Re-Engineering Language Teaching Strategies

By

Cajetan Onugha, PhD
Department Of English and Communication Art, Faculty of Humanities,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education
Email: Cajeonugha@Gmail.Com
&
Iwejor, Eze Nnamdi
Department Of English and Communication Art, Faculty of Humanities,
Ignatius Ajuru University Of Education.
Email: ezen11599@gmail.com
Phone: 08061554217

Abstract

This paper focuses on re-engineering language teaching strategies. Its main aim is to portray the new approaches with which English Language should be taught so as to enable the students understand the subject better and to use the language to communicate effectively. In order to achieve this broad objective, emphasis is placed on teaching language with passion, designing programs for language learning, using technology in language teaching, changing pedagogies, and refining the instructional materials. The methods that are used specifically encourage the learners study the language with ease and also help them understand and discuss social, political and economic issues, because of their abilities to interpret meaningfully what another speaker of the same language says. The paper recommends that language teachers should bring new innovations in terms of using appropriate instructional materials as learning aids for the language learners to understand the lessons effectively. Also, both the teachers and learners must possess the recommended English language textbooks and literature textbooks, so as to make use of them effectively during lessons. Furthermore, English language classes and lessons should only be taught by well qualified English language professionals, not just by anybody that can read and write so that the learners would benefit immensely. And the government should provide ICT systems to all primary and secondary schools to facilitate teaching and learning of the language in a better way.

Keywords: Language, Re-Engineering and Language Education.

Introduction

Language is the communication of thoughts and feelings through a system of arbitrary signals such as voice sounds, gestures or written symbols. Umera-okeke (2009) defined language as a group of symbols used by a particular race to communicate themselves both verbally and in written forms. Language is obviously a vital tool. Not only is it a means of communicating thoughts and ideas, but it forges friendships, cultural ties and economic relationships. To communicate effectively, message is sent with words, gestures or actions which somebody else receives. Communication is therefore a two-way process i.e. with the sender and receiver. So both listening and speaking are important for communication to take place.

Anagbogu, Mbah and Eme (2010) defined language as a means which human beings have devised for communicating ideas, feelings, emotions, desires etc. through complex vocal or written symbols.

In educational context, language is important for comprehension and making use of knowledge. Therefore, language could be modified to suit a particular situation. It is an extremely important way of interacting with the people around us and it is used to let others know how we feel, what we need and to ask questions. Whether spoken or written, language consists of the use of words in a structured and conventional way.

A second language or L2 is any language learned after the first language or mother tongue. Some languages often called auxiliary languages are used primarily as second languages or Lingua Franca. In Nigerian context, the second language is English. Second language can provide a base or a foundation for the language requirements in schools, colleges and universities and can equally increase globalization and peoples' chances in the global job markets. However, a second language is a nice sounding development but without the opportunity for utilization, it amounts to a waste, hence a very high demanding need to re-engineer language education through second language learning. A number of studies have shown that when students learn a second language, they have a

tendency of outscoring those who are proficient in only a single language on test of non-verbal and verbal intelligence.

The importance of learning second language is not merely limited to the ability of communicating with people who speak different languages. Learning a second language results in students' achievement of greater divergent thinking, creativity and cognitive development compared to monolingual students, so language education needs re- engineering for optimum performance.

English as a second language refers to the use or study of English by speakers with different native languages. English is a language which has great reach and influence, it is taught all over the world under different circumstances. Acquiring a second language can be a lifelong process for many. Despite persistent efforts, most learners of a second language will never become fully native-like in it although with practice, considerable fluency can be achieved.

Language teaching is the process of imparting knowledge and skills related to a particular language to learners. It involves various methods and techniques to facilitate language learning and improve proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, and grammar. Language teaching can be formal or informal and is aimed at achieving specific objectives and standards. It emphasizes the integration of theory and practice to enhance language learning and teaching. Language curriculum includes components such as reading, speaking, writing, and grammar, which are interconnected and complement each other. The role of the teacher is crucial in designing and implementing language curriculum and ensuring the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application . Language teaching methods should consider the communicative functions of language and adapt to different stages of language learning. Language teaching has a long, fascinating but rather tortuous history, in which a debate on teaching methods has evolved particularly over the last hundred years. The names of many of the methods (Grammar-translation Method, Direct Method, Audio-lingual Method, Communicative Teaching Method, etc) are familiar enough, yet the methods are not easy to grasp in practice because a method, however ill-defined it may be, is more than a single strategy or a particular technique. As a part of language teaching theories, these methods derived partly from social, economic, political, or

educational circumstances, partly from theoretical consideration (new changes in language theories and in new psychological perspective on language learning), partly from practical experience, intuition, and inventiveness. Therefore, to some degree, they represent a combination of language teaching beliefs, but it is evident that they are characterized by the over-emphasis on single aspects as the central issue of language teaching and learning.

The Concept of Re Engineering

The word, 're-engineering' obviously makes one think of the existence of problem and possible solution for remedy. Re-engineering is the process of changing strategy and/ or design of a faulty or non working system so as to enable it to improve efficiency. Offorma (2011) was of the view that the re-engineering concept is one which is aimed at taking education out of the catch-up mode and placing it at the edge of the development process. In a nut shell, re-engineering implies changes of various types in a system from a slight renovation to a total overhaul. The purpose of re-engineering is to improve the system's functionality, usability, security, stability, performance, etc.

Re-Engineering of English Language Teaching

English language, although a second language in the Nigeria situation, is also the first language when talking about formal education needs, so it requires re- evaluation and re-assessment in terms of approaches and methods of teaching, because of its relevance and importance to the social, economic and political situations in Nigeria. English language teaching has been influenced by the discipline of linguistics not only in contents but also in method of language teaching. In recent times the nature of psycholinguistics has yielded insights into the way in which language is learned by both native and non-native speakers according to Williams (1990). Moreover, in actual fact, language teaching has benefited much from the discipline of sociolinguistics, because of its influence in the societies which facilitate or impede language learning. The varieties of situation in which messages are conveyed, have been integrated into teaching purposes in the classroom. The modern inventions and the changing nature of the society engineer changes in language teaching and learning.

As a new vocabulary emanates from these scientific and technological inventions and innovations, so does the societal changing nature brings improvements in teaching and learning because of the new approaches to language usages in the society. Therefore, classroom interaction should not be limited to the structural pattern of drills and speech practice but to a wide range of varieties of new vocabulary or dominant vocabulary which only existed in the dictionaries without the learner's knowledge of their usage. Language teaching now should take into consideration the nature of the society, language interest of the society according to the professional growth, class, age and time, relevance to the socio-economic and political teaching of the language. These account for the major essence of language which is for communication in order to serve the social interaction and educational needs of the people. Presently, the objective of communicative language teaching should extend beyond grammatical competence to socio-cultural and inter-personal purposes. Such social usage should include; appropriateness of usage, conventional usage and interactional usage.

In response to English language re-engineering concept, Ezeude (2007) postulated that many current issues in language teaching are not particularly new, but keep on changing and improving in approaches and methods. Also modern language teaching methods which makes use of computers and other ICTs have brought some innovations in language teaching. These have re-engineered English language teaching because of sophistication in computer aided programmes in language teaching. The actual method necessary for re-engineering of language teaching this time is direct method. Direct method according to Ezeude is from the direct listening, speaking, reading and writing of the target language. This entails that language should be presented to the learners as a whole not in bits and pieces. This method further stresses importance in phonology and the teaching of grammar using inductive method.

Furthermore, William (1990) expressed that lesson begins with dialogues or brief anecdotes spoken by the teacher in the conventional style of the target language. Oral activities are prompted and assisted by the use of actions, gestures, and miming, with the aid of pictures, diagrams and illustrations. Aboderin (1996) postulated that an average Nigerian generally has problems with

spoken English because of the differences in the phonological systems of English and Nigerian languages. Since English is an intonal language while Nigerian languages are tonal, the Nigerian speakers of the language have problems in the suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm and intonation. This can be corrected if the teachers of English language are competent in oral English and would teach the students using the direct method effectively.

When English language is geared towards communicative competence, learners should be exposed to literature genres in order to enable them to learn how to read and speak effectively, because of the varieties of ways that the literary authors write their sentences in their literary works.

Language Education

Anyadiegwu (2008) had it that language education has to do with learning a second language or a foreign language; it is concerned with the factors that affect success or failure in language learning. According to her, language education looks at the teacher's methods, attitudes and motivation of the learners, how individual differences among learners can influence the teaching outcome. Language education reinforces the work of the organization in favour of linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingual education. Language education is one of the fundamental aspects of personal development and languages are the main vehicle for educational and teaching activities.

Language education is based on the notion that language is the key vehicle for inculcating knowledge, skills and competence. Because of this, there is the need for teachers to understand the knowledge and mechanism of language. It aims at supporting the action of member states in preparing and implementing language policies designed to promote language teaching. For this, science cannot advance if specialized vocabularies are not developed. It helps to develop a learner's linguistic skills thereby promoting educational growth inside the school as well as social and personal development outside the school. Language education develops learners' communicative competence and guides them in the study of the rules of pronunciation and grammar of a language so as to enable a practical command of that language (Anyadiegwu, 2008).

Methods of Language Teaching

Language teaching has for long been influenced by linguistics. The current trend in language classes is the learner-centered approach. In describing the language teaching methods, emphasis will be on the major among them. These include:

1. Grammar Translation Method: This method emphasizes the teaching of second or foreign language grammar through the primary technique of translation form the native language into the target language and vice versa. Features of this method include role memorization, reading aloud, translation of sentence from L2 to L1 and vice versa, etc. This method concentrates on teaching explicit rules which are linked to problem solving situations. The principle underlying this method is that language learning is a process of developing mental discipline.

2. The Direct Method In this method, teaching is done entirely in the target language. It is based on the theory that language learning is a natural process. Learning is promoted through straight association of words and structures with objects and actions. Oral activity is promoted and assisted by the use of actions, gestures and pictures. Grammar is taught inductively.

3. The Audio-Lingual Method This method is based on aural-oral skill, emphasizing listening and speaking as the primary skills to language learning. This method fosters dependence on mimicry and memorization. Grammatical structures are sequenced and taught inductively. There is abundant use of language laboratories, tapes and visual aids. Dialogues are used as the chief means of presenting the languages.

4. The Cognitive Code-Learning Method This method emerged as a reaction against the audio-lingual method that language learning is rule-formation and not habit formation. In this method, book work and individualized instruction are given more attention than cultural work. Thus language learning is characterized by rule governed creativity in which children not only learn linguistic rules but sometimes create them.

Possible Ways of Re-Engineering Language Teaching

1. Teaching Language with Passion: English language should not be taught for the purpose of language teaching. It should be taught with passion and much dedication so as to make it more interesting for the learners. When the language is taught with passion, it will raise the enthusiasm of the learners on the language.

2. Designing Programs for Language Learning: There is need for flexible language programs in order to accommodate diverse species of learners. The teacher can include programs like "native speakers' day" where he will employ native speakers who are successful and could be considered role models to come into the school and give presentations on their work, life and culture. Another program for language learning is organizing "second language speech competition" where celebrity judges from the local community who speak the target language can be brought to judge the competition. Through these programs waned interest in language education could be retrieved and language teaching is re-engineered.

3. Using Technology in Language Teaching: ICT and other aids such as audio and visual materials can speed up the language learning process by offering opportunity for practices outside the classroom. Technology provides for the language teachers a relatively safe environment but also a strongly realistic use of language. The use of technology in language teaching will help facilitate the intercommunication of teachers and students. Communication technologies can facilitate global interactions between language users, providing opportunities for language use and participation in the second language communities.

4. Changing Pedagogies: Pedagogical approaches to language teaching are constantly changing and evolving. Therefore teachers need to be abreast with recent trends innovation and development which could be either social or technological. This could promote purposeful interaction and extend students' learning and requires them to use language in ways that move beyond the superficial.

5. Refining the instructional materials: The instructional materials in this new strategy should have a link with the subject matter. Also, the instructional materials should be something that can make the language learners pay more attention to the language teaching.

Conclusion

The world is becoming a smaller place with so much common global interest that learning a second language has become almost a necessity. Language teaching as it aims at publicizing periodically a report on our linguistic heritage could be re- engineered with points discussed above in order to meet the millennium set developmental goals. Re-engineering language teaching through second language learning gives insight to L2 importance as it fosters global interaction. What is left for educators and teachers is to challenge the problems of learning languages and apply workable solution to language problems for optimum performance. Re-engineering of English language teaching, is a way of re-evaluation of the approaches and methods of teaching English language in order to achieve maximum benefits for the learners. It is a well-known fact that pupils and students often fail external examinations in English language because of inability to understand what has been taught. Perhaps the methods used were ineffective or the learners were unable to cope with the demands of the subject. The various approaches that the teachers of the subject should use, so as to help the learners to study and make use of the skills acquired in language learning effectively are incorporated in this paper. What is necessary now is for the teachers to change their approaches where the learners should be involved directly in the speaking, reading and writing in language classes regularly.

Recommendations

1. Language teachers should bring new innovations in terms of using appropriate instructional materials as learning aids for the language learners to understand the lessons effectively.
2. Both the teachers and learners must possess the recommended English language textbooks and literature textbooks, so as to make use of them effectively during lessons.

3. English language classes and lessons should only be taught by well qualified English language professionals, not just by anybody that can read and write so that the learners would benefit immensely.
4. Government should provide ICT systems to all primary and secondary schools to facilitate teaching and learning of the language in a better way, since it is the key to all other subjects at all levels of formal education in Nigeria presently.

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