

Schools' Records: A Deficiency Analysis of English Language Exercises in Public Schools

Ataisi Emiya Gladday

Dept of Linguistics and Communication Studies,
University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

Doi:10.5901/mjss.2012.v3n14p104

Abstract

This paper examines students' records of English language exercises in public schools in Rivers State, Nigeria. Students' record shows classroom practices or interaction between teachers and students as it relates to the implementation of the national policy on education. Students and teachers in public secondary school constitute the population of this study. Data for the study was got through content analysis of 30 English language notes from 30 students in five secondary schools in Rivers State. Structured interview was also used to elicit data from 15 English language teachers and 72 students in public secondary schools to corroborate the students' record. Simple frequency and percentage are used for data analysis. Based on the findings, the paper reveals amongst others that students' lacks as a result of the quality of language instruction is majorly responsible for students' proneness to examination malpractices and mass failure in English language in NECO and WAEC. The paper recommends the provision of an optimal learning environment for language learning as well as the use of a good supervisory technique to ensure instructional quality in language arts in public schools in Rivers State.

Keywords: Schools Record, Students Record, Language Instruction, Corrective Feedback, English Language Note Book

Introduction

Whereas children unconsciously acquire language especially the language they are exposed to, students of second language must consciously study the necessary skills required for communication in a target language. The essence of language teaching in second language acquisition is for communicative competence.

In Nigeria, English language as a subject is studied to improve the communicative competence of the students who hitherto must have acquired and gained a fair mastery of their mother tongue. The study of English language as a major subject is tied to the fact that English language is the official language in Nigeria. Considering the importance of language in all human activities, it is imperative to empirically study the quality of language instruction in Nigerian schools.

The purpose of this study is to examine students' record of English language exercises as an evidence of pedagogical contact with English language teachers in the classroom. The significance of this study lies in the instructional quality of the contact between the students and their English language teachers in the classroom. The examination of students' record is important as it reveals teachers performance or implementation of the curriculum. Teachers' performance in the classroom serves as input which manifest in students knowledge and usage of the target language. Students manifest teachers input as output in their performance in examination. Mass failure in English language in national examination like WAEC (West African Examination Council) and NECO

(National Examination Council) is an indicator of the quality of language instruction in public schools in Nigeria.

The quality of language instruction in schools has bearings on students' behaviour during examination. It accounts for students' proneness to examination malpractices in Nigeria. This paper aims to provide answers to the following research questions.

What does students' record of language exercises show about the quality of language instruction in public schools in Rivers State?

1. What factors are responsible for the quality of language instruction shown in students' record of English language exercises in public secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. What is the implication of the quality shown by the students' record?

To provide answers to these questions, the paper is divided into five parts. Part one is the introduction. Part two provides a conceptual framework for the study. Part three contains research methodology. Part four discusses findings and part five has summary and recommendations.

Conceptual Background

In school administration, record keeping is very crucial. Some major records in the school are diary, teachers' grade book, cumulative record folder (CRF), transcript or report card, log book, attendance register, admission register, visitors' book and punishment book.

Apart from these, there is the exercise book used by students to record subject taught in the classroom. The exercise book records the instruction taught in the class. In the secondary school, most students have different exercise book for different subjects.

Ogidi (2008, p.9) provides the following reasons for record keeping in the school system. Record keeping:

1. provides details of students' progress towards the attainment of stated educational objectives, aims and goals,
2. shows the academic achievement of the students,
3. provides a track record of a child's behaviour and work problems,
4. helps in educational planning,
5. provides a working tool for teachers and parents to assess students activities in the school,
6. serves as a diagnosis tool for the discovery of academic flaws which require remediation,
7. contains information about the schools' administrators,
8. enables students to obtain information about their schools' work for employment or further studies.

Students' record and English Language Exercises

Students' records show academic activities in school. Students use exercise books to note salient points of every lesson presented by teachers in school. The English language exercise book records the content as well as the exercises used for evaluation for every lesson presented by the English language teacher.

Usually, the English exercise book has the following information: subject, date, title of lesson and content of lesson. In addition to these, there are exercises for evaluation 'classwork' in the exercise book. More exercises based on the lesson may be given as homework or assignment. Some schools use different note for homework. There is also the workbook which provides more exercises as a kind of drill to reinforce students' competence in the skills taught. The English language note is

meant to contain corrective feedback by teachers. By feedback, the teacher makes comment by evaluating what has been written by the students.

The essence of corrective feedback is to treat errors in the work submitted by the students. Errors in the students exercise may be semantic or lexical, syntactic errors or pronunciation errors (Spada and Lightbown, 2002, p.128). The students are to respond to the teachers' remark by attending to the teachers' comment. The teacher is also to comment on the students' corrected exercise.

English Language Instruction in Schools

English language instruction in schools is centered majorly on the four language skill: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These language skills are acquired through the arrangement of language instruction through the following linguistic components: syntax (sentence structure), phonology (sound system), lexicon (vocabulary), semantics (meaning) and pragmatics (usage) (Mitsutomi, 2005, p.1). These are presented through the following lessons:

1. comprehension (reading and listening)
2. speech (oral English)
3. language structure (syntactic rules)
4. vocabulary Building (semantics)
5. composition (writing)
6. mechanics (punctuation rules)
7. literature (Junior secondary).

The scheme of work for language instruction provides a topic on these areas of study at least once in two weeks. Otherwise, there is an aspect of these areas to be covered weekly.

The importance of the aforementioned areas in the development of basic language skills are discussed hereafter.

Comprehension in language instruction is done as either listening or reading comprehension. This aspect of language instruction builds on all the language skills. While listening comprehension emphasizes students comprehension to passages read to them, reading comprehension is based on what students comprehend from what they have read. Idogo (2011, pp.3-4) defines reading comprehension from three perspectives. They are listed below.

1. Reading comprehension is the end product of a reading programme that aims at getting students to grasp the meaning of words.
2. Reading comprehension is a constructive process that involves the drawing of inferences based on an interaction between the readers' prior knowledge and information from the text.
3. Reading comprehension is the process of constructing meaning through the dynamic interaction among the reader, the text and the context of the reading situation.

Speech in language instruction encompasses the study of vowels, consonants and stress. The essence of speech in language instruction is to improve the pronunciation skills of the students. Burns and Seidlhofer (2002, p.211) consider speech from a broad view of speaking and note that learning speaking involves developing subtle and detailed knowledge about why, how and when to communicate, and complex skills for producing and managing interaction.

Language structure is another aspect of language instruction. It avails students with skills in syntax. The students are made to understand the rules of grammar through language instruction.

Understanding the meaning of words in English language is undertaken in lessons on vocabulary building. This aspect of language instruction increases students' knowledge and grasp of words as well as usage. Vocabulary building lessons are focused deliberate learning of words. This form of learning is seen to be effective than incidental learning of vocabulary (Nation and Meara, 2002, p.41). Focused deliberate learning of words is in consonance with the noticing hypothesis which explains that students are more likely to learn when they consciously notice the words presented to them through deliberate vocabulary learning (Schmidt, 1990, p.130).

Composition is also an aspect of language instruction. Through composition, students are taught on how to express themselves in oral presentation or writing. They are made to understand the framework of composing sentences to express their views and opinions.

Mechanics is a part of language instruction. Through mechanics, students know when, where and how to use punctuation.

In junior secondary, Literature-in-English is also a part of language instruction. The essence is to improve students' knowledge of words especially when words are used figuratively.

Data Analysis

Lantern English, English Project, Intensive English and Oxford English are some English textbooks used in secondary schools in Nigeria. For this study, English textbooks would serve as a guide as there is no uniform scheme of work. The content of Intensive English and English Project would serve as a guide.

In Intensive English, a total of 135 lessons for a school year can be formed from comprehension (20), language structure (20), speech (20), composition (35), vocabulary (20) and mechanics (20). For English Project, a total of 160 lessons can be formed from speech (20), reading comprehension (20), vocabulary building (25), listening comprehension (20), grammar (20), skills (25) and writing (30).

Using these two textbooks as course books to be covered in a school year, the sample of students' record of language exercises can be evaluated thus:

Data Presentation

Table 1: Content Analysis from Students' Records of English Language Exercises in 2011/2012 School Year.

S/No	School/Class	Term	CM	SP	LS	VB	CP	MC	LIT	ASS	TOTAL	FB
1	Sample1 JS1	1 st	4	2	5	3	3	-	-	1	18	4
		2 nd	4	1	2	3	-	-	-	-	10	7
		3 rd	1	1	2	-	-	1	-	3	08	3
		Total	9	4	9	6	3	1	-	4	36	14
2	Sample 2 JS1	1 st	2	3	1	1	3	1	-	-	11	2
		2 nd	1	-	4	2	-	1	-	1	09	4
		3 rd	-	-	3	1	-	-	-	1	05	2
		Total	03	03	08	04	03	02	-	02	25	08
3	Sample 3 JS1	1 st	-	-	4	-	-	1	2	-	07	-
		2 nd	-	-	6	2	-	-	1	2	11	3
		3 rd	1	-	-	-	5	-	-	1	07	1
		Total	01	-	10	2	5	1	3	3	25	4
4	Sample 4 JS2	1 st	1	7	3	1	-	1	2	-	15	4
		2 nd	2	8	3	2	2	1	-	2	20	3

		3 rd	1	-	4	1	5	1	-	1	12	3
		Total	04	15	10	04	07	03	02	03	47	10
5	Sample 5 JS2	1 st	4	4	5	1	2	-	1	3	20	7
		2 nd	2	5	2	1	-	-	1	1	12	2
		3 rd	-	-	4	1	-	-	-	-	05	1
		Total	06	09	11	03	02	-	02	04	37	10
6	Sample 6 JS2	1 st	1	9	1	2	-	-	1	2	16	2
		2 nd	-	-	11	-	2	-	-	3	16	2
		3 rd	3	-	-	-	1	-	7	3	14	-
		Total	04	09	12	02	03	-	08	08	46	04
7	Sample 7 JS3	1 st	1	3	3	2	1	-	2	5	17	7
		2 nd	2	-	2	2	-	-	3	1	10	4
		3 rd	2	-	1	1	-	-	6	4	14	1
		Total	05	03	06	05	01	-	11	10	41	12
8	Sample 8 SS1	1 st	-	3	5	1	-	-	-	3	12	6
		2 nd	-	4	9	2	-	-	-	4	19	4
		3 rd	-	2	6	-	-	-	-	1	09	4
		Total	-	09	20	03	-	-	-	08	40	14
9	Sample 9 SS11	1 st	-	3	2	-	1	-	-	-	06	-
		2 nd	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
		3 rd	1	2	6	-	1	-	-	2	11	-
		Total	01	05	08	-	02	-	-	02	17	-
Sum of Exercises			33	57	94	29	26	07	26	44	316	76

Foot Notes

CM – Comprehension VB - Vocabulary Building

LS - Language Structure

CP - Composition MC – Mechanics

ASS - Assignment

SP – Speech

LIT – Literature

FB - Corrective Feedback

The use of '-' means nothing or no record found. The '-' on this table implies the aspects of language instruction not provided in the period shown on the table.

Table 2: Coverage of English Textbook for School Year 2011/12

Samples	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Mean
No. of Lessons Recorded	36	25	25	47	37	46	41	40	17	34.9
Coverage of Course book Intensive English	26.7%	18.5%	18.5%	34.8%	27.4%	34.1%	30.4%	29.6%	12.6%	25.8%
Coverage of Course book English Project	22.5%	15.6%	15.6%	29.4%	23.1%	28.8%	25.6%	25%	10.6%	20.6%

Table 3: Corrective Feedback Given in Response to Students' Exercises Recorded

Samples	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	Mean
No. of Lessons Recorded	36	25	25	47	37	46	41	40	17	34.9
No. Of Corrective Feedback Given	14	08	04	10	10	04	12	14	-	8.4
Percentage of Corrective Feedback Given	38.9%	32%	16%	21.3%	27.0%	8.6%	29.3%	35%	0%	23.2%

The data shown reveals that the language instruction students are exposed to in the school year shown is short of what is required to boost their communicative competence. Language instruction serves as input in second language acquisition. Sun (2008, p.1) notes that input is one of the most important elements in the process of second language learning.

Teachers' response to students work is about 23.2%. This implies that certain errors in the students' record would go uncorrected. This means that the wrong hypothesis of the students would be unchecked. Students' responses to the structured interview corroborate the fact that the students do not get the required attention. In a particular school as shown on table 1, students did not receive corrective feedback for a whole term. Students interviewed from that school attest to the fact that they never received corrective feedback.

Certain factors account for the poor performance of teachers and students, Akwanya (n. d., pp.1-2) laments that the low performance of Nigerian students can be attributed to factors such as low investment in education, poor training of teachers, non-availability of teaching aids, poor teaching methods, lack of commitment among the teachers, explosion in student population.

Of a truth, these factors affect the quality of language instruction. Take for instance explosion in intake or admission of students is tantamount to over crowded classrooms. A teacher cannot provide corrective feedback to an over crowded class. Students' responses to the structured interview show that some classes have more than one hundred students. This is against the teacher student ratio of 1: 40 (National Policy on Education, 2004, p.22). An English teacher who teaches five classes where each class is more than one hundred cannot provide corrective feedback.

Consequently, this scenario leads to poorly delivered language lessons. This ultimately would mean students low confidence in their language skills. Hence, they resort to examination malpractices. Moreover, poorly delivered language lessons would result to failure. Ijaiya(2001, p.295) explains that failure 'suggests that there is a dissonance between what the teachers teach and the needs of the learners.'

Every year, public schools churn out educated illiterates. To be precise, these students come out of with learning disabilities. They cannot read, write or speak English Language. In a situation where these students do not get remedial language instruction, they become language disabled. Being language disabled, they become handicapped in communication.

On the contrary, English language instruction in Nigerian schools is supposed to be for communicative competence. Where this is achieved, students in and from Nigerian schools through quality language instruction would be enabled to use English language fluently, accurately and elegantly (Olaofe, 2002, p.36). This is important because apart from using English language for academic purpose, students are supposed to use language for such developmental purposes like improved socio-economic development, increased employment opportunities, poverty alleviation, self actualization, scientific and technological growth(Olaofe, 2002, p.36). These are not possible with the poor language instruction shown in the students' record of language exercises in public schools in Rivers State. There is need for remediation through the adoption of the recommendations listed hereafter.

Conclusion and Recommendation

1. Government should provide an optimal learning environment for language instruction in schools.

2. English lessons should be presented everyday of the school week for a fair coverage of the scheme of work. A class should not be more than 40 students. This would make corrective feedback possible.
3. There should be quality control in language teaching through the provision of a uniform scheme of work.
4. A good supervisory technique should be adopted to ensure that the scheme of work is fairly covered.
5. Language teachers should be trained on the use of an eclectic approach in teaching.
6. Remedial language instruction should be planned and put in place in secondary schools to remediate the lacks of students as a result of poor language instruction provided over the years.

References

- Akwanya, A. N. (n. d.). *English language learning in Nigeria: In search of an enabling principle. Inaugural Lecture.* Retrieved June 2, 2012, from www.unn.edu.ng/.../Arts/17th%20inaugural%20Lecture.pdf
- Burns, A. & Seidlhofer, B. (2002). *Speaking and pronunciation.* In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied Linguistics.* (pp. 211- 232). UK: Hodder Education.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. (2004). *National policy on education.* (4th Ed.), Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Grant, N., Olagoke, D. O., Nnamonu, S. and Jowitt D. 2007. *Junior English project for secondary schools. Students' Book 1. UBE Edition.* England: Pearson Longman.
- Idogo, G. (2011). *Instructional strategies in primary schools in Ibadan North Local Government Area: An empirical investigation of the effects in children basic reading and comprehension skills.* *African Journal of Education and Technology.* Vol. 1, No. 1. 1-15.
- Ijaiya, Y. 2001. *From quality control to quality assurance: A panacea for quality education in Nigerian schools.* In Nwagwu, N. A., Ehiametalor, E. T., Ogunu, M. A. & Nwadiani (Ed.), *Current issues in educational management in Nigeria.* Retrieved July 16, 2012, from www.herp-net.org/ Towards-Qualityl-In-African-Higher...
- Mitsutomi, M. 2005. *Some fundamental principles of language teaching and learning.* Retrieved July 2, 2012, from www.aesrvices.net/English/Language-learning-mitsutomi.pdf
- Nation, P. & Meara, P. (2002). *Vocabulary.* In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An introduction to applied Linguistics.* (pp. 35-54). UK: Hodder Education.
- Ogidi, R. C. (2008). *Effective continuous assessment practice/ recording keeping in post primary schools.* Seminar paper presented at New Covenant Secondary School, Port Harcourt.
- Olaofe, I. O. (2002). *Capacity building in applied Linguistics: A Nigerian perspectives.* In Lawal, A., Isiugo-Abanihe, I., Ohia, I. N. (Ed.), *Perspectives on applied Linguistics in language & literature in honour of Prof. E. E. Ubahakwe.* (pp. 300 -322). Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Pub.
- Oluikpe, B. O., T. Y. Obah, E. J. Otagburuagu & S. M. Onuigbo.(1983). *Intensive English for junior secondary schools.*(3rd Ed.). Nigeria: Africana First Publishers Limited.
- Onukaogu, C. E. (2002). *A literature-based English language curriculum in Nigerian schools and colleges: Some reflections in minimum requirements.* In Lawal A., Isiugo-Abanihe, I. & Ohia, I. N.(Ed.), *Perspectives in applied linguistics language & literature in honour of Prof. Ephraim Ebolinye Ubahakwe.* Ibadan: Stirling – Horden Pub.
- Schmidt, R. (1990). *The role of consciousness in second learning.* *Applied Linguistics,* 11, 129-158.
- Spada, N. & Lightbown, P. M. (2002). *Second language acquisition.* In N. Schmitt (Ed.), *An Introduction to applied Linguistics.*(pp. 115- 133). UK: Hodder Education.
- Sun, Y. A. (2008). *Input processing in second language acquisition: A discussion of four input processing models.* *Working papers in TESOL & Applied Linguistics.* Vol. 8. No. 1.