



English teachers' experience as panacea for functional literacy

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Abstract

This paper studies the central role of teachers' experience in the teaching and learning of English language. The paper is qualitative and uses the descriptive research design. John Dewey's (1916) theory of experience provides the theoretical framework on which this paper is anchored. Dewey argues that it is only through understanding that a gentleman learns about the universe. Empirical reviews made reveal that experience plays a significant role in effective teaching of English language. The study therefore recommends among others that trainee teachers should always be attached to knowledgeable ones as assistants until they acquire reasonable experience.

Keywords: literacy, functional literacy, experience, attributes of experienced teachers

Introduction

Literacy in the Nigerian context equates to the capability to manipulate the English language with ease. It appears that English as well as reading ability remain virtually substitutable. It has been renowned that reading ability is imperative in the lives plus individual growth of persons as well as to fortify the economy as a whole.

As Tsui (2003, 38) says:

English is an absolutely critical subject in the curriculum. Not only does English help young people learn about themselves and their world, and explore communication, culture, creativity and critical thinking, but it also enables learning and engagement across the curriculum.

The relevance of English as an additional language in Nigeria is not in doubt. English comes to play in every facet of life; educationally, politically, economically, socially and even culturally. This implies that learning the language is fundamental to every Nigerian. English is a core subject in the Nigerian schools from the fourth year in primary school to the end of secondary education. The National Policy on Education (2013) stipulates that primary education is to inculcate reading ability and capability to communicate efficiently in English. A credit pass in English is equally a criterion to gain admission into any University in Nigeria as well as into other tertiary institutions. Despite the central place of the English language in Nigeria, it has continued to pose as a colossus which needs to be surmounted.

A good teacher is a vital ingredient in the making of a learner. Where the teacher is not worth their salt, the result will certainly be half-baked products. Akinwomn and Odunsi (2008) point out that teacher's experience is a major determinant of scholar's good performance in any subject. They claim that teacher's experience denotes the knowledge and mastery of a subject which a teacher acquires over a period of time. When educators of English language lack the necessary experience of between two to four years of teaching, they are bound to face difficulties in not only the techniques and methods of teaching but also in

understanding the psychology and glitches of scholars in the subject. It is often said that "experience is the best teacher". Literacy is described in countless ways and the descriptions keep evolving. The term literacy sometimes denotes to "reading", at other times to "reading and writing", and yet at the some other times are "reading, writing, speaking and listening". Most progenies learn to talk quite effortlessly. In dissimilarity, learning to recite as well as write is an arduous procedure. It is the capability to recite in addition to transcribe that makes a person "literate", with variable grades of eloquence. A well-educated individual is competent to converse efficiently with others as well as to understand printed facts.

Countless descriptions of literacy emphasize on the capability to recite plus write at a suitable level. To Blake and Henley (1995, 89) ^[4] "The quality of literacy is largely renowned as one of the crucial academic-based aims of obligatory schooling. It denotes the capability to recite in addition to write to a suitable level of "eloquence". However, no universally acknowledged description of what "a suitable level", "efficiently" or "well" denotes.

Functional literacy is an effort to connect reading ability to resolve as well as thus to some sort of level. Lawton & Gordon (1998, 108) described practical reading ability as "the level of expertise in reading as well as writing that a person desires in order to manage with fully developed life time. They admit that this doesn't certainly resolve the glitches of level, as "it is clearly very difficult to arrive at a satisfactory description of functional reading ability" Edwards (2008, 3) ^[5] insists that "reading ability is central to being human, to be released from illiteracy is to be released from shame, to feel more human".

A reasonable sum of research reports have examined knowledgeable tutors' expertise, understanding in addition to sureness. Akyel's (1997) ^[1] work on associating knowledgeable ESL (English as second language) tutors with scholars' ESL educators established that knowledgeable tutors reflected a broader in addition to more wide-ranging sorts of teaching choices in retort to scholar cues. They welcomed scholar initiatives (e.g. scholars'

Questions and remarks that speed up an adjustment in the trend or subject of a lesson) since they assumed this could give rise to expressive message in the class. They remained less probably than scholar tutors to be disturbed when scholars' initiatives triggered a deviation from their lesson plan.

Walls, Nardi, Von Minden & Hoffman (2002) ^[11] established that skilled educators depend mainly on practical understanding (their personal applied understanding of what steps as well as procedures have functioned well in previous times), while beginners depend basically on declarative understanding (the hypothetical understanding they have garnered from training programs). Akyel (1997) ^[11] opined that knowledgeable educators remain not as anxious as scholar tutors about faithfulness to rules plus models in their instruction or at endorsement of outer basis. Conversely, trainee tutors perceive student thoughts in addition to faults as probable hitches in addition to focus predominantly on upholding the stream of their lesson plans. Much more than knowledgeable educators, they complaint about the suitability of their teaching approaches.

Mullock (2006) ^[9] avers that trainee tutors are also more probably to involve in self-deprecation. Garbonton (2008) ^[6] further affirmed that knowledgeable tutors could be less anxious with enhancing learner's gaining of precise language items, i.e. espousing the "s" with third person verbs in the simple present tense, than with certifying that candid as well as significant communication exist.

Theoretical framework

John Dewey's theory of experience (1916)

This paper anchors John Dewey's theory of experience. Dewey has been largely renowned as the most well-known as well as prominent American philosopher of education. He was born in 1859 in Burlington, Vermont, as well as died in New York City in 1952.

His theory of experience opined that the day-to-day world of common understanding was all the genuineness that men had access to or desired. He was significantly awe-struck with the success of the physical sciences in resolving practical glitches in addition to clarifying, forecasting plus monitoring man's environ. He took the scientific approach of investigation plus scientific systemization of humanoid experience as the greatest accomplishment in the development of the mind of man, in addition this way of thinking plus approaching the world became a major feature of his philosophy.

He described academic based procedure as a "frequent reform, rebuilding plus revolution of knowledge, "for he assumed that it is exclusively by understanding that humans acquires knowledge about the world as well as only through the spouse of his understanding that humans could uphold as well as improve himself within the world.

Dewey remained cautious in his literatures to declare strong whatever sorts of understandings were utmost treasured as well as beneficial. Several proficiencies are purely inactive undertakings, enjoyable or agonizing but not informative. Dewey maintained that an educative knowledge is a know-how wherein we create an assemblage amid what we do to things in addition to what transpires to them or us as a result; the worth of a knowledge depends on the insight of interactions or continuousness amid happenings. Thus, if a youngster stretches for a wax light flame in addition, it hurts his finger, he understands pain, nonetheless it's not an

informative knowledge except he recognized that touching the fire occasioned the burnt and furthermore, expresses the over-all anticipation that fires will afford burns if touched. Along these lines, before we are officially taught, we acquire much about the world, ourselves as well as others. It is the ordinary form of scholarship from knowledge by undertaking as well as then reflecting on what occurred, which Dewey made fundamental in his methodology to education.

This theory is relevant here because the English teacher who has been teaching over a reasonable period of time builds expertise by the repeated process. Such a teacher can connect between his past activities and how they will impact on his scholars.

Qualities of the ESL knowledgeable teachers

Teachers, no doubt are the most important factor in implementing scholar achievement. The description of what constitutes teacher experience varies between those that have up to two years of experience to those that have up to five years of experience and more. Countless years of teaching, however, doesn't absolutely ensure proficiency. Some knowledgeable educators could be taken as expert whereas others remain "knowledgeable non-experts" (Tsui, 2003; 3). In reality, the thoughtfulness that a knowledgeable educator is a proficient person who could be independent as well as subjective, but not all participants might share their opinion.

Research reports have revealed that knowledgeable educators share countless characteristics that differentiate them from trainee educators. Bastick (2002) ^[2] asserts that knowledgeable tutors in Jamaica remained less inspired (e.g. moved by income) plus more fundamentally stimulated (e.g. inspired by the expressive reward of working with progenies) than were trainee tutor trainees. Correspondingly, Bivona's (2002) work of English educators' assertiveness established that tutors with over ten years of knowledge had enhanced optimistic attitude to teaching compared to less knowledgeable educators. Furthermore, Maryall, Martin & Yin (2006) ^[8] asserts that knowledgeable tutors managed the schoolrooms more efficiently than less knowledgeable educators. They exhibit better regulation than did trainee tutors in instituting schoolroom practices as well as checking cluster work. They are also less monitoring plus responsive in handling specific scholar behavior. Correspondingly, Gatbonton (2008) ^[6] established that trainee ESL (English as a second language) educators stood more occupied with scholar conduct plus reactions than with tutoring in addition to scholar results. Knowledgeable ESL tutors remained more disturbed with guaranteeing that learning remained effective in addition to less disturbed about scholars' undesirable responses to class events or to learning procedure.

Tsui (2003) points out that proficient educators tend to share the following features, setting them separately from trainee tutors:

1. A rich as well as intricate knowledge base
2. Capability to interpret plus usage of altered sorts of understanding
3. Capability to make intuitive judgments based on past experience
4. Aspiration to examine as well as resolve a extensive sort of teaching glitches
5. Better awareness of scholars' desires in addition to

- scholars' learning
6. Understanding of instructional purposes to enhance teaching
 7. Better understanding and use of language learning strategies.
 8. Better consciousness of the learning framework.
 9. Better fluidity in addition to flexibility in teaching
 10. Better proficiency as well as efficacy in lesson preparation

Conclusion

Language teaching is a complex art. The complexity heightens if a second language such as English is involved. English as the official language in Nigeria as well as the language of education is taught as a compulsory subject at the primary and secondary levels of education. Since it is a foreign language with its distinct structures and patterns, it requires that the language educators must be qualified and competent to carry out this task.

Besides tutors' proficiency, there is need for educators to possess considerable experience, before taking charge of a class. The experience of a language teacher will enhance proficiency in the use of instructional methods and materials. It will also expose them to the various language glitches of their scholars so as to find lasting solutions. Scholars of English are mostly faced with glitches ranging from mother tongue interference arbitrary rules of grammar to writing difficulties. These glitches are only addressed with the help of tutors' years of experiences. A teacher who has taught English language for a couple of years stands a good chance of guiding the scholars against errors associated with different aspects of the language. Teaching experience is therefore a major determinant of scholars' improvement in English language.

Recommendations

Based on the discoveries of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Trainee educators should not be assigned as main subject tutors to any group of scholars. They should be made assistants to the knowledgeable educators. This will enable them to under-study such knowledgeable tutors for at least a period of two years before being given a class to handle. By this time, they would have gathered enough experience to function as full-fledged educators.
2. The implication of the above is that, there is need for recruitment of more tutors especially the freshers from the universities and colleges of education. Such employees should be attached to educators with up to five year experience or more, to be guided by the knowledgeable tutors for at least a period of two years before being allowed to teach independently.
3. It therefore follows that educators should cultivate the spirit of mentorship. Veteran tutors should ensure that they mentor the upcoming ones so as to facilitate best practices.

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