EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN MULTICULTURAL L2 CLASSROOMS: THE NIGERIAN PERSPECTIVE

Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu

Department of English Studies, Faculty of Humanities, University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

ABSTRACT: *Effective teaching demands that we use all the facts available to us to impact knowledge. In Nigeria where the English Language is essentially a second language, effective teaching seeks to incorporate all tools and practices that assist the English Language learner in an L2 multicultural classroom. Effective teaching in an L2 setting seeks to promote learning skills that will be of benefit to learners from diverse cultural backgrounds. The paper identifies a number of issues related to effective teaching in multicultural L2 classrooms. It addresses barriers to effective learning in an L2 classroom, the potential challenges to teaching and provides diverse strategies that may improve teaching and learning in this context. In the end, the paper outlines the processes for improving the effectiveness and quality of teaching and learning the English Language. The argument is that multiculturalism improves teaching, teaching skills and learning abilities. Therefore, the paper highlights core considerations for analyzing the challenges faced by teachers and learners, and finally, recommends some directions to embrace the challenges.*

KEYWORDS: Effective Teaching, Second Language, L2 Classrooms, Multiculturalism, improved Teaching, Teaching Skills, Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a highly diverse, multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic country, comprising of nationalities that come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, with over 450 ethnic groups and languages. Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural society. It is therefore inevitable that the multicultural nature of Nigerian education system will continue to grow in size and diversity. In Nigeria today, English is not only the medium of instruction in the educational system, but has become a common *lingua franca*. Nigeria itself is a culturally plural and linguistically diverse society and will continue to be so. In present day Nigeria, schooling means a classroom for an increasing student population from diverse ethnic groups and languages. Apart from students who speak one of the major indigenous languages (Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba), there are others from ethnic minorities and, all of them have come to the classroom to learn English as a medium of instruction. Ultimately, they must reconcile crossing cultures since they have become multicultural in school settings. Therefore, the crucial factor is the need for new types of teachers and training to develop the skills and confidence that teachers need for effective teaching of English in this multicultural L2 classrooms. As Marcos Koffi Ngoran has remarked, there is need for an ESP approach. An ESP approach encourages communicative and interactive teaching, allowing Nigerian learners to fully express themselves and their world (*IATEFL* ESP SIG 2013 Issue 41, p. 31). In Nigeria where English is a second language   it is imperative for the teaching and learning implications to be properly addressed in such a diverse L2 classrooms. In a typical Nigerian classroom, one finds students from diverse cultural backgrounds and mother tongues (Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Efik, Echie), to mention but a few who have come to acquire the English Language in the classrooms. However, the acquisition of

English is different from these indigenous languages as English can only be learnt in schools in the classrooms where it is taught as a subject. The implication is that the majority of learners of English in Nigeria hardly practise English after school and in fact outside the classrooms because, they quickly revert to their mother tongues once they escape the classrooms or in the case of Nigeria to pidgin which now has the unofficial status of *lingua franca* for most Nigerian students in Secondary Schools, especially in the cities; as they hang out with their peer group

However, multicultural classrooms can provide an opportunity for intercultural learning and avenues for sharing perspectives that could prove useful for today's global educational setting. The basic question now is, how do teachers and facilitators of education ensure effective teaching and learning in a complex setting such as the multicultural L2 classroom? In the Nigerian context, English is not only a medium of communication but a medium of instruction called upon to mediate a whole range of cultural and cross-cultural concepts. Therefore, this paper highlights some of the core considerations for analyzing the challenges faced by teachers and learners of English Language. Therefore effective teaching of English in a multicultural context is crucial, but there are many challenges related to this, and exploring the issue of how to come out of this challenge by the learner has been a matter of great concern for a long time to pedagogical scholars

Challenges to Effective Teaching and Learning of English in Multicultural L2 Classrooms

Some impediments and challenges to effective teaching and learning in multicultural L2 classrooms have been identified. In Nigerian classrooms the challenges include: Lack of training for teachers of ESL (English as a Second Language). Most teachers of ESL lack or have no basic skill teaching practice, sufficient exposure and mastery of the structure of English language; related to the above is low levels of personal language proficiency and lack of understanding of second language pedagogy. Marcos Koffi Ngoran has noted that in Nigeria "English Language is extremely badly taught in Nigerian schools as evidenced by the poor examination results. At the University level, the Use of English course is also poorly taught" (*IATEFL* ESP SIG 2013, Issue41, p. 31). In addition, in most Nigerian classrooms, there are diminished positive factors in the learning environment. Positive environment include adequate linguistic landscapes in classrooms and finally, the inability of learners to make a transition from learning and acquiring L1 and the gap that exists in learning through interaction and shared social participation in multicultural L2 classrooms (Freeman 2009).

It has also been observed that most teachers of L2 classrooms lack experience in teaching young learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Fernandes, 2013, p. 37).Indeed, most Nigerian classrooms are overcrowded, making discipline difficult to achieve for most teachers. Teachers find it tasking in such situations to motivate young learners in multicultural diverse L2 classrooms to use English to communicate with their peers. Finally, the most common challenge to teaching and learning English in Nigerian classrooms is the lack of school materials and technological equipment to make language teaching a reality in most classrooms. As Sharmin Sultana has noted English " not being the native language of learners in TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language), ESL (English as a Second Language) context, that is, in a cross-cultural context triggers some problems" (accessed and retrieved on   23/08/16, www.nepjol. info/index.php/ NELTA/ article / download/61315032).To remedy the lapses in the multicultural L2 classroom in Nigeria, Ngoran(2013, p.31) advocates an ESP approach. This a more communicative and interactive approach to teaching English which is believed to make

the learning experience more pleasurable. Indeed despite the challenges, a multicultural L2 classroom in Nigeria offers great benefits for teaching and learning of English. According to Espelago and Holt (2001), peer pressure dictates that for one to belong and be accepted in a group, s/he must behave like it, so most times, the Nigerian learner of English especially at the Secondary School level must speak pidgin because it is the *lingua franca* of most peer groups. The general adoption of pidgin in most communicative situations poses a serious challenge to the development and mastery of English. Kolawole (1998) has rightly noted that "A mastery of written and spoken language is highly desirable, yet its teaching and learning are beset by a myriad of problems at the secondary school level" (cited in Iorember, 2013, p. 96).

In L2 classrooms therefore, communication in English will be a major motivation. Lasagasbaster (2011) has reported that young learners have positive attitudes and motivation to learn a foreign or second language when the teacher shows proficiency and mastery of the language and Coonan (2011) observed that the multilingual classroom offers a fertile terrain for learning and "opens up the prospect of cosmopolitan and intercultural education" (IATEFL, *Voices* (2014.237), p.12). Since the students are from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, it will be easy to motivate students to use English to communicate with their peers. In multicultural L2 classrooms young learners are more readily susceptible to learning English if the teacher shows adequate mastery of the language. As Andreia Fernandes(2013, p. 37) has argued it is essential to make the teachers of English "believe that they are able to make young learners learn a foreign language successfully" (p. 37).To achieve total success, teachers of English need to be provided with what Fernandes has called " pedagogical tools that will make the English learning process a memorable experience..."(p. 37).This is what will make the L2 classrooms effective and help students have a better chance of achieving success in a Second Language like English.

Effective Teaching and Learning in Multicultural L2 Classrooms

Despite the challenges and impediments to English language teaching and learning in multicultural L2 classrooms like Nigeria, effective teaching skills promote healthy learning abilities. As Tania Pattison (2013, p. 23) has observed, effective teaching requires that teachers of English in second language settings possess high levels of personal proficiency and extensive understanding of how second language pedagogy can help learners to develop their abilities. In multicultural classrooms, learners are more readily susceptible to learning English if teachers show adequate mastery and high proficiency of English. Effective teaching of English in L2 classrooms generally demands that teachers get ready to develop a set of digital competencies suitable for this internet age including technology awareness, integrating content into the curriculum, developing new forms of classrooms, and using tools to create new materials.

Similarly, effective learning of English in multicultural L2 classrooms will require that the young learners of English do not regard the L2 classrooms as their primary source of learning English; rather, they must have continued exposure to English through electronic and print media to form greater and sustained awareness of its structure. Awareness of the structure of English will help young learners gradually appropriate English for their own uses, allowing them access to intercultural identities. This is because effective teaching can lead to improved learning and once learning is assimilated the students in multicultural environment are capable of becoming an identity group; this is the ultimate benefit of multicultural L2 classrooms. Once the students communicate common perspectives among themselves, they become an identity group. Janet Bennett has described cultural identity in terms of individual's relationships to

dominant cultural groups. In L2 classrooms like Nigeria English has become the dominant group and replacing the marginal mother tongues and this can be ascribed into new identity\

There are two essential responses which effective learning of English can induce in multicultural L2 classrooms. These are inscribed and encapsulated into two paradigms Bennett (1993) has called "encapsulated marginality and constructive marginality." Bennett has used these terms to describe what happens in group and identity affiliations. He argued that group affiliations can affect the identity of individuals. I other words, effective teaching and learning of English in multicultural L2 classroom has the capacity to transform the identities of disparate, diverse and multilingual people (Moran, 2001, p. 103). In Nigeria therefore, English serves as a means of social and group identification with other students from different ethnic societies in Nigerian classrooms. Based on the experiences of most Nigerian students in Secondary Schools and Universities, students use English to form part of a new culture. They have ascribed dimensions of that identity as distinct perceptions. Therefore effective teaching of English can promote cultural hybridity

CONCLUSION

Nonetheless, despite the challenges and difficulties to teaching and learning English in multicultural L2 classrooms, there are also opportunities to convert such challenges to fertile fields to develop useful language skills as the diversity of the student learners, experiences will encourage young learners of English in Nigeria to benefit immensely in forging a new cultural identity by communicating and sharing ideas in English; teachers will be motivated to enjoy working and teaching in a Second language. This is because in multicultural L2 classrooms English would have become a tool of transiting into a new culture thereby helping learners to build up their world. This new culture is now marked by an organization of diversity rather than by a replication of uniformity (Hannerz, 1990, p. 237). Effective teaching can stimulate learners' interest in communication and intercultural exposure and activity. This will be the best remedy to learning challenges. If the learners are adequately exposed to works by multilingual writers, it will promote classroom activities allowing self-expression and this will help present English as a tool to be appropriated.

Therefore, effective teaching of English in Nigeria is an issue that needs great attention from education planners and policy-makers. It seems clear that besides a teacher's personal motivation to teach well, there is also the need for adequate training to equip teachers with basic tools so that English can be learned effectively in Nigeria.

This paper has identified teaching and learning challenges in multicultural L2 classrooms and suggested how this can be overcome. It is imperative for all teachers of ESL to bear this conclusion in mind as recommended by Stevick (1982, p. 201)

> *Teaching a language is only one kind of teaching, and teaching and learning are only two limited aspects of being human. I therefore hope, first of all, that you will take time to sit down and read again whatever philosophical or religious writings you have found most nourishing to you (iatefl 2013,p. 84).*

In the end, these strategies and recommendations are likely to lead to better overall performance on more effective teaching and learning progress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Effective teaching of English in multicultural L2 classrooms has become imperative if effective learning must be realized. To achieve this target in the Nigerian context, the following recommendations are suggested;

1. Teachers need to improve their knowledge of English because accurate knowledge is important for skills transfer. These can be done through talking, coaching and reflecting as this technique can provide mentoring to young learners in L2 classrooms.

2. There should be regular language professional development seminars for teachers of English as a Second Language (TESL).Indeed regular workshops will give teachers of English the opportunities to meet, discuss and practice with colleagues and help them develop professional awareness which is required to make personal decisions in helping learners improve in their classrooms.

3. Those who are recruited to teach English in L2 classrooms should be properly trained by experienced personnel so that the skills and knowledge that need to be transferred would be easily assimilated.

4. The quality of the language curricula need to be improved because it has been observed that a well developed curricula can influence the capacity of the teachers and learners to learn and adapt **to new** performance expectations (Herold & Fedor, 2008, p. 88).

5. Education managers should set up English Language centres to ensure that teachers of English in Schools and higher institutions in Nigeria meet the requirements and education standards in ESL (English as a second language) classrooms.

6. In addition teachers of English in Nigeria should be trained in LEAP(Learning English for Academic Purposes, so that they can fill the gap between what students are to do on traditional EAP (English for Academic Purposes) courses and what is expected of them as they enter Universities and Colleges. This will " encourage students to utilize their own critical thinking and skills when carrying out academic reading and writing tasks" (*iatefl*, 2013, p. 50).

7. Teaching research in language teaching should be encouraged to improve teaching quality. That is, facilitators of education should promote language teacher research engagement and, there should be workload allocation for research time, to enable teachers of English to be research active.

8. The English language curriculum in Nigerian should be redesigned to address the technological needs of the digital generation of young learners of English for as Skiba and Barton (2006) have noted features of students born after 1980 include digital skills, experiential and active learning, collaboration and connectivity. Therefore a new paradigm is needed in Schools, Universities and Colleges in Nigeria Finally it is recommended that teachers should communicate aims to learners, though this depends on the teaching context.

REFERENCES

Bennett, Janet. 1993. 'Cultural marginality: Identity issues and intercultural training' in R.M. Paige (ed.). *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Espelago, D. L. & Holt M.K. 2001. *Bullying and Victimization during early adolescence: Peer Influences and Psychological Correlates*. Binghamton: My Haworth Press.

Freeman, D. 2009. 'The scope of second language teacher education' in A. Burns and J. C. Richards (eds.). *The Cambridge Guide to Second Language Teacher Education*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Fernandes, Andreia. 'Training English teachers at public schools in Brazil' in IATEFL 2013 Liverpool conference selections. 36-37.

Hannerz, U. 1990. 'Cosmopolitans and locals in world culture.' *Theory, Culture and Society*7: 237-51

Herold, D. & Fedor, D. B. 2008. *Leading Change Management Leadership Strategies that really work*. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press.

IATEFL 2013 Liverpool Conference Selections. Faversham: IATEFL *Journal of the IATEFL-ESP-SIG issue* 41, Winter2012- Spring 2013.

Iorember, Margaret N. 2013. 'The problems of teaching and learning English in secondary schools in Yobe State: A historical analysis' in *A Journal of Nigerian English and Literature*, Vol. 9. 96-102.

Lasagasbaster, D. 2011. 'English achievement and student motivation in CLIL and EFL settings.' *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching 5/1: 3-18*

Moran, P. 2001. *Teaching Culture: Perspectives in Practice*. Boston: Heinle and Heinle. Pattison, Tania (ed.). IATEFL 2013 Liverpool Conference Selections

Skiba, D. & Barton, A. 2006. 'Adapting your teaching to accommodate the net generation of Learners.' *OJIN: The Journal of Issues in Nursing*. Retrieved August 24, 2016, from http://www.nursingworld.org/mainMenuCategory/ANAmarketplace/ANAperiodicals/OJIN/table of contents/volume/N02May06/tpc30-416076 aspx.

Stevick, E.W. 1982. *Teaching and Learning Languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *Voices*237. IATEFL 2014.

www.nepjol.info/index.php/NELTA/article/download/61315032.