

CURRENT ISSUES IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF SECOND LANGUAGES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper is an incisive overview of issue bordering on second language learning. It also discusses the language policy in Nigeria, the concept of second language learning and current issues in second language learning. The paper further outlined the second language teachers' challenges among which are diversity of the audience, thematic language among others and also some of the challenges of students in second language learning which includes the role of first language. Individuals learners differences, learners process etc. Recommendations were also proffered on how to curb the problems of teaching and learning in second language.

Keywords: *Second Language, Language Learning and Language Policy.*

Introduction

The importance of communication to man is incalculable, especially when daily human interaction is considered. Long before the postmodernist, the value of language began, the primacy of language in human history has never been in doubt. In political and social policy, language functions as a vehicle of interaction and an instrument of communication with the use of communications, although it has always possessed an added cultural importance as a tool of the dominant ideology. That is to learn a language is not only reaching out to others but to maintain a variety of the social bond, a shared sense of values and communal awareness, Linguists of all persuasions seem to agree that a language should be viewed as a system; a set of elements, each of which has a capacity of contributing to the workings of the whole (Beau Grande and Dressler 1992:31). Language is a powerful tool of control used by the colonial powers. Language forms a large part of the culture of people-it is through their language that they express their folk tales, myths, proverbs and history (Picador et al., 1988, the African trilogy) Language also covers a more potent and characteristic of human behaviour. It consists of a comprehensive and overlapping set of "sub-languages, " both ethnically and geographically

defined territory known as dialects--some are in some cases defined by shared settings known to be registered while others are linked to profession, class or educational level or a combination of these elements. The language includes a wide range of variation from a variety of human activities in a system of interacting with somebody, society, or culture. It also plays a crucial role in the social, political and economic life support of the people in a given geographic entity. In spite of all perceived roles of languages to humankind, an all-embracing interpretation of it continues to elude us due to the complexity of its structure and the functions it performs. A useful definition of communication should include the feeling that language has been widely studied and acclaimed as the most valuable human institution and is indispensable in all spheres of life (Crystal 1987) Conceptualized it as having perhaps a “magical, ” "mystical” and "unique” role in capturing the breadth of human thoughts and endeavour.” It means that for a country to function properly it needs the cooperation and understanding of people (Rufai 1977) For co-operation and understanding among different ethnic groups, inter-ethnic discussion was needed. Antonio de Nebrija published in Spain in 1492 the idea “[l] language has always been the perfect instrument of an empire.”” Language functions include the sophisticated mechanism of human communication and as such. It is the crucial component of cultural identity and the most striking factor in distinguishing one culture from another. For example, Igbo and Hausa in Nigeria which share different linguistic identity, culture and social life within one define institutions as a nation. The roles of language include a substantial amount of people’s historical experience, their thought patterns, and their world view. Language roles paralleled along the embodiment of culture lead to the depth of a person’s reflection--beyond the practical necessities of life to such aspects as the search for knowledge, education and collaboration among multi-ethnic societies.

Language policy: Hoffmann (1991: 204) considers language planning as concerned with “both the symbolic function of language within a society, and with the instrumental use that its speakers make of their language.” However, Crystal (1990: 174) believes that language policy should be understood as a systematic attempt to resolve the communication problems of a community by studying the various dialects it uses and developing a viable policy concerning the collection and the use of different languages. One crucial point stated in this view is that the primary stage of language policy is seeking to understand the languages available and planning the importance of those selected to use for various functions. Furthermore, related to this is the

fact that for any government-oriented change in language status, the first stage is information on its use (Mackey 1989:17). Like Crystal, Kaplan (1990: 4) declares that language planning remains an attempt by any organized body (most often some level of government) to initiate structured language change for some more or less clearly articulated purpose (commonly stated in altruistic terms but not based on altruistic intents). It is a similar but extended view that Kaplan & Baldauf pickup (1997: 3) as follows: Language planning is a body of ideas, laws and regulations. Language policy, change rules, beliefs, and practices intended to achieve a planned change (or to stop change from happening) in the language use in one or more communities. Lewis (1981) opined that: “any guidelines for language, especially in the system of education, has to take account of the attitude of those likely to be affected. In the long run, no policy will be succeeded, which does not make one of the three following functions: (a) Conform to the express attitude of those involved, (b) convince those who expressed attitudes about the rightness of the policy, (c) or those that seek to remove the causes of the disagreement in any case knowledge about attitudes is essential to the formation of a policy as well as success in its implementation”. But Apple and Muysken (1987: 47) have also pointed out that language planning is part of language policy, arguing that language planning is in fact a part of, or the exact recognition of language policy: a government adopts a strict policy with respect to the language(s) spoken in the country and will try to keep it out in the form of communication planning, any case of language design is based on an effective language policy, and this will generally indicate a more inclusive government policy. However, one way out of these controversies is to adopt the general view held by Spolsky (2004: ISB4 abstract) as a working principle: “The language policy of a speech community may be revealed in its practices, its beliefs, or in straightforward language management” this choice is reflected in this article.

Second Language Learning

Second language acquisition literally refers to the learning of a language after acquiring a first language. The term frequently used to refer to the acquisition of a second language after a person has reached the puberty level. Gital (2004) also adds that; "second language is learnt after the first language. It is learned through a formal process that is, classroom, teacher, and syllabus and the learner learns the rules guiding the user of the language consciously.

Corder (1967) states that the learning of first language is inevitable but there is not such inevitability in the learning of a second language. Whatever may be the case, learning a

language is something which is governed by grammatical rules and no tongue can be acquired without it. So both language one and language two systems progress through series of stages by means of rules that the learner essentially familiarize himself with. Though, children language has been accepted as a system in its own right and not as a deviation from the adult language while second language learner speech that is inter-language is regarded as a unique system which is different from the learners first language.

Dulay and Burt (1972 and 1974) claim that second language learners largely followed the same strategies as first language learners and that the errors in their inter-language were mainly interlingual or developmental in nature i.e. comparable to errors in the speech of children learning their first language.

Current Issues in Second Language Teaching

The following are the current issues in second language teaching;

- **Problem of Motivational and Personality**

There is, for example, a group of problems associated with motivational and personality variables in second-language learning, problems which need linguistic attention, but which more than that need the attention of psychologists and pedagogues, and perhaps of sociologists and anthropologists. A growing body of evidence points to the fact that student motivation is essential to almost any learning task and that drill may be quite ineffective unless it is perceived to have some almost immediate practical benefit. Except in the very early stages of second-language learning the amount of drill required by some teaching techniques and the amount of skill acquired are often perceived by students to be almost totally unrelated. However, motivation in second-language learning encompasses many other factors too: the purpose of the learning; the particular dialect of the language involved; and the total social and academic climate of the learning experience. Personality variables are closely related to motivational ones: degree of inhibition; possible feelings of inadequacy, rivalry or threat; anomie; preferred sense use in learning, for example visual rather than auditory; and many other variables related to sociocultural factors in the make-up of individual students.

- **Problem of Language Description and Language Context**

An equally important group of problems is language description and language contrast. Most contrastive analyses, for example, are designed to reveal different surface contrasts between the first language and the second language and most methodology is designed to drill the correct surface representations of the second language. Analyses and drills focus in turn on phonology, grammar and lexicon, and the goal throughout is that the learning will be open-ended, so that there will be generalization. However, the highly structured materials of many current courses deliberately leave little or no scope for creativity in the early stages and are often quite inexplicit in the later stages as to the extent to which analogy and generalization offer appropriate means for productivity. The terms analogy and generalization themselves are ill-defined and cloud rather than clarify the issues which are involved.

Second Language Teachers' Challenges

- **Diversity of the audience** is one of the key challenges especially (but not only) in adult learners. The scientific literature indicates the following: the cultural, socioeconomic, linguistic and academic diversity, which is typical in today's student population, requires second language teacher to work with students, whose needs, educational experiences and native language skills are very different from those of students they have typically taught. (Valdes, 1995). In addition, of course, the factors, that have traditionally existed about the audience, and which are familiar to practicing teachers still remain. In our view, these factors might be considered as the students' emotional diversity, intellectual differences, motivation, different quality and access to the target language, differences in the technological skills and, of course, in advance knowledge.

- **"Dealing with sensitive issues"**. Figuratively speaking, a second language teacher is in the epicenter of cultural gathering. The target culture in the context of a second language study is one of the decisive factors of second language acquisition. It is known that "culture and communication are inseparable, because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, about what, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to decide how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstances under which various messages might or might not be sent, noticed or interpreted.

Language learning and specifics of teaching involves a lot of issues for mastering, which are different from the norms and beliefs prevailing in the student's culture. One of the most important challenges second / foreign language teachers have to overcome is to deliver it

thoroughly and delicately. This problem is particularly acute when it concerns linguistic / ethnic minorities or immigrants and when cultural inversion occurs, i.e resistance process to the dominant culture for the integration process or bicultural ambivalence, the double sense, reflected in their native culture by their sense of shame and hostile, negative attitude towards other cultures.

- **Thematic language (themes principle) teaching.** Real knowledge of the language is not only knowledge of its vocabulary and grammatical structures, or switching smoothly from one language code to another. Language knowledge means the ability to use it in real communicative situations. Therefore, we need knowledge of the issues and themes that learners have to meet in real-life communication situations or will have them in the future. In addition, a foreign language teaching strong tradition should be taken into consideration that not only lexical-phraseological units, but also the rules of grammar and structures are taught with a specific topic. The list of issues is almost endless, but the teacher will be required to know and teach learners such subjects as: the nation (nations) history, geography, politics, social issues, health care, banking and financial sector, legal systems and, also, high level knowledge of their vocabulary is required.

- **An instruction (teaching) language.** Should a teacher use the student's first language (although, according to a class composition, it may be either a learner's first language or any language, which both students and teachers speak) to teach a second language? For decades important discussions about this issue (more accurately, the usage of first language) have been going on in the scientific community. It is known Stephen Krashen's point of view that second language (in its broadest sense) is taught mainly in the same way as people study their first language. This idea has been the basis for the opinion that using the first language in teaching the second language is not recommended. (Tang, 2007)

According to the second approach, „the use of L1 in the L2 classroom by both teachers and students can be beneficial in the language learning process. Once an appropriate balance is achieved, the use of L1 will enhance an L2 classroom.”

- **Knowing methods of teaching second language and diversity of approaches and ability of selecting an adequate method to the specific theme.** Stephen Noushen, a recognized researcher in second language teaching, believes that there is no best method of learning

language. “Is there a best method for learning a language? Unfortunately, the answer is no. Language learning can occur through all kinds of methods. What is most important is that good principles of learning are applied... These all have their supporters and attackers. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses and there is no research that shows the superiority of one method over another. It is fine to follow a particular method although it is not necessary.

Second Language Student’s Challenges

1. The role of first language

Assumption that there were differences between first language and second language, the learner’s first language knowledge would interfere with the second language. And first language and second language were similar; the first language would actively aid second language learning. It can be called as positive transfer (first language and second language are similar) and negative transfer for first language and second language are different. Negative transfer creates the areas of difficulty. To identify the areas of difficulty, Contrastive Analysis was developed. By comparing learner’s first language and second language on linguistic differences, it predicts the learner’s difficulty. Contrastive Analysis assumes that first language interfere second language.

2. Contextual variation in language-learner language

In producing language, learner language contains errors. It means utterances produced by learners are not well formed according to the rules of the adult grammar. Errors show that learners do not simply memorize target language rules and then reproduce them in their own utterances, and the rules differ from the target language. It is rare that a learner produces the same error in all contexts of use. Learner produces an error in some contexts but not in others.

Ellis (1989) divides contextual variation into two types. They are:

a) Situational context

Learners use their knowledge of the second language differently in different situations, for example: learner produces errors when learner communicate directly, she or he does not have time to monitor the output, compared with if she or he has opportunity to monitor in producing language, she or he will not produce errors.

b) Linguistic context

Learners produce errors in one type of sentence but not in another, for example: errors in the third person singular of the English simple present tense may not occur regularly in the second clause of complex sentences.

3. Individual learner differences

Five general factors that contribute to individual learner differences, they are age, aptitude, cognitive style, motivation, and personality.

a. Age

Adult and child second language acquisition are not the same. Adults have a greater memory capacity and are also able to focus more easily on the purely formal features of a language. But comparison of child and adult second language acquisition needs to be done in two parts. First, it needs to be shown whether the learning route differs. Second, the rate at which adults and children learn needs to be investigated. It is possible that no significant differences exist in either route and rate.

b. Aptitude

It refers to the special ability involved in language learning. It is a major factor determining the level of success of classroom language learning. It is one of the strongest predictors of success in language learning.

c. Motivation and needs

Learners who have high motivation and needs in learning target language, will be successful than learners who have low motivation and needs in learning target language.

The learner has a 'socioaffective filter' which governs how much of the input gets through to the language processing mechanisms. As a result of conscious or unconscious motives or needs, attitudes or emotional states, the learner is 'open' or 'close' to the second language. Thus once learners have obtained sufficient second language knowledge to meet their communicative and emotional needs, they may stop learning. It is called fossilization.

Aptitude and motivation correlate positively with achievement (outcome); it means the higher the aptitude and motivation, the higher achievement (outcome).

d. Personality and cognitive style

Little is known about how personality and cognitive style influence second language acquisition, although there is a general conviction that both are potentially extremely important.

Anxiety as one part of personality plays an important role in language achievement (outcome). Anxiety correlates negatively with achievement (outcome); it means the higher the anxiety, the lower the achievement (outcome).

4. The role of the input

Ellis (1989) writes ‘it is self-evident that second language acquisition can take place only when the learner has access to second language input. This input may be in the form of exposure in natural settings or formal instruction. It may be spoken or written. A central issue in second language acquisition is what role the input plays’.

It shows that input plays a very important role in second language acquisition. Many researches have been done by linguist in term of role of input. The role of input in the process of second language remains one of the most controversial issues in current research.

5. Learner process

Learners need to sift the input they receive and relate it to their existing knowledge.

Tarone (1980) cited in Ellis (1989) divides three sets of learner strategies.

a. Learning strategies

Learner processes the second language input in order to develop linguistic knowledge. Learning strategies can be conscious and behavioral or they can be subconscious and psycholinguistic.

b. Production strategies

These involve learners’ attempts to use the second language knowledge they have already acquired efficiently, clearly, and with minimum effort.

c. Communication strategies They consist of learners’ attempts to communicate meanings for which they lack the requisite linguistic knowledge. Learners, particularly in natural settings, constantly need to express ideas which are beyond

their linguistic resources. They can either give up and so avoid the problem, or try to find some way around it.

An optimal input is one that learners can handle by means of learning strategies. Learners adjust the strategies they use to suit the type of input they are getting. Learners can also attempt to control the type of input they are exposed to through the use of production and communication strategies. Input, learner strategies, and output are all interrelated in a highly complex manner.

Other Challenges are

Instructional Barriers in Teaching

Not all the difficulties are related to linguistic items. A teacher can be one of the significant factors in the matter of experiencing problems in language learning. A teacher who continuously refreshes himself/herself on current issues should be favoured in educational institutions. Otherwise, successful language learning cannot be realised due to the problems caused by teachers, methods, and techniques applied in class. Gándara and Maxwell-Jolly and Driscoll (2005) indicate that what makes a difference in students' success is qualified teachers, detailed content knowledge, educational background of the teachers, degree of certificates, and their experiences.

Affective Factors (anxiety, attitude, motivation, self-confidence, and peer pressure)

Some additional factors causing difficulty in learning English are affective factors, which consist of attitude and motivation, self-confidence and peer pressure. Motivation is one of the major factors affecting the learners in the field of second language learning. Within this subject matter, according to Rifai (2010), motivation provides the learners with reasons to acquire a second language. Furthermore, he asserts that students get to learn the language not only to understand it but also for instrumental reasons.

On the other hand, Zhu and Zhou (2012) found some personal problems such as anxiety, demoralization, and lack of self-confidence, which affect the achievement of language learning. It is likely that anxiety plays a tremendous role in learners' success of learning a new language.

Other factors include in-class activities such as oral presentations, role-play activities, question-answer sessions, and performing in front of the class in general (Kayaoğlu and Sağlamel, 2013; MacIntyre, 1999).

Lack of Assistance (family, resource, materials, technological support)

Second language learners tend to search for some support while learning. However, learners who lack in being assisted face some difficulties that affect their second language development. One significant factor while learning a second language is family or family background. Khan (2011) referred to the countries like Saudi where the people living there are poorly educated and do not possess a qualified educational background. Additionally, the income of those families is largely not adequate and hence families are not interested in providing adequate education for their children. Within this framework, Salameh (2012) defined family and school as two primary social environments in which a child grows. Hence, a learners' socio-psychological perspective is hugely influenced by these social environmental factors.

Other difficulties

Apart from the mentioned subjects, there are some other crucial issues confronted by second language learners. Khan (2011:1256) listed some of them briefly as "lifestyle, discipline, punctuality, future aim, family pressure, social status, excessive freedom, etc.". Moreover, Griffiths (2015) referred to the importance of practice as strategy training. He suggested that with the awareness of new strategies provided, learners would become automatic to use their own strategy repertoire on new tasks when needed to achieve their learning goals. Furthermore, Griffiths, (2015) pointed out some individual variations of learners that need to be taken into account:

- the learning stage (since learners may use different strategies at different points in the learning process),
- the learner's age (since adults may be better cognitively, but children are often more active, and this may affect the strategies they choose),
- the culture to which the learner belongs (since culture provides both affordances and constraints on behaviour),
- learning style (since preferences for how to learn can vary considerably from individual to individual, this may influence strategy selection).

Conclusion/Recommendations:

The paper presented the major problem, which teachers/students have to deal with and my opinions about their elimination. At the end of the paper I offer some general recommendations

that will make easier for language learners difficult and laborintensive process, and will give teachers the opportunity to create most comfort for their students and their activities will become effective.

- Establishing close links between theory and practice will give efficient operation of the educational process. On the one hand, teachers should be able to transfer the theory into practice, on the other hand, to observe own practice, research own experiences and implement obtained results in the teaching process.
- Teaching language cannot be reduced to "readily available" level for students. Language should be taught in the context and not only study issues should be changed according to students' needs, but the methods and approaches.
- Teachers should not depend only on the available resources. They should be ready to create materials taking into consideration specific needs.
- Teaching language is a dynamic field. University education can not cover all the needs of practicing language teachers. Professional development (including self-development) should be an integral part of life in teacher's career. We believe that continuous education is one of the most effective solution.

To respond to the challenges language teachers are required to know not only the subject, psychology and pedagogy foundations, but have also some personal qualities, if they exist in this case language courses are much more productive and efficient. These include, above all, flexibility, creativity and openness. Teachers do not have to look like a "technician", (Lawes, 2003; pp.22-28), whose duty is only transmission of information or knowledge. A teacher must be a person who plans training process from beginning to end, and takes responsibility for the decisions and success of the process.

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