

DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS: TOOL FOR THE ENHANCEMENT AND INNOVATIONS IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The objective of every classroom teaching is to impart knowledge into the learners. This paper therefore, looks into several peculiar classroom situations that hinder the expected quality teaching and learning in contemporary classrooms in Nigeria and the position or function of instructional materials in facilitating quality teaching and learning. The essence of developing and evaluating of English language instructional materials as the point of emphasis will help in updating the materials to be appropriate to the needs of both the teacher and the learners. It also explains the two forms of evaluation, predictive and retrospective evaluation and how they can be developed for the enhancement and innovations in higher education in Nigeria. The paper suggested that, to make teaching and learning worthwhile, the government should employ appropriate instructional materials and appropriate teachers hence appropriate instructional materials demand appropriate management. Conclusion was also drawn.

The ideal teaching climate or situation, as every professional teacher would readily recognize, is one in which the number of learners involved is manageable; there are teaching facilities to highlight each teaching topic; every pupil has his/her textbook and writing materials; the normal academic session is uninterrupted; and learners are of the same academic range (NTI-TESSA integrated manual for the Re-training of teachers, 2010).

Every professional teacher is aware of several peculiar classroom situations under which teachers may find themselves today. The situations are quite distinct and far from the ideal situations mentioned above. Such situations include over-crowded classes, different age group combined in one class, limited or totally lack of teaching/learning facilities, students from diverse cultural and linguistic background in the same classroom, etc. In these situations, the objectives of teaching and learning must be focused and the teacher is expected to produce the desired goal. The question however is, how can the class teacher teaching English as a second language tackle the poor situations that face him/her in the class to be able to achieve the expected goal?

In Nigeria, the English language serves as a language of instruction in schools and a subject in the curriculum. It is also the language of publication, administration and international relation. The English language being a second language entered into Nigeria as a result of contact with the westerners during the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade. It started in an “unrefined” pidgin-English form

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which was a means of transaction between the European slave dealer and their Nigerian customers. The spread became wider after the abolition of slave trade which ushered in Christianity and the return of slaves from Free Town to Nigeria. And then, the colonization of Nigeria by the British administrators which brought education into Nigeria and through which the English language was for the first time used as language of instruction and a subject in the curriculum. This is to say that the English language is alien in Nigeria. And for proficiency to be achieved, adequate facilities should be provided.

Language contact here indicates the emergence of a new language in a community where the people already speak language or languages or several mother-tongues. Language contact in the simplest definition according to Thomason (2001:1), "Is the use of more than one language in the same place at the same time". The problem of multi-lingualism also places serious constraints on language teaching. In the words of Williams (2004: 10), "the problem is compounded when one considers the fact that, for many students, English is not really a second language, but a third, or even a fourth language." But the situation becomes more compounded when individual students from diverse cultures are in the same class with their individual English language problems. Language learning problems are caused not only by differences between the mother-tongue and the target language, but also emanate from differences between the cultures which constitute the roots of the languages and other allied factors as mentioned in the first paragraph. For any teacher of the English language to overcome these situations, the use of instructional materials is very essential.

The Essence of Instructional Materials in the Teaching/ Leaching of English Language

Language pedagogy or language in education relates to language teaching and learning which its main focus is on the evaluation of language performance and the production of materials to be used in language teaching (Olusegun and Adebayo, 2012, p.30).

Aduwa-ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2006: 6), quoting Galliher (1995) who stated that teachers must assume the role of "resource brokers". The implication of this is that teachers should become familiar with a variety of instructional delivery methods. They further explain that what obtains in public secondary schools and some higher institutions in Nigeria is contrary to the above assertion. The English language teachers in Nigeria still "depend heavily on the traditional lecture method". The intensive use of prescribed textbooks and the use of lecture method in delivering English lessons are prevalent; the debate and group methods of teachings are occasionally used.

The teaching of the English language in most schools in Nigeria is dominated with the use of chalkboards, textbooks and dictionaries. It is compounded with many problems such as, inadequate period of teaching, poor methods of teaching and lack of adequate and useful resources (Kolawole, 1998).

According to World Bank Report published in the Guardian on the 19th of February, 2001, the poor performance of Nigerian graduates is particularly evident in two areas; "poor mastery of the English language and lack of requisite teaching skill". It was ascertained in the report that the

deficiencies in both vital areas make Nigerian graduates of the past fifteen years unfit for the labour market, and sometimes the larger society.

Learning any language always involves learning at least something of the ways of operating in the society where that language is used. The English language teachers should be very conscious of the need to take this fact into account in devising fruitful language learning methodologies (Painter, 2001: 167). For the learner to participate effectively in this new culture, the teacher should focus his/her attention on the role of the language. The two areas that are of fundamental importance are the communicative and linguistic competencies. The teachers teaching English language as a second language should bear the question of relevance in mind. This has to do with the concept of “realism”. According to Williams (2009:8).

Realities affecting the teaching of English language as a second language may be described as situational constraints. These are inhibiting factors in the linguistic, economic, and socio-cultural situation in which the language is taught. They may in fact, impede rather than assist the learning of the second language.

Every topic in the English language teaching curriculum has an objective or a purpose it stands to achieve. In that essence, the teacher starts the evaluation of teaching materials by considering the three domains of behavioural objectives (cognitive, affective and psychomotor) of learning. Which domain(s) is the topic likely going to develop? Which instructional material is most appropriate to aid the teaching and learning of the topic? Is the material available? And if available, does the quality suit the situation or environment that demands for the material? If the quality does not suit the situation, how can the teacher develop the material in the way of adjusting or adapting the available material to suit the situation or improvise where there is lack in order to meet the needed standard? Above all, quality teaching materials demand competency in the implementation. Instructional materials being materials that can be used to facilitate teaching-learning activities, the teacher should strive to make the implementation worthwhile. Instructional materials, also known as teaching aids or technically known as audio-visual materials; are the different types of useful materials, device and symbols that make the study of a subject more comprehensive and interesting. They provide the learners with realistic experiences which capture their attention and help in the understanding of the phenomena. They appeal to the mind through the visual auditory senses and thereby enliven the past (Singh, 2005: 131).

Instructional materials in other words can be described as devices that present units of knowledge through auditory or visual stimuli or both with a view to help learning. They concretize the knowledge to be presented and help in making a learning experience appear real, living and vital. They supplement the work of the teacher and help in the study of textbooks (Antony, 1993: 55).

Kitao and Kitao (1997: 7) state that “language instruction has five important components - students, a teacher, materials, teaching methods, and evaluation”. Learners should be the centre of instruction and learning, while the curriculum is a statement of the goals of learning, the methods of learning, etc., the role of teachers is to help learners to learn. Teachers have to follow the curriculum

and provide, make, or choose materials. They may adopt, supplement, and elaborate on those materials and also monitor the progress and needs of the students and finally evaluate students.

Instructional materials are of different types and are demanded according to the needs of the learners and the environment (both physical and social environments). According to Kitao and Kitao (1997: .2); Materials include textbooks, video and audio tapes, computer software, and visual aids. They influence the content and the procedures of learning. The choice of deductive VS inductive learning, the role of memorization, the use of creativity and problem solving, production VS reception, and the order in which materials are presented are all influenced by the materials.

Development and Evaluation of English Language Instructional Materials

Evaluation is defined as, “the process of assessing or forming an idea of quality or value of something” (Hornby, 1998: 394). To evaluate instructional materials, especially for the teaching of English as a second language means to investigate the quality of instructional materials available and also the standard of manpower to be able to know the needs of both the teachers and the learners whom the materials are meant to facilitate. Without knowing the quality of the teacher handling the subject and the level of proficiency of the learners in the English language, to choose instructional materials will be difficult.

The evaluation of English language instructional materials to be discussed here is based on empirical studies and not theoretical. The evaluation is of two types: “a predictive evaluation designed to make a decision regarding what materials to use and a retrospective evaluation designed to examine materials that have actually been used” (Ellis, 1997: 1).

Predictive Evaluation

Before the predictive evaluation of teaching materials, the teacher should first evaluate the learners. This can be done by going through their curriculum to know the exercises they had already undertaken, the materials that were available for the exercises and also their performance at the end of the previous academic exercises. These will help the teacher to understand the need of the learners in regards to the teaching/learning of English as a second language.

After evaluating the learners, the teachers will then carry out a predictive evaluation of the materials available to him in order to determine which are best suited to his/her purpose. According to Ellis, review of the literature relating to materials evaluation reveals that, “to date, the focus of attention has been more or less exclusively on predictive evaluation”. This should be more appropriate because a professional teacher equips him/herself before facing the class. As the teacher studies the topics or courses, he at the same time evaluates the needed or adequate materials that can facilitate his delivery of lesson. McDonough and Shaw (1993) state that, there are two principal ways in which teachers can carry out this kind of evaluation; journals like ELT journal assist teachers in this respect by providing reviews of published course books. In some cases, the reviewers identify specific criteria for evaluating materials. Secondly, teachers can carry out their own predictive evaluation following checklists and guidelines available to help them do so. The instruments, according to Skierso (1991) are generally organised in a manner that reflects the decision-making process which the teachers go

through. The first of which enables teachers to address the overall “usefulness” of the materials, while the second caters for “a more searching analysis” based on the teacher’s actual teaching situation (Breen and Candlin, 1987).

Retrospective Evaluation

Such an evaluation provides the teacher with information which can be used to determine whether it is worthwhile using the materials again, which activities “work” demand for modified materials and which do not, and how to modify the materials to make them more effective for future use. Linch (1996) states that; a retrospective evaluation also serves as a means of ‘testing’ the validity of a predictive evaluation, and may point to ways in which the predictive instruments can be improved for future use.

The idea behind these guides is to help teachers carry out a predictive evaluation systematically to enhance qualitative teaching and learning, and also for the teachers to be able to evaluate the outcome of their teaching and use of instructional materials. Where the outcome of teaching is not encouraging, the retrospective evaluation will help in modeling the materials for more effective teaching/learning outcome.

In evaluating English language teaching materials, the first materials to come to mind are the curriculum and the prescribed textbooks. These are the basic written materials to be evaluated. The curriculum arouses two basic questions which are: (i) what do I teach in English language? (ii) how am I supposed to teach it? The answers to the questions are to be addressed by the content and activities enshrined in the curriculum (Williams, 2004: 16).

Littlejohn and Windeatt (1989) opine that;

Materials have a hidden curriculum that includes attitudes toward knowledge, attitudes towards the role and relationship of the teacher and students. And values and attitudes related to gender, society etc. Materials have an underlying instructional philosophy, approach, method and content, including both linguistic and cultural information. That is, choices made in writing textbooks are based on beliefs that the writers have about what language is and how it should be taught.

Clarke (1989) trying to support Littlejohn and Windeatt states that, communicative methodology is important and that communicative methodology is based on authenticity, realism, context, and a focus on the learner.

Development of English language instructional materials goes hand-in-hand with evaluating the materials. As the evaluation looks into the quality and suitability of available materials in providing the needs of the learners, development entails modifying and adapting the available materials to suit the purpose of the teacher and the learners. Development of instructional materials can take place alongside with predictive evaluation or after retrospective evaluation. Evaluation and development of English language teaching materials are two sides of a coin because the practice items must have qualities such as usefulness, clarity, and focus on the teaching point (Williams, 2004: 318).

Though evaluation precedes development, both seek for the same goal of achieving the needs of the learners. As evaluation unravels the loopholes in the English language instructional materials, development gives solution to the problems by adapting or modifying the materials to be suitable for teaching/learning.

The simplest method of evaluating English language instructional materials is to generate evaluative criteria which could systematically relate to a conceptual frame work. This will certainly deal with the content of the materials and the method of application.

The objectives of learning a particular topic determine the material to be used and the nature of evaluation of material employed so that the objective will be realized. The table below presents the basic aspects of English language that should be focused on while evaluating the instructional materials. It can be said that what to look out for in material evaluation is subject to the material available, objectives of the study, and the needs of the learners (the environment).

Table 1: Conceptual Framework of Developing and Evaluating English Language Instructional Materials

The objectives	
Linguistic competence	Communicative competence
Phonology, grammar and lexis	Appropriateness of usage: conventional usage transactional usage interactional usage

The evaluator studies the topic along with the available materials to find out the suitability of the materials to the teaching /learning of the English language. The objectives must be linked to achieving linguistic competence or communicative competence. The linguistic aspect can be phonological, grammatical or lexical. At the other hand, the communicative competence is to be linked to the appropriateness of usage which can be divided into conventional usage such as politeness and use of registers associated to various situations. Also transactional usage of the English language and the skill of varying our interactional usage of the language are considered in the evaluation of materials. It is also pertinent to mention that the objectives can also be referenced to the four language skills especially in Nigeria where English as a second language is used for general purposes. The four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing demand appropriate instructional materials to facilitate the following objectives in teaching/learning:

- i. understand simple conventional English spoken at normal speed (Listening skill)
- ii. speak fluent and acceptable English (Speaking skill)
- iii. comprehend contemporary written English (Reading skill)
- iv. write clear, acceptable English (Writing skill)

Being that teaching deals with words which go beyond the experience of pupils, mere verbal description does not help much in facilitating the understanding of the learners. The teacher must take

the help of instructional materials to supplement and explain the spoken words (Singh, 2005: 234). Where the evaluation of the available instructional materials indicate that the aids are not appropriate to give the needed help, adaptation (development) which is the natural outcome of evaluation is applied. As a perfect audio or visual aid cannot be produced, the teacher's responsibility is therefore to adapt or develop instructional materials to make sure that the objectives stated in the table above are realized. Principles of developing materials can be derived from the evaluative criteria dealt with above. Realistic approach demands that developments be made to enable learners to put to use the linguistic and communicative skills and structures they have learned to manipulate.

Conclusion and Suggestions

The paper emphasized on several peculiar classroom situations under which contemporary teachers may find themselves which are quite distinct and far from the ideal situations. The poor situation of teaching and learning notwithstanding, the teacher is expected at all times to achieve the desired goal. The emphasis being on the English language as a second language, the only solution to the problems faced by the teacher in the classroom is the use of instructional materials to facilitate his/her teaching. The materials are categorized under visual and audio materials which should be harnessed to make the teaching lively and interesting. They will also make learners to learn faster, remember longer, and gain more accurate information. All these are to be achieved by conducting predictive and retrospective evaluation and development of available instructional materials to make them more suitable for teaching/learning. The needed competency in both linguistic and communicative aspects of the English language as a second language can only be achieved through the use of well evaluated and developed instructional materials.

To make teaching and learning worthwhile, it is suggested that the government should employ the use of appropriate instructional materials and appropriate teachers because adequate instructional materials demand appropriate management. And where the available materials are to be evaluated and developed before usage or after, experts should be engaged to carry out the job in order to achieve the needed competency in the teaching and learning of the English language in Nigeria. For us to achieve enhancement and innovations in higher education in Nigeria, the English language should be properly taught. The instructional materials that facilitate teaching and learning of the English language should be adequately evaluated and developed hence competency in the English language helps in the understanding of other courses. And above all, the English language is so vital in Nigeria being the language of instruction in our institutions of higher learning, language of publication, governance and international relations.

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