

# CLASSROOM INTERACTION TECHNIQUES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN UPPER BASIC EDUCATION

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## **Abstract**

Anchored on different aspects of classroom interaction techniques which allow the English Language teacher to act upon the class while the class' reaction modifies his next action, the paper focuses on the creation of a synergy of strategies and actual classroom situation that prompt the language teacher to appraise ideas and inform application of these ideas for effective teaching and learning of the English Language in his own classroom. The paper explores not only objectives of teaching English Language but the process of achieving these objectives and the implications for learning and teaching of English Language in Nigerian Upper Basic Education. The study discovered, among others, that the strategies employed give room for face-to-face interaction, make learning interactive and participatory and the whole process learner-centred. It was, therefore, suggested that for effective use of these strategies, the English teacher should endeavour to test-run the various methods and attain some measure of competence before deploying them in his own classroom

**Keywords: Activities based, Classroom, Competence, Learner-Centred, Participatory Lesson.**

## **Introduction**

English language has gained more prominence, gradually becoming the most used language in the world while the emergence of new technologies makes it more relevant for everyone to communicate effectively (Atim , G.R, Bola,A, Onekutu, P.O, Olukunle, O.O, &Atim,R.D 2019:223). Therefore, the modern teacher must pay attention to how the language is taught in a classroom setting and

employ the best standard practice to impart the learners. As the teacher in the classroom setting, he occupies the position of a manager who sees to the learning process using different strategies to achieve his set objectives. Asa, K.J and Yusuf O.M (2014) emphasize the “need for a good knowledge of English language (both spoken and written) for contemporary teachers who need to communicate effectively to the students through modern technology devices” p.63.

Learning a language, like the learning of anything else, is essentially an individual achievement of the capacities of the mind to make sense of the environment (Malamah-Thomas, 1987). However, this private process, according to him, typically takes place in the public context of the classroom: the individual is one of a group, a member of the class, and the activities which will set the process in motion are determined by the teacher. By extension, three critical things are involved in this connection:

1. The classroom - context/setting;
2. The group/individual - class member(s); and
3. The teacher, the one in control

It is, therefore, safe to assume that this external process of learning will come about as a consequence of the external interaction which takes place between the two kinds of participant, the teacher who takes initiatives on the one hand, and the learner who responds to teacher's initiatives on the other. This is the pivot of classroom interaction which serves an enabling function or providing conditions for learning.

Siddiqui (2009), while emphasizing the role of the teacher in classroom interaction, opines that teachers trying to provide watered-up classrooms do not just focus on enhancing the academic and thinking curriculum; they also water up the social curriculum. According to him, just like the specific cognitive skills that are integrated into academic skills and knowledge instruction, specific social skills and values are also targeted and explicitly taught in an interactive manner. He gave examples of such social skills that characterize classroom interaction as:

- a. doing one's share (individual task);
- b. Listening without interrupting;
- c. Encouraging and complimenting others;
- d. Offering and providing assistance; and
- e. Recognizing and celebrating the success/talents of others
- f. Providing positive and critical feedback
- g. Recognizing but not judging, differences in personal characteristics etc.

### **Principles of Classroom Interaction in Perspective**

Malamah-Thomas (2009) believes that classroom interaction provides something of a paradox. According to him, although teaching is a subservient activity, accountable entirely to its effect on learning, the teacher typically assumes a dominant and directive role in classroom interaction, and it is learning which is made accountable to the teaching intent. Thus, traditionally, learning has been seen as the reflex of teaching, the action of the teacher as requiring a corresponding reaction on the part of the learner. However, learners may be induced to cooperate by overtly participating in the classroom interaction, either with the teacher or with other learners in groups, but there may be conflicts with the covert process of individual learning itself. To ensure that learning takes place both at individual and group level, Siddiqui (2009) suggests different processes or activities which include the following:

- a. Using tiered activities through which all learners work with same important understanding and skills, but proceed with different levels of support, challenge or complexity;
- b. Providing interest centers that encourage students to explore subsets of the class topic of particular interest to them;
- c. Developing personal agenda (task lists written by the teacher and containing both in-common work for the whole class and work that addresses individual needs of learners) to be completed either during specified agenda time or as students complete other work early;
- d. Offering manipulative or other hand-on supports for students who need them; and

- e. Varying the length of time a student may take to complete a task in order to provide additional support for a struggling learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth.

The effectiveness of classroom interaction is also largely dependent on the teacher's learning experience which is the interaction between the learner and the external conditions in the environment to which he can interact (Olaitan & Ali, 1997). It is imperative to note here that it is not what was taught in the classroom or the teaching materials used that constitute experience but the interaction of the learner and the instructional facilities. Students, like teachers, come to the language classroom with their own personalities. According to Malamah-Thomas (2009), some of their attitudes are due to their basic dispositions and these affect all areas of their lives. Some are also as a result of their learning experiences, how they feel about the subject, the teacher, their own progress and the particular classroom situation.

Also very germane is the kind of classroom interaction, the kind of teacher and learner's participation that will most likely produce conditions where by the exercise of individual learner's initiative can lead to effective learning. The role of the teacher cannot be overemphasized here because whatever achievement or progress he makes in the class is also dependent on his strategies. Some teachers have been able to go beyond the classroom in what is referred to as blended learning which is a combination of traditional teaching approaches with distance and online learning in teaching and learning of the English language (Hanan, 2018, Waheed & Khlood, 2019, Zhang & Zhu, 2018).

## **Classroom Interaction Techniques in Teaching and Learning of English Language**

### **A) The Correction Method**

The correction method is a method of applying simple instruments aimed at raising awareness about or focusing attention on specific areas of language study. It may be areas which require

improvement or correction. Error correction is an important part of any teacher's methodological practice, and one which is usually neglected or treated with levity in classroom interaction. The technique is such that a dialogue cum question is developed either in grammar, vocabulary or pronunciation that will highlight errors through repetition of a student's answer to the point of error. The teacher then makes a physical gesture to indicate an error.

### Method of Error Correction

1. Teacher gives correct answer
2. Teacher asks other students - "Is that right?" "What's wrong?"
3. Teacher says "No/Wrong"
4. Teacher says "Again/repeat"
5. Teacher mentions term, e.g tense, noun, pronoun etc.
6. Teacher repeats question with change of stress.
7. Teacher repeats student's answer up to point of error
8. Teacher makes physical gesture to indicate error
9. Teacher does not correct (Ann Malamah-Thomas (1988).

Consider the following short piece of classroom interaction adapted from British Council Video Tape Teaching and Learning in Focus, (1985);

Teacher: Ok Ayo you are walking down the street with Mr, Okoro.  
You are verygood friends. OK? What, what do you say to Mr.Okoro.

Ayo: Um, er, could you passing me-er-one cigarette, please?

Teacher: I don't think so. I don 't think so (+ gesture)

Ayo: Do you think ... I want a cigarette

Teacher: Ok, you could say I want a cigarette and what would you say Mr. Ayo.

Ayo: Of course. Here, here you are

Teacher: Ok, so he gives you a cigarette, Ayo and now you want something

else. So what, so what do you ask for now?

All Students: Matches, matches,

Student: Matches? Fire?

Teacher: Yeah, but you don't say matches or fire (laugh) what do you ask him?

Student: Er- can you please ... or ... give me fire?

Teacher: Fire

Student: Give me

Teacher: A light yes, we say "a light" in English. So we 'd say 'can you please give me a light or ...

Student: Have you got any matches?

Teacher: Have you got any matches? Ok

In the classroom interaction above the teacher exposes the student's error by repeating the student's answer until learning takes place.

## 2. Humanistic Technique in Language Teaching

Another English language teaching technique is the humanistic approach. Humanistic approaches to activities in language emphasize affective factors and interpersonal aspects of the classroom situation. By affective, it means the way the teacher and students feel about each other, about themselves and about what is going on in the classroom. In humanistic approach, according to Ann (1988) the following are the factors to show that the right atmosphere necessary for co-operative interaction between teacher and students exists:

- a. the teacher's attitude and behaviour
- b. the students' attitudes and behaviour
1. C. the general classroom atmosphere

For the above factors to produce the desired results in language teaching and learning, both positive and negative effect on the part of the teacher and students must be seriously taken into consideration. There has been in recent years research about how different students approach language learning in general, especially arising from Rubin and Thompson Learning Strategies (1982) listed below:

1. finding your own way

2. organize
3. be creative
4. make your own opportunities
5. learn to live with uncertainty
6. use mnemonics
7. make errors work
8. use your linguistic knowledge
9. let context help you
10. learn to make intelligent guesses
11. learn some lines as wholes
12. learn formalized routines
13. learn production techniques
14. use different styles of speech

However, recent research has tended to discourage the use of mnemonic in language teaching especially in classroom interaction, rather creativity is encouraged. For instance, Siddiqui (2009) says:

Mnemonics strategies do not represent a philosophy of education. We do not use or recommend the use of mnemonic strategies because they are compatible with someone's theory about what education should be ... It is also true that mnemonic strategies are not an overall teaching method or curricular approach. (p.35)

However, according to him “the focus of mnemonic strategies is so specific that they are intended to be used to enhance the recall of the components or any lesson for which memory is needed” (p.35).

Humanistic techniques in language teaching are trends developed and recently improved in methodology and approach which stress the affective factors of classroom situation. Once methodology stresses the classroom transaction, concentration will now be on interaction. This move from transaction to interaction necessarily brings in the human factor, in that it does not focus on the objectives of teaching, but on the process of achieving that objective. The prime mover of this technique is Moskowitz in her book *Caring and Sharing in*

*the Foreign Language Classroom* (1978). The example below provides one of her humanistic exercises titled "**The Best Product - Me**".

## **The Purpose**

### **A) Affective**

- a. To get students to be introspective in a light hearted way.
- b. To call on students' creativity and imagination for fun.

### **B) Linguistic**

- a. To practice the use of superlatives
- b. ii. To practice forming interrogative sentences
- c. iii. To practice the use of adjectives describing positive qualities

Levels: *All levels*

Size of Groups: Six to eight or the total class

Materials needed: A brochure or ad made by each student.

Procedures needed: In giving the assignment to the class, the teacher begins by saying:

Where ever we turn, we are surrounded by advertisements. Every few minutes, television broadcasts commercials, Magazines and newspapers are filled with ads. And even driving in a car, the radio and bin boards on the high way overwhelm us with advertising. All of the products, we are told are the best on the market.

Since we are familiar with advertising, we are going to write some commercials. The product each of you will write about is very special and rare. The product is YOU. Think about yourself and what makes you so UNIQUE. Then design an ad or a brochure selling your products to readers. You can use colour tag board. Magazine pictures, snapshots, sketches and three-dimensional objects paper on can be used for your commercial. Use the foreign language (English in the circumstance) in writing your ad. Remember to rave about how great, how extra-ordinary,



how remarkable your products is and what it can do for others.

We will all get to see the ads or brochures you create, so use your imagination and remember how good your product is as you try to sell it. (Encourage creativity and you will get it). When the ads are brought, divide the students into groups of six to eight. Have each student pass his ad to the person on his right. Everyone will then read the ad to himself to get the flavour of it. Then, one at a time, the students will read the advert aloud and show it to the group. (That means no one is reading his own ad, so embarrassment will be reduced). Next, the groups should volunteer to have two of their advertisements read to the entire class. The owners of the ads could now read them before the class. Then instruct the students to hang their ads on the wall, and let the class circulate around the room reading them. As they do so, have the students each compose five questions based on the ads they read, and select some to ask before their former groups or the total class. This will keep the class actively involved with the ads. It is fun and humorous to see whether you remember 'whose the product is' in the follow-up quiz activity.

Ever since Moskowitz developed this technique in 1987, it has undergone remarkable improvement and produced outstanding results. For instance, the students can be seated in a circle and have the ads passed and still hang them on the wall with the quiz activity following. It makes learners use superlatives adjectives to describe positive qualities and ability to generate probing questions/interrogative sentences.

### **3. The Counselling Language Learning Technique (CLL)**

The Counselling Language Learning is another form of complete humanistic approach to language learning. Created by Curran (1972), Counselling Language Learning is an approach to language teaching based on the principle of psychological counselling.

The technique has since assumed greater dimension and produced positive results in language learning. Below is a typical CCL classroom scenario adapted from Ann Malamah-Thomas (1988):

About 12 students are sitting in a circle. There is a small table in the centre of the circle with a tape recorder and microphone on it. One of the students begins a sentence in English.

**I spend my last holiday at, at---**

falters, then hesitates, then continues in Yoruba his native language. The teacher goes up behind him, whispers in his ear, and the student, clearly repeating what the teacher has said to him, comes out with:

**"I spent my last holiday at my uncle's place in Lagos".** The teacher motions him to repeat this sentence, and switches on the tape-recorder so that the repetition can be captured on tape. Immediately, another student in the circle responds with **"was you enjoy yourself?"** The teacher goes up to this student, whispers in his ear, and the student corrects himself with: **"Did you enjoy yourself?"** The repetition of this corrected version is then recorded on tape. The class continues like this for some minutes, students stumbling on their contributions to the conversation, the teacher playing a low-key, supportive role throughout.

After some time, the teacher stops the conversation, and plays back the tape-recorded version. He then takes this version, one sentence at a time, then writes each sentence up on the board, drawing attention to points of grammar, spelling and punctuation. The teacher uses the material as the basis of a grammar lesson, concentrating on those grammatical patterns which the students need to know well.

With this technique, every student is a contributor to the entire learning process and ownership of knowledge can also be guaranteed. Individual weak areas are naturally unveiled for the teacher to be able

to make necessary corrections. Since it is an action-based exercise, the class is alive with active participants dictating the course of learning.

#### 4. The Suggestopedic Technique

The Suggestopedia is a technique under the overall humanistic approaches to language learning. The fundamental idea behind the suggestopedia is to make the learner totally relaxed, open, and receptive to what he is learning (Cozanov, 1978). Here, any barriers built up by negative feelings or resentments are to be broken down and removed before learning can take place.

In achieving desired result, comfortable seating and pleasant classroom decor play a significant role. Each candidate is given a foreign-language name (at times names of world achievers e.g. Bill Gate) and a fictitious prestigious occupation at the outset of the course (e.g. Bank M.D, Dr, Barrister etc.). The teacher maintains an aura of authority, encouraging and exuding self-confidence and also encouraging self-confidence in the students. Dialogues remain the authentic material for suggestopedia and this is printed in a special way with a native language translation in a parallel column.

Below are the set techniques for the handling of these dialogues in the classroom as adapted from Ann Malamah-Thomas (1988)

##### Step 1

The teacher reads the text of the dialogue and the students follow in their books. The teacher then answers any question the students may ask on the dialogue. This question and answer session is conducted in the native language. Since the native language is acquired and students are believed to be versed in their native language (L1), it provides a pointer for the understanding of the content of the target language (English),

##### Step 2

The students put aside their books, sit comfortably in their chairs listening to the teacher as he reads the dialogue again.

##### Step 3

The teacher reads the dialogue the third time, but this time the reading is accompanied by a carefully chosen classical music. The students are still expected to still be seated comfortably in their chairs without referring to their books.

#### **Step 4**

Finally, the dialogue is analysed and discussed variously to test understanding of content, grammar and linguistic. Both oral and written exercises are conducted by the language teacher to gain understanding and ensure learning.

Suggestopedia techniques help language learning because negative barriers such as complex would have been broken down before the start of the lesson. Students have a high idea of themselves; therefore, encouraging self-confidence especially in the use of language. Again, because the students see themselves in the same status cadre coupled with the air of flamboyance in terms of classroom atmosphere, verbal communication becomes easy, such that even when errors are made, there will be no resentment or complex.

### **5. The Silent Way Technique**

The Silent Way is another set of language teaching techniques which lay emphasis on affective factors of the teaching and learning situation (Gattengno 1972). In the Silent Way, the teacher talks less in an interactive class. He is made to play a muted role in the process of teaching and learning.

**A typical Silent Way technique adapted from Ann Malamah-Thomas (1988) is presented below:**

The teacher and about fifteen students are seated round a table. The teacher intends to teach spellings of some different words from the list Farison (1989) refers to as 'spelling demons.' He writes different spellings of the difficult-to-spell words on flash cards. Note that only correct word on the card is pronounced and spelt by the teacher. The teacher raises the first card with the word

Accommodation written on it, pronounces, spells and drops it on the table.

He raises another card with **Acommodation** does not pronounce or spell it, then drops it on the table. He takes the third card with the same word Accomodation does not pronounce or spell it, then drops it on the table. With the three cards of the same word but different spellings, the teacher comes back to raise and pronounce the card with the correct word ONLY.

The students watch and listen. The teacher then lifts the cards one by one from the table and points to one of the students.

Starting with the card with wrong spelling, the student keeps quiet, the second card with wrong spelling, yet the student keeps quiet, and then he raises the third card with the correct word, then student pronounces and spells the word accommodation, then teacher nods and puts down the correct card. If the teacher raises the wrong cards and the student pronounces and spells the word, the teacher frowns and shakes his head.

Teacher points the cards to another student who provides the correct response. This exercise continues for ten minutes. Then the teacher put more sets of cards with different words on the table e.g.

1. Commemorate / Commemorate / Commemorate
2. Lightning / Lighthening / Lighthning
3. Queuing / Queueing / Queueuing
4. Privilege / Priviledge / Privelege
5. Apparel / Apparrel / Aparrel
6. Sisters-in-law / Sister-in-laws / Sister in law

The teacher having done the same for all the set of words above, now arranges them on the table and says "Give me the spelling for commemorate, one or two students reach hesitantly for the card with the correct spelling and the

teacher motions to his direction. One student hands him the card. The teacher points at that the student and indicates all the cards with correct spellings on the table. The student says "Give me the spelling for **commemorate**", the teacher picks up the correct card, hands it to her. He then points to another student and indicates three or more other sets of correct words, for instance: **Lightning. Privilege. Sisters-in-law**

The teacher points to another student, who picks up the correct card and hands it to his classmate. Within a few minutes, the students are giving and picking cards among themselves without the prompting or intervention of the teacher at all.

The Silent Way technique, provides little room for the teacher to dominate interaction. Rather, his intervention is minimal because by the time the students know the appropriate response, the teacher merely watches on as learning takes place unhindered.

### **Implications of Classroom Interaction Techniques for the Teaching and Learning of English Language in Nigerian Upper Basic Schools**

Since interaction is a process in which people or things have reciprocal effects upon each other through their actions, its implications for effective teaching and learning of English Language cannot be over-emphasized. There is no doubt the fact that classroom interaction provides conditions favourable for learning. These have been adequately examined and illustrated with scenarios in a typical English Language lesson class while describing different aspects of classroom interaction.

Five aspects of classroom interaction techniques relevant to the teaching and learning of English Language have been explored in this paper, not for anything but to guide the English teachers towards the critical appraisal of the ideas and their informed application of these ideas in their own classroom to ensure competencies in delivery. The effective

application of the techniques has the potential of improving teacher's competencies especially in the pedagogic skills of Speaking, Listening, Reading and Writing in English Language.

The humanistic approaches in classroom interaction have so many things in common, especially as students' performances and involvement help teachers to identify problem areas, thereby adding to teacher's experience and competence. The strategies aim at achieving the following:

1. To make English language classroom more effective by influencing affective domain in the classroom.
2. Suggestopedic techniques makes English language learners feel more relaxed and less threatened.
3. The Silent Way technique makes the English language learners more independent, creative and self-reliant.
4. The Counselling Language Learning technique makes the English Language learners feel comfortable and accepted as a member of a group.
5. When students interact under the supervision of the teacher, especially in verbal communication, learning is not only fun but exciting and interesting.

According to Banjo (1990), in the present dispensation in which most teachers of English Language lack clear ideas of what best method to apply in order to achieve their goals, the classroom interaction techniques will no doubt help the teaching and learning of English Language in Nigerian schools. More than any methods or techniques, the English Language teacher has a lot to gain if the classroom interaction/humanistic approach is put into maximum use. For instance, it will help the English Language teacher's competence in:

- a. Developing in the learner good language habits through participatory approach.
- b. Giving the learners a lot of drills and repetitions especially as the corrected versions are tape-recorded for the learner to hear over and over again.

- c. Breaking barriers, making learners relaxed and receptive to what he is learning, and prompting creativity in the process.

## Conclusion

There is no doubting the fact that teaching language is more tasking than any other subject and the case of English Language especially in a second language context is more laborious and demanding (Adedokun, 2006). More so that the language teachers according to Williams (1990) are more often than not confronted with the problem of "what do I teach in language"? And how am I supposed to teach it? As a language of trade, language of instruction and indeed Nigeria's *lingua franca*, competence in English language cannot be compromised or down played. Therefore, versatility, independence and creativity which classroom interaction provides should be encouraged in the English Language teacher to engender competence in the speaking, listening, reading and writing of the language both as a language of instruction and as core teaching subject in our schools.

However, since there is no do-it-all teaching strategy, this paper submits that the language teacher must be creative to search for a suitable teaching technique for his/her particular lesson and kind of student in order to make his class exciting and interesting. Also because teaching environment is also a *sine qua non* for learning, Governments at all levels should provide the enabling environment for learning and the right motivation for the teachers of English Language.

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