

## **APPLICATION OF COMICS AS INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY IN LANGUAGE SKILL DEVELOPMENT: AN ORACY ENHANCEMENT PARADIIGM**

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**ABSTRACT:** *English language is very important in Nigeria because it is used for education, commerce, governmental activities and in inter /intranational relations, among others. The teaching of English language is being faced by a lot of problems ranging from poor teaching methods, students' weaknesses in pronunciation, poor reading abilities and bad writing, which amount to students' poor performance. It is therefore important that the language is properly taught in order to enhance the communicative competence of students. This papers looks into the use of comics in pedagogy. Important areas highlighted include: English Language in Nigerian Schools; Oral Communication in English Language; Teachers' Role in Enhancing English Language Teaching and Students' Oral Competence Comics and Strategies for Using Comics to Enhance Oral Communication in English Language. Recommendations offered include: teachers should understand that oral language is at the base of literacy which involves risk taking through a willingness to confront more languages than what is presently owned. It therefore requires diligence and hard work on the teacher's part to help students come across more words in their learning.*

**KEYWORDS:** Comics, Second Language, Oral Skill,, Assessment, Performance

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Language does not only distinguish man from other creatures but also endowed man with the authority to communicate. With language, man controls his entire environment. Language is more than an instrument for the conveying of ideas. It is an instrument for working on the feelings of others, for self-expression and helps the user in achieving self-assessment. Language affects the opportunities and possibilities of acquiring knowledge, being in the world, exploring the world and enjoying the world (Obiegbu, and Njemanze, 2015).

English language as a second language in Nigeria is used for myriads of purposes. This is why it has become so important in the life of the nation to the extent that instruction in English language is required at every level of education. The goal of language teaching in Nigerian schools is communicative competence of students in English Language. As a result, students are expected to be proficient in this subject but students' performance over the years have revealed that students perform poorly in the subject as they cannot express themselves in simple and correct English.(Obadare, 2011). Rafiu and Nwalo (2016) see English language proficiency as the ability of students or learners to be able to possess writing skills, listening skills, reading skills and speaking skills in English Language. It is the ability of an individual to speak or perform in an acquired language (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL, 2008).

Soares dos Luz (2015) posited that English has become a language that people worldwide want to learn and speak fluently. The English language is global; and globalization is also

reflected in the worldwide use of English language. As a result, English plays a vital role in many areas: education, science, technology, politics, and trade. For instance, in Cape Verde, everyone wants to learn the language most spoken worldwide. The official language is Portuguese, but their mother tongue is Creole. Despite the multilingual background of Cape Verde students, instruction in English as a foreign language (EFL) focuses on reading and correctness of grammatical structures in writing, and less often addresses oral communicative skills such as listening or speaking.

English Language is the official language in many countries of the world including Nigeria. As a colonial linguistic legacy, it has been the country's official language since the exit of our British colonial administration. It became the language of Trade, Education, Judiciary, Government and of instruction in our institutions and by default the lingua franca. Its importance in the educational sector and even in the labour market cannot be over emphasized. (Obadare, 2011).

Blaha (2006) observes that teaching young learners foreign language is not an easy task. Teachers have to be aware of many things (concentration span of the pupils, their psychical development, individual features and large number of other factors that influence them). However, there are some features young learners have, that help them to learn the foreign language, which if the teachers know, can be used to find the way to help children with learning and what methods are wise to choose. Susan Halliwell mentions several interesting abilities that children bring to the classes and that can be basis for teacher to “build on them” such as “Children’s ability to grasp the meaning, children’s creative use of limited language sources; children’s capacity for indirect learning; children’s instinct for role play; the role of imagination; and the instinct for interaction and talk”

Now, Akinwamide (2007) says one point to note is the fact that the global importance of the English language cannot be over-emphasised; using English has nothing to do with one’s nationality, history or interest. English is an international language and every user wants to fall within the good users. However, the process of learning English language after the first language has been acquired has not been favourable hence incomprehensible inputs/outputs are the major flaws of second language learners. The situation becomes more appalling when a second language teacher whose limitations are observable in pronunciation are the teachers. The learners imitate imperfect models and imperfection is on the increase.

The importance of oral communication cannot be overemphasized because it is used in everyday life. Oyinloye (2007) observed that oral communication is used more often than written communication and by more people. It enhances the chances of our interaction at home, school work, policy and business. Its effectiveness will influence the chances for personal success. Oral communication is often used in everyday activities such as speaking to solve problems, participate in and conduct meetings and small group discussion, public professional groups, supervisors and colleagues. It is used to make request, provide instruction and give information.

Alimi, Ehinola and Alabi (2012) observed that learners of English as a second language experience some difficulties in the mastery of communicative competence due to a number of reasons. Okoh (2002) noted that “English has quite a number of words which are pronounced differently from the way they look. Several words, even while sounding exactly the same have entirely different meanings, while others are spelt in terribly odd and awkward ways. Oral skills hardly stand alone; they enter into such other regions as spelling, writing,

even vocabulary building”. This implies that teachers should drill students well in spelling in order to be able to write words like owl, awl; altar, alter; alley, ally; thought, taught; braising, brazen; shore, shawl; feed, feud; hole, whole; cease, seize etc. Fatiloro (2005) citing Barrow also confirmed that “there is no consistent method of representing sounds in English. English alphabet does not contain letters enough to represent English sounds adequately. The phonetic representation of English sound calls for at least thirty eight different symbols while our alphabets contain only twenty six letters thus in most cases, a letter must stand for more than one sound as in letter “a” which has different pronunciations in at /æ/; art /a:t/; at /et/; sofa /səʊfə/; all /ɔ:l/; village /vɪlɪdʒ/. Letter c stands for three different sounds as in face /s/; cat /k/; ocean /sh/. Letter “k” may be represented by k, c, q, ch, ck and x as in kit /kit/; cat /kæt/; quite /kwaɪt/; ache /eɪk/; sick /sɪk/.

For instance, Alimi et al (2012) observed that Yoruba users of English find it difficult to pronounce certain English sounds like /z, v, ð, θ/ because they are absent from their language. Thus pronounce think /tɪnk/ instead of /ðɪnk/ sip/ instead of /zɪp/ /fery / instead of /very/. Furthermore, English language has notoriously confusing spelling nature. For example, the following words can pose a problem to learners of English as a second language: omission, xylophone, orchestral, juvenile, anecdotal, philanthropist, etc.

Furthermore, Opoola and Fatiloro (2014) observed that many Nigerian English as L2 students particularly in secondary schools are still finding it difficult to effectively communicate using English as viable medium. Spoken and written texts in English of most students are of no enviable standard. The necessary knowledge in English appears lacking due to absence of sound oral and written drilling in English.

Cultural differences also play a role in language acquisition. Someone learning English may have difficulties understanding certain actions, such as dressing, body language and the teacher's role that are played out in everyday life.

Further observations have shown that the right methods are not being used to impart English language knowledge. Alam and Uddin (2013) noted that several other evidences show that language is learned for the sake of passing examinations, not for developing skills such as listening and speaking. Teachers mostly practice traditional teaching methods which focus on reading and writing skills but productive skills such as speaking is given no importance. As a result this skill is neglected, as Hodson (2006) pointed out, “the explicit teaching of speaking and listening has been neglected’.

Troute (2016) and Saleh (2013) noted that communicating effectively in a language requires the speaker's good understanding of linguistic, sociolinguistic and socio-cultural aspects of that language. This understanding will enable him to use the right language in the right context for the right purpose and then he can be referred to as communicatively competent. According to Troude (2016), helping students develop oral language proficiency will help them understand words when they meet them in print. Students of any language (even English) who don't read well can usually be helped by further oral language development. If words aren't in students' oral working vocabulary, they won't be comprehended if they are encountered in print. Students who haven't learned vocabulary or are occupied by decoding don't have enough working memory space available to focus on comprehension, or to implement reading strategies. Reading vocabulary grows out of oral vocabulary.

### **English Language in Nigerian Schools**

English language occupies an important position in Nigeria because it is used for myriads of purpose. world (Obiegbu, and Njemanze, 2015) assert that English Language is the language of education in Nigeria and many other countries of the world. For this very reason students study English Language from pre-nursery to the university level. The essence of this is to increase the communicative competence of these learners in English Language. Opoola and Fatiloro (2014) believe the notion that any competent user of a language should demonstrate accuracy of the grammatical and vocabulary aspects and also use such linguistic knowledge appropriately, hence, recommended among other things, communicative approach to teaching of English language which enables learners to understand and use utterances rightly in different contexts; that learners should be exposed to consonant and vowel sounds which are absent from their mother tongues (MT) and also mentioned the need for the teacher to drill the taught in extensive reading.

Obiegbu, and Njemanze (2015) opined that an analysis of the curriculum development process of the Nigerian Education Programme reveals that at the moment, learners are not being empowered with the communicative abilities they need for functional survival in today's society. A lot needs to be done to forestall the poor attitude of the teachers/students in order to enhance the quality of formal and informal communication in the English language. This obvious communication reality calls for proper teaching of the English language especially at the foundation level. Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu's (2006) study revealed the dominance of textbooks, dictionaries, chalkboards, workbooks and posters in the teaching of English Language in secondary schools in Nigeria. Modern media such as audio and video tapes, language laboratories, programmed texts, flash cards, computers, magazines and newspaper are rarely used. In Nigeria, Adeyegbe (2002) found that there was a decline in students' performance in SSC examinations. He reported that in topics where teachers found difficult to teach, students tend to perform below expectation.

### **Oral Communication in English Language**

According to Troute (2016), oral language is the ability to speak and listen. The development of thinking and reading abilities is closely linked to the development of oral language. "Speaking to learn" is the vehicle for increasing and deepening knowledge. For very young toddlers, spoken language naturally comes before written language. This developmental pattern continues throughout school: it is extremely difficult to read a language that still is incomprehensible to the ear. While oral language is used in most classrooms, almost all of that "talking" is generally done by the teacher, not the students. Students often become passive--the teacher talks, the students (may) listen. In this type of classroom environment, students might learn the basic skills of reading and writing, but they may not learn how to think critically, express themselves orally in a fluent manner, or make independent conclusions. You don't acquire language if you don't use it.

Oyinloye (2007) opines that oral communication is used more often than written communication and by more people. It enhances the chances of our interaction at home, school work, policy and business. It uses spoken words to exchange ideas and information and involves one-to-one conversation, and may also involve small group.

Kinsella (2006) Oral language is at the base of literacy. It involves risk taking through a willingness to confront more language than what is presently owned. It takes nerve because it

also involves vulnerability; the willingness to err for the broader goal of communication; and intuition, the ability to sift for meaning. When students talk with students, there is less risk of embarrassment if words aren't correctly pronounced or used than when students talk with teachers. A common barrier to comprehension is lack of background knowledge and prior experience with words. Students cannot develop oral language and vocabulary proficiency in a quiet classroom. They need time to practice the skills they're expected to master.

### **Teachers' Role in Enhancing English Language Teaching and Students' Oral Competence**

Teaching is considered a demanding and challenging social activity in our society with the ultimate goal of training students to acquire the ability, knowledge, social values and skills in order to apply and integrate them in the community. It is generally agreed that good teaching involves good communication between the teacher and students and also among students. The best productivity in a classroom comes from effective co-operation between the teacher and the students. Therefore, teachers' roles can be vital to the effectivity of the language learning (Juchniewicz, 2008). According to Soares dos Luz (2015), the teacher's role is vital to the effect of the language learning. A supportive teacher creates efficiently a positive classroom environment, encourages students to behave well in classroom and to be motivated. The relationship between teachers and students affects the quality of students' motivation to learn and classroom learning experiences. Operating as socializing agents, teachers can influence students' social and intellectual experiences via their abilities to instill values in children such as the motivation to learn; by providing classroom contexts that stimulate students' motivation and learning; by addressing students' need to belong; and by serving a regulatory function for the development of emotional, behavioral, and academic skills (Davis, 2003).

Mazer, (2013) states that "engaged students display many behaviors inside and outside of the classroom that reflect their interest and engagement in learning. They often have the opportunity to listen attentively, verbally contribute during interest and engagement discussions, take notes, and ask questions of instructors". Fakeye (2012), Soares dos Luz (2015) investigated the extent to which teachers' classroom behavior would predict students' achievement in English language and how a supportive relationship between teachers and students in the classroom can improve the learning process and found that teachers' classroom behavior has significant relative contribution to achievement of students in English language and capable of predicting students' academic achievement in English language and that by having a good relationship with students, teachers can offer to students chances to be motivated and feel engaged in the learning process; students will be engaged actively in the learning instead of being passive learners. Hence teachers and students value a supportive and caring relationship between them and that interaction is essential to the teacher-student relationship. Also, the methods and strategies teachers use, make students feel engaged and stimulated to participate in the learning process.

In support, Sita (2010) found that interaction in the classroom is an essential part of teaching learning process, whereby two or more people engage in reciprocal actions. The classroom climate is built up by the pattern of interaction between teacher and students' verbal exchange, asking questions, responding and reacting. The most important factors in a classroom situation are the interactions and exchanges initiated by teacher and students.

Troute (2016) The process of reading and speaking must be developed side by side. However, extensive reading instruction is more effective after an adequate level of oral proficiency in



English has been achieved but by no means should instruction in reading be totally delayed until proficiency with oral language has been attained. Accordingly, Troute (2016) suggested that teachers should:

- encourage students to bring their ideas, background knowledge, and experiences into class learning activities.
- Be responsive and accepting listeners when students are talking.
- Nurture an accepting, risk free environment where students will feel comfortable. Language is not practiced or acquired when students are afraid to use it.
- Allow students to express themselves without fear of censure – either by adults or by fellow students.
- Pose follow-up questions concerning the activities or conversations held with students. (e.g. Tell me more, What did you do then?, How do you feel about that?, What more can you add?, ...etc.)
- Encourage on-topic student-to-student discussions among class members.
- Provide opportunities for speaking, discussion, and expression of ideas, experiences and opinions across the whole curriculum. This will involve a range of experiences in which the size and type of audience, the situation and purpose will all vary.
- Present themselves as good models of oral language.
- Establish strategies to manage all forms of communication to ensure that all students have fair and equitable opportunities to develop their interpersonal speaking and listening skills (e.g. large and small group discussions).

Oral language provides a foundation for communication of ideas and intelligent conversation, and the development of other language skills. Before students achieve proficiency in reading and writing, oral language is one of the most important means of learning and of acquiring knowledge.

When selecting words to teach:

- Teach words that are central to the concept students must learn.
- Teach only words students do not already know.
- Teach students to use context clues, when available.
- Teach only a few words at a time so meaning is retained.
- Relate new words to previously learned words.
- Provide multiple exposures to words.

### **Comics**

Sudjana dan Ahmad (2002) define comics as a kind of cartoon form expressing character and playing a story in sequences of closely related drawing and designed to give fun to the readers.

It contains several continued stories. The stories are brief and interesting, completed with action. Comics also appear in newspaper and book. It is generally a pictorial story in magazines, newspaper, or books that is usually easy to understand and funny. It is an art work which has sequence of stories about characters, events in picture form which can be humorous, mysterious, etc. Comic contains pictures which can be created through drawing, painting, and graphic.

Comics is made up of bubbles (for speech, dialogue or words), which is a bordered space attached to the picture; captions which are the fields mostly of square or rectangle shape (not the rule), used for the text of the narrator to specify the place, time or any other feature that is not pictured; panel is a space for the picture, usually bordered with a frame, contains bubbles and captions; the picture expresses a single moment of the story. Framing can differ in form, which can carry the meaning, in size, or they can overlap one another, which expresses the level of importance of particular panels. The plot is divided into particular pictures through the panels and the narration flows in rhythm. The sequence of panels forms strips or consequently, a whole comic book.

Comics is beneficial in education because it has the ability to motivate students; it's visual nature shows the gestures and the body language of the characters, hence contributes to the development of communicative competence which includes nonverbal communication; It can serve as an intermediate step to difficult disciplines and concepts; it can lead students toward the discipline of learning and it is a popular reading for children. Researchers and teachers have found comic strips to be particularly useful in special classes or for slow learning pupils in regular classes; discussions on comics are generally livelier than those on classic novels; by comics, students can learn about culture which can bridge the separation many students feel, between their lives in and out of school. Teacher can also lead their students in a study of "contemporary lifestyles, myths, and values" (Versaci, 2001).

Muzumdar and Nania's (2015) study evaluated the effects of two vaccine information flyers (a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) flyer vs a flyer designed in Comic medium) to compare the effectiveness of two vaccine information flyers on participants' attitude towards the flyers. They found that the flyer with comics was evaluated more attractive than the CDC flyer. Royanti (2007) opined that with the use of English comics, students will be active as participants and they have more a chance to express their minds, emotions, feelings and attitudes.

### **Strategies for Using Comics to Enhance Oral Communication in English Language**

Teach story retelling with comics: Students' problems are not only from the classroom environment but also from the students themselves. The reality is that, in fact, many students master the theory better than practice. For example, in speaking, they may have the knowledge of how to speak, but in practice they find difficulties. They lack self-confidence. To build their confidence, students need more practice, hence teachers should create and use interesting methods. One of such methods is story retelling with comics. Generally, story retelling is liked by the students because they like stories. It is also an appropriate method for the students at their age. (Royanti (2007)). Using English comics as a means for teaching story retelling can be very pleasing and interesting for the students. By using English comics students will be more interested and more active in learning. They will feel something new and different from what they usually get in their class. Accordingly, it could motivate students to improve their interest in learning English since they will find that speaking, especially story retelling, is not

always difficult to learn. Their improvement of interest in learning English will help them master English well.

**Expose students to lots of words:** Oral language development in school does not mean teaching children to speak so much as providing them with the skills and opportunities to communicate more effectively. Expose students to lots of words. Not all of the words encountered by students will be learned, but if they never encounter them, they will never learn them. Exposure provides students with opportunities to recognize and possibly use new words when they hear or see them again. Royanti (2007) suggested that comics could be used in pupils' textbooks, by offering broad variety of activities based on comics. The activities will develop reading skills and reading comprehensive and can also be used to develop other skills, especially reading skills. When focused on reading skills, pupils' role changes from receiver to producer..

Acting 'comic with children' could also help to enhance students' oral communication skills. Pupils could be asked to repeat the sentences written in the bubbles. There should be follow-up activities and practising exercises based on the language introduced by comics, mostly a dialogue to practice new language, popular game 'Simon Says' or various listen-and-do activities. With regard to skills, activities linked with comics (described above) are orientated on reading and speaking skills.

Furthermore, activities based on creating comics can be used to develop pupils' imagination and creativity. During the lessons pupils should have the chance to work with the communicative means of the comics and use them to express themselves, their ideas and thoughts. After the class activities, students could be asked to design their own comics based on assignment given in class and be allowed to evaluate abilities to express the meaning understandably through the oral feedback of class-mates. Communication competencies could be developed mainly through:

- working with basic types of bubbles, their function and expressing the meaning through them;
  - working with sounds and their graphic recording; and
- expressing the meaning through different means – visual, graphic, textual, etc.

Troute (2016) also suggested the following six steps to vocabulary success:

1. Provide a description, explanation, or example of the new word along with a nonlinguistic representation. Determine what students already know or think they know, integrate direct experiences, stories, pictures or computer images, and create pictures about the word.
2. Ask students to restate the description, explanation, or example in their own words. Let students work with peers to arrive at appropriate ways to remember the word. They may be permitted to use their heritage language for this purpose.
3. Have students construct pictures, diagrams, or graphic representations of the new term or phrase. There is power in pictures. When students are required to create a picture or symbol, they are forced to think in non-linguistic ways and make connections to things



they are familiar with. Model examples and provide assistance until the idea catches on. The internet may also provide ideas. Group work is encouraged.

4. Plan activities that require students to add new terms to their notebooks or vocabulary cards. Highlighting prefixes, suffixes, or root words may help students remember terms; synonyms, antonyms, related words, pictures, and translations into the heritage language can also be helpful. Circulate when students are working in their notebooks to catch and correct errors as they occur. Periodically collect and check notebooks.
5. Encourage students to discuss the terms with one another. Interacting deepens understanding. Think-pair-share activities can be helpful, particularly with others who speak the same language. Encourage students to check one another's understandings. During review activities and games, check for misconceptions.
6. Involve students in learning activities and games that require them to use the new terms.

Give periodic quizzes to check levels of knowledge, and let students pair with others of the same language to self-correct for immediate feedback and clarification, if needed. Encourage students to create graphs or visual representations of words they've mastered. Because students are working with other students and in notebooks, misconceptions can occur. Regularly monitoring student work for accuracy can avoid misunderstandings before they become deeply ingrained. Also, a systematic program of wide reading should be implemented since the more that students read, the more words they are exposed to.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Teachers should understand that oral language is at the base of literacy which involves risk taking through a willingness to confront more language than what is presently owned. It therefore requires diligence and hard work on the teacher's part to help students come across more words in their learning.
- Teachers should take proper control of the classroom situation to assure students of a safe environment in order to build self-confidence into students in order to encourage them to use language without fear.
- Teachers should encourage teacher-student, student-student interaction in the English language classroom.
- Extensive oral language for both social and academic purposes must be incorporated into successful literacy development.
- Teachers should not overlook oral aspects of English language teaching for fear of losing classroom control.
- Students should be given time to practice the skills they're expected to master.
- Teachers should use standard English and model conversation with students by focusing on encouraging the expression of ideas.

- Teachers should try the use of comics by designing and encouraging students to design their own comics to encourage extensive use of words and by speaking in the English language classroom.

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