

APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: AN INNOVATION IN NIGERIA EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

Language is the expression and communication of emotions or ideas between human beings by means of speech and hearing. It has been noted that Educationists have emphasized the need for teachers to see that their lessons are real and relevant to the students' experiences and that communication is seen as prerequisite for anyone who ventures into a new profession. Thus, a teaching approach that stresses communication and appropriate manipulation of the teaching material in concrete and real-life situation becomes desirable for the development of communicative skills in a situation where the second language is used for general and academic purposes. This paper focuses on the communicative approach to teaching and learning of English, its objectives and advantages in second language situation. It recommends that since communicative competence is predicated upon grammatical competence, teachers should make sure that learners master grammatical rules and use them in appropriate situations.

The primary means of communication among the peoples of the world is language. Learning a second language creates conflict in the mind of learner, who struggles to get beyond the confines of his first language and into a new language. It has been noted that language development occurs in all children with normal brain function and any theory of language acquisition must account for what children do and do not do in the course of achieving adult linguistic competence. Akmajian (2001).

Learning a second Language (L₂) is adopting a language that is not one's native language. Second language learning refers to any language after the native language (L₁). It is a situation where a student enrolls in a class and takes concrete steps to learn a language in order to master its intricacies and complexities and be able to use it as a communication tool.

Accordingly, Yule (2009) stated that a child growing up requires interaction with other users of the language in order to bring the language 'faculty' into operation. It is sad to note that students are not given the opportunity to participate in their own learning as they merely carry out instructions issued by their teachers. Most of the

teachers fear engaging students in class activities. They do not encourage students to master basic rules of grammar as well as neglecting achievement of communicative competence. This view was supported by Doff (1988) who laments that the language used in the classroom is often unnatural and artificial.

The standard of English Language in Nigeria is no longer what it used to be in some past decades. It has fallen so abysmally low that a good number of Nigerian students hardly express themselves in simple and correct English. This supports Stubbs (1976) who observed that linguistic failure is educational failure. Therefore, the strong need for an approach that would develop communicative competence among learners becomes crucial.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign language that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. This teaching methodology emerged as a product of educators and linguistics who had grown dissatisfied with the audio lingual and grammar translation method of foreign language instructions.

English as a Second Language in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multilingual society resulting from the coming together of ethno-cultural groups with various languages. Its pluralism stands out as the most linguistically diverse country in Africa with over 400 languages (Adegbite 2003). This linguistic situation has encouraged English language to thrive in every facet of the economy; and thus continues to perform many of the functions of a national language as well as those of an official language (Jowit 1999). Modern English has also been described by David (2004) as the first global lingua franca that has dominant international language in communication, business, science, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy.

English Language is the most widely spoken Language in both Metropolitan and Cosmopolitan cities in Nigeria. Nigeria ranks third position with a population of 79 million speakers after United States (251 million speakers); India (90 million speakers). This constitute 53% of total Nigeria population (estimated 148 million) in which 4 million speak English as first Language and over 75 million as second language (Wikipedia, 2010).

The impact of the English Language had a large influence on other languages leading to the emergence of English dialects, varieties and English- based Creole Languages and Pidgins. Commenting on the usage of English Language in Nigeria, Jowit (1999) stated that the usage of every Nigerian user is a mixture of standard forms and popular Nigerian English forms, which are in form composed of errors and variants.

Concept of Communicative Approach to Teaching and Learning of Language.

The major use of language is communication and one of the reasons for teaching any language is to enable the learner to develop communicative competence. Communicative competence is a term in linguistic coined by Hymes (1966) which refers to Language users' grammatical knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence

in terms of four components namely, grammatical competence (word & rule), socio linguistic competence) (appropriateness) Discourse competence (appropriate use of communicative strategies. In these senses, communicative competence becomes the ability to use Language correctly and appropriately to accomplish communication goals in a communicative system that is characterized by social factors.

The approach is derived from the end means approach to curriculum design which lays emphasis on the need for course designers to study the needs, interest and aspiration of learners and use the data got from such studies as a basis for syllabus and instructional materials design (Njoku & Izuagba, 2004). It sets out to define and teach second Language (L₂) in terms of “ communication functions” taking into account the different component of communicative competence, including linguistic, sociolinguistic and also attempts to put into practice the theoretical principle of communicative competence. These principles suggests that communication is a form of social interaction which must have a purpose, convey feelings and attitudes, authentic language and the use of language skills that have been acquired or learned. The communicative approach puts into play both the implicit and explicit activities and combines the presentation of linguistic materials with systematization, and expression on Language functions, the hallmark of which is the mastering of the speech acts.

Objectives of Communicative Language Teaching

The objectives of the communicative approach to Language teaching and learning extend beyond mere grammatical competence; but also socio-cultural and inter-personal context. These include:

- (a) Appropriateness of usage
- (b) Conventional usage
- (c) Transactional usage and
- (d) Interactional usage

Appropriateness of Usage: Portrays a situation where the native speaker of English would use an informal style whereas the speaker of English as a second language will engage in a more formal usage assuming that the communicative competence of the second language speaker is not fully developed.

Conventional Usage: Communication in language consists of a great deal of conventional usage which must be taught is the second language situation especially the rules and principles of the Language.

Transactional Usage: This implies that formulas are taught for communicative language used in transactions such as buying and selling in the market, posting letters at the post office, requesting for meals at the restaurant etc.

Interactional Usage: Interactional skills need to be developed in second language situations. Not much attention is paid to the development of this skill and yet so many

of our social encounters are interactional. For example, greeting friends, relatives, colleagues; enquiring after one another's health, and social gatherings of all sorts.

Suffice to say that communicative approach to learning exposes the teacher to come to realize that to achieve quality in educational system, a lot of relevance should be placed on interaction outside the four walls of the classroom.

Techniques for Communicative Language Teaching Approach

The following techniques represent essential aspects of the methodology of teaching communicative competence.

Group Activity: Group activity in pairs is essential for practice in communication. There is no limit to the topics that can be discussed among groups and between pairs of students. These interactive discussions can include the food they like, what their parents do, the games they play, clothes that are in fashion, motorcars, famous people in all walks of life, etc. There are also number of activities to choose from, such as word games and puzzles.

Group or pair for communicative practice has the following characteristics:

- i. It must give students something interesting and relevant to talk about, bearing in mind their different stages of social and mental development.
- ii. A situation or linguistic framework must be provided for communicative interaction. Communicative practice in class is not an anything goes affair. The minimum cues and prompts must be provided, otherwise it will not work.

Questionnaires: The questionnaire format is a useful prompt for dialogue in communicative practice. It is best suited to pair activity, although it can be used with a group for example, for "Name" you ask the question: What's your name? for "Age" How old are you?" for "Date of Birth" "When were you born?" and so on.

Visuals: Maps, diagrams, pictures are visual stimulus for communicative interaction. These materials focus attention on topics of communication, direct questions and answers towards specific details as well as enhance students' power of observation.

Role – Playing: There is great difference between the classroom environment and the activities of the world outside. These differences call for learners' to play roles that would bring about communication in real life situations. However, the important requirements for role-playing are that students be given sufficient stimulus for verbal interaction; that they are provided with the 'facts' of the situation which they have to stimulate.

The Advantages of Communicative Approach

The advantages of Communicative Approach to teaching and learning of the English Language for both learners and teachers include the following;

1. The learners are actively involved in the learning process and because the content is relevant to their needs, they are motivated to learn.
2. The teachers act as facilitators and enablers in the learning process as the syllabus content is centred on the learners' needs.
3. Language learning becomes practical and real to the learner as real situations are introduced into the learning process.
4. Classroom activities help the learners to differentiate between rules of grammar and rules of language use.
5. This method is relevant and appropriate in teaching at all levels of education and at all levels of learners both children, adults and specialists.
6. Needs analysis is used to determine the language need of the learner which forms basis of curriculum design.

Recommendations

To build up communicative competence among learners of English as second Language in Nigeria, the following are required of both the teachers and the learner.

1. In adopting what is new in language teaching, we should not throw away what is valuable in the traditional structured approach. Both methods can be integrated.
2. As Communicative competence is predicated upon grammatical competence, teachers should make sure the learners are familiar with grammatical rules and that they use them in appropriate situations or contexts.
3. Teachers should modify teaching methods to encourage practice.
4. Teachers need to be adequately trained to perform the role of facilitators and enablers in the learning process and to give real life tasks into actual teaching of the target language.
5. Course designers should study the needs, interest and aspiration of learners and use the data got from such studies as a basis for syllabus and instructional materials design.

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