

Effective Teaching Method in English Language at the Tertiary Level

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Abstract

This paper reviewed Effective English Language teaching as well as who an effective teacher is. It discussed effective methods of Language teaching which include grammar translation method, direct method, audio – language method, communicative method and the eidetic method. It concluded that English teachers in tertiary education are expected to focus on communicative language teaching method (CLT) instead of grammar-based teaching, but it was also suggested among other things that teachers should vary teaching methods to suit interest of learners, and be equipped with the required knowledge for transferring language skills, and constantly remain in touch with current trends in the society. But the critical practical situation in the classrooms currently as observed by the paper presenter, calls for language teachers to advocate for the electric method of teaching English language in order to make lasting impart on the learners of L2.

Keywords: *Effective Teaching of English Language in Tertiary Institution*

Background to the Study

To teach entails various connotations such as the imparting of knowledge or skill, to instruct by concepts; to make known; to educate, discipline or train, to cause, to acquire knowledge or skill so that others may learn.

To be effective means to be able to produce the required results/outcome or having particular role/result in practice. Different methods of teaching have been proposed by different educational thinkers or schools of thought in education. It is very necessary for teachers of English and Igbo for example, to have good understanding of the various methods in order to make rational choices when it comes to the selection of the most appropriate method in every given situation. Some methods are only suitable for certain situations, for example when teachers are expected to cover a syllabus within the shortest possible time; while others are only suitable for certain topics. An effective teacher must be able to discern between these scenarios or situations.

What is Effective Teaching?

Effective teaching is the process of imparting knowledge to a learner in such a way that the learner is fully engaged using different approaches. It is the process that helps students/learners to absorb, remember, and make use of information/training given. It takes care of all learning styles low, average, etc.

Effective teaching is the teacher's ability to reach students no matter what level they are in, imparting the information in friendly way; understanding learners; teaching topics very well, interestingly and practically in order to meet the goal of achieving the results. Effective teaching is the key propeller for school improvement. In our environment, the Nigerian context, students accept responsibility for their own learning, actively participate, and are authentically engaged and team up with others. They exhibit a sense of accomplishment and confidence.

Who is an Effective English Language Teacher?

An effective English Language teacher

1. Facilitates learning by truly caring about the students
2. Provides students with opportunities to work both independently, collaboratively to make sense out of ideas
3. Plans learning experiences that enable students to build on their existing proficiencies, interest and experiences.
4. Understands that the task and example they select influence how students come to develop, use and make sense out of them.
5. Supports students in creating connections between different ways to solve problems between representations, and topics between and everyday experiences.
6. Uses a wide range of assessment practices to make students' thinking visible

- and support their learning.
7. Is able to facilitate classroom dialogue that is focused on Igbo/English argumentations.
 8. Carefully selects tools and representations to provide support for students' thinking.
 9. Develops and uses sound knowledge as a basis for initiating learning and responding to the needs of all their students
 10. Loves to teach young people and enjoys using variety of effective teaching methods (Hilde Brand, 1971)
 11. Promotes student learning

Effective Teaching Methods

Communicating by means of language has been designated as the most characteristically human of all man's behaviour patterns. Nigeria as a multi-lingual society is where about 400 indigenous languages (excluding English, Pidgin English and some foreign languages like French, German, Portuguese, and Italian) are spoken and used as a means of communication, though at varying communication ranges (Okolo & Ezikeojiaku, 1999:226).

The nature and essence of language to humankind make it imperative that we accord it a thorough and constant study through effective teaching. In the teaching of languages, it is important that the language teacher at any level be conversant with the different methods/strategies. Varying methods of teaching, language will make teaching exciting and beneficial to the learners. The language teacher should vary his teaching methods in order to suit the various aspects (e.g. grammar, literature, writing, culture, etc.).

Teaching is an art and methods are the ways the teacher follows to make learners understand and practice this art. It is the procedure teachers follow in order to attain the set goals/objectives. There are many procedures but in this paper viable and effective methods that may be used to deliver language topics to learners have been identified. Teaching methods that effectively bring out learning outcomes in the students. Teaching methods that effectively bring out learning outcomes in the students are student centered. Students' centered methods are methods in which student are expected to be active in the learning process by being fully involved, and participating actively in discussions. They are also expected to contribute and collaborate with others, by either asking questions or answering questions.

Research seems to agree that group-oriented discussions, team learning, and student led discussion produce favourable student performance outcomes, and foster self-confidence and leadership skills. Such methodologies as they relate to language teaching include grammar translation methods, direct method, audio-lingual method, communicative language teaching method and the eclectic method.

Language Teaching Methods

Some of the effective methods of language teaching include: grammar translations methods, direct method, audio lingual method, cognitive code learning method, communicative competence method and eclectic/ integrated method.

1. Grammar Translation Method

This method is perhaps the oldest method of language teaching. It is still very much in use today in Nigeria. In this method, students learn grammar rules by memorization or (rote method) and later apply the rules by drills and translating sentences to and from the target language. A quick evaluation of this method shows that it is useful and economical when rules are stated and explained. Translation too can be an effective technique by second language teaching. But the application of deductive rules to translation and written composition make students totally reliant on printed forms of target language and incompetent to handle aural and oral skills (listening and speaking) now termed audio-lingual which are the essence of language.

Ezeude (2007) notes that the method produced “literate unspeakable” in the target language.

Benefit of the Grammar Translation Method

1. Develops students' reading ability to a level where they can read literature in the target language
2. Promotes learning largely by translation to and from the target language. Students translate from English to their native languages.
3. Develops students' general mental ability through reading and writing.
4. Sharpens retentive memory since grammar rules are to be memorized and long lists of vocabulary learned by heart. It supports teaching about the language, and not language.
5. Promotion of textbooks as instructional or classroom materials for grammar drills and translating sentences to and from the target language.

Limitations of the Grammar Translation Method

1. Neglect of aural and oral skills practice (listening and speaking) as well as communicative aspects of the language.

2. Because speaking or any kind of spontaneous creative output was missing from the curriculum of this method, students lack skills or competence in speaking or even letter writing in the target language.
3. Application of deductive rules to translation and written composition make students very reliant only on printed forms of the target language.
4. Rules are memorized and later applied without adequate systematic practice.
5. Students lack active roles in the classroom, since they are often correcting their own work and strictly following textbooks.

The Direct Method/Natural Method

This method came as a result of a reaction or alternative to grammar-translation method. The method is based on the idea that language is naturally acquired; hence, it is also called natural method. The teaching in this method is done only in the target language. (Students learn by associating meaning directly in English). It refrains from using learner's native language; this means that the learner is not allowed to use his or her mother tongue. This method stresses the importance of phonetics. It prescribes the teaching of grammar inductively. This means that the learner should discover the rules himself through much or series of practice. Rivers (1968) theory of Direct/Natural method commands that:

The direct method provided an exciting and interesting way of learning the foreign language and it proved to be successful in releasing students from the inhibitions all too often associated with speaking of a foreign tongue, practically at the early stage.

By this, Rivers expressed popular view of people, that this method avoided the rigorous grammar rules that were unbearable.

Benefits of the Direct Method

1. Both speech and listening comprehensions are taught.
2. It frowns at translation intervention, hence the student learns by associating meaning directly in English.
3. Grammar is taught inductively (i.e. having learners find out rules through presentation of adequate linguistic forms in the target language).
4. It promotes co-operation by focusing on question and answer patterns
5. Correct pronunciation and grammar are emphasized.
6. It advocates a strict order of learning of language: hearing- speaking - reading - writing.
7. Lessons begin with a dialogue with teacher in a conversational style exclusively in the target language. It is full of activities between students and teachers, particularly in the post-primary schools.

Limitations

The learner's mother tongue (LI) is never used.

1. It is not realistic in using this method alone in teaching a foreign / second language because the procedure is too unstructured and success in its use is dependent on the teacher's competence or integrity.
2. Lessons are built on static drills in which learners have little or no control of their own output; the feedback.

The Audio - Lingual Method

The increase in attention given to foreign language teaching in the United States gave rise to the audio-lingual method towards the end of 1950s. In order to prevent Americans from becoming isolated from scientific advances made in other countries, the US government intensified efforts in foreign language teaching. It is the dominant method or style of teaching foreign languages today. It is based on behaviourist theory which professes that all human behaviour (including language) was learnt through repetition and positive or negative reinforcement. The theory behind this method is that learning a language means acquiring habits. In using audio-lingual method, language is taught mainly through practice, and repetitions mimicking and memorization. Some of the basic principles of this method assert that:

1. Language is speech, not writing. This emphasizes listening and speaking before reading and writing.
2. Language is a set of habits. Here manipulative drills are used to teach the language so that learners form correct habits.
3. Teach the language, not about the language. This discounts the conscious study of the rules in language learning. William (1990) observes that language laboratory is one of the techniques which audio-lingual method uses. For example, a tape recorder is used as a stimulus. Then students respond to the cue from the tape. The drill continues until pattern is established. This method has been so successful and popular in language teaching that Rivers (1968) made this true representative comment:

Interest in the audio-lingual method now extends to every continent. It has been enthusiastically endorsed by some teachers and accepted with reserve by others, as has happened with all new approaches to foreign language teaching. Like all living ideas, it is in a process of evolution.

Benefit of the Audio –Lingual Method

1. Like direct method, the audio-lingual method advocates teaching a language directly to students without using the student's native language to explain new words or grammar in that target language.
2. Unlike direct method that focuses on teaching vocabulary, audio-lingual focuses on drilling students in the use of grammar by the teacher in the classroom, and in the context of the language lab. This implies that the teacher will present correct model of sentence and the students will have to repeat it.
3. Here the starting point of language learning for students is learning structure or grammar. (In other words, it was the basic sentence patterns and grammatical structures.
4. Drills and pattern practice are typical of this method
5. Lessons in the classroom focus on the correct imitation of the teacher by the students. Here students are not only expected to produce the correct output, but attention is also paid to correct pronunciation.
6. Target language is the only language to be used in the classroom.
7. Focus on sentence and sound patterns (student learns listening and speaking drills and pattern practice).
8. It promotes cooperation. (The learning material is introduced in a dialogue form which is then used as a basis for structural drills).

It is student-centered and very effective in teaching, listening and speaking skills.

Limitations

1. Less effective because it does not use the learner's first language or mother tongue.
2. Lesson is teacher centered here.
3. Presentation here is mechanical and this does not present language as it is in real life.

The Communicative Language Teaching Method

This method is often called communicative language teaching (CLT). According to Williams (1999), “communicative language teaching has its roots in the same movement that gave rise to the functional notational approach. Williams further identifies the objective of communicative method of language as geared towards communicative competence. This specifically refers to the social purposes of language, which includes appropriateness of usage, and interactional usage.

The method de-emphasizes grammatical aspect of the language and this problem could lead to poor language performance in language acquisition. It is however a

more effective method with mature students who already possess some basic linguistic competence. The focus of this method is to communicate effectively and appropriately in various situations and contexts.

Benefits of the Communicative Language Teaching Method

1. Teaching is geared towards communicative competence
2. Learner's role is paramount.
3. Language learning is learning to communicate
4. Develops procedures for the teaching of four language skills that acknowledge interdependence of language and communication, reading, writing, speaking, practical application.
5. Learners understand language through active student interactions, games, or role-play games.
6. More effective with mature learners or students who already possess some basic linguistic competence.

Limitations

1. De-emphasizes grammatical aspect of language.
2. It leads to poor performance in language acquisition.

The Eclectic Method (learner -need)

This method selects the most appropriate method to suit the objective of the learner's needs. What this means is fitting the method to suit the learner, not vice versa. This further means that the method is an interactive method of language teaching. Here, a teacher is expected to acquaint himself with alternatives from particular method which suits the need of particular task, context, and learner, will be chosen, with focus on helping learners become independent and inspired to learn more.

Benefits of the Eclectic Method

1. It is learner oriented since it entails fitting the method to suit the learner, not vice versa.
2. Makes teaching flexible
3. Inspires and makes learning independent
4. Choice of method based on variables within teaching situation
5. Choice based on teacher's ability to handle particulate method
6. It is learner specific oriented

Language Teaching in Nigeria

The position Nigeria accords to language teaching in her National Policy on Education, 1998 edition, is that language (Foreign and Nigerian) are grouped under 'A' as core subjects made compulsory at both junior and secondary levels. To further demonstrate the importance attached to language learning in Nigeria, English, Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are made learning subjects and recognized media of instruction in the country right from the primary level of education in Nigeria.

It is against this background that it is imperative for Nigeria to keep abreast of the times in language teaching. It is a fact that Nigeria is still a developing nation pejoratively referred to as a "third world" country and still has the attributes of a developing country but not being abreast of the times in language teaching. Preferably, in language teaching, the communicative language teaching method (the modern standard method) is yet to be put into practice in Nigeria because of lack of facilities.

Ezeude (2007) notes that "communicative method of language teaching (CTL) is only read about in texts, to the extent that an average Nigerian language teacher can hardly give satisfactory explanation of what CLT is, let alone practice it". Language teaching has passed through phases of traditional methods to modern methods, yet Nigerians make use of textbook method of grammar-translation, which is a traditional method.

In our tertiary institutions for example, we have inadequate language laboratories. The most appalling thing about the laboratories is that they are poorly equipped and at times out of use. Unlike in Nigeria, developed countries now teach languages under computer-aided programmes. In 1999, for example, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) London mounted a door-to-door awareness campaign on the modern language teaching method in the programme they captioned "Radio English Direct" (RED). With that programme, they were able to reach the nook and crannies of the third world countries in an effort to improve language teaching.

Gifts of language learning materials such as audio cassette tapes, disks, and radio (that neither use battery nor electricity), were given to schools. Similar efforts were also noticed on the part of French government who sees language as a political weapon by wanting the world population to be French literate. Nigeria should tow the line of these developed countries in improving language teaching and learning.

Methodology

This paper adopted a descriptive method. Descriptive research does not fit neatly into the definition of either quantitative or qualitative research methodologies but instead it can utilize elements of both, often with the same study. The term descriptive research refers to the type of research question, design and data analysis that will be applied to a given topic.

Language laboratory was used as well as a classroom with a population size.

Conclusion

Teaching methods are crucial in the teaching/learning processes because if teaching is good, then we assume that learning will also be good. Although the active role of the learners is an established principle, it is still the teacher's responsibility to engage the interest and intellect of the learner with whatever means available to him. As such, he should process the required knowledge for transferring language skills.

The English language teacher should know that varying his methods as the situation demands will make his teaching better and exciting to the learners or students. The language teacher should vary the teaching methods to include the following discussed methods: grammar translation method, direct method, audio-lingual method, communicative competence method, and eclectic / integrated method. These methods are specifically suitable for the teaching of English and some other aspects of Nigerian languages, while some other aspects of the language can be effectively be taught with a combination of some of the discussed methods / strategies. Some other language methods not discussed here include suggestopedia, the silent method, community language learning method, natural method, language from within method, total physical response, and teaching aids and materials methods, all collectively called "Humanistic Approach".

However for any method to be effective in the context of English Language in the current times, it has to be flexible and utilitarian. For an effective language teaching at the tertiary level of education, this paper adopts or recommends the communicative language teaching method (CLT) as a modern and good method for teaching English Language in tertiary institutions. A second look at CLT method that forms the basis of its adoption or recommendation as an appropriate method for language teaching in tertiary level of education is "its integration, not compartmentalization of all four language skills; its emphasis on communicative competence, Hence, it is an effective teaching for mature learners or students who already possess some basic linguistic competence.

Recommendations

The following Recommendations are made for effective teaching/learning of English language at tertiary level, with regards to teaching methods.

These include:

1. Teachers are to vary their teaching methods for effective teaching. It depicts innovation and hence students tend not only to enjoy lessons but also hold teachers in high esteem.
2. Teachers are to have favourable attitude towards modern English language teaching method like CLT provided the students are proficient in the basic grammar of English Language.
3. Implementation of CLT has been difficult over years. Governments should guard against this especially, Nigerian government by providing the necessary infrastructure in tertiary institutions.
4. English Language Teachers are to be innovative in making choices and devising their lesson procedures, which will appropriately suit their students' interests and purposes, since all the methods are not appropriate to learning situations.
5. They are to be equipped with the required knowledge for transferring language skills.
6. It is of great importance that English language teachers in tertiary institutions should transform their grammar based teaching methods into more communicative one where appropriate.
7. Federal government should make funds available for English language teaching/learning projects in Nigeria by funding English Language based competitions nationally and at state levels.

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