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**Resources and Resourcefulness in Language
Teaching and Learning**

Kolawole, Clement Olusegun Olaniran, Prof.

Department of Teacher Education;

Dean, Faculty of Education,

University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

A resource is 'money, material and other asset that can be drawn on by a person or organization in order to function effectively. Resourcefulness, on the other hand, is the quality of being able to cope with a difficult situation in one's attempt at succeeding. Attempts will be made in this paper to examine what we mean by language, language teaching and learning, resources and resourcefulness in language teaching and learning and the benefit of teachers being resourceful in language teaching and learning to both the learners, the teachers, the society and the nation at large. It is expected that a discussion based on these concepts will help us to have a greater appreciation of the enormity of the challenges that language teachers face in their efforts at teaching and promoting the learning of their subjects in schools.



Introduction

The importance of teachers in the overall development of Nigeria – a country that believes, according to the National Policy on Education (2004:iii), that ‘education in Nigeria is an instrument “per excellence” for effecting national development’ – cannot be over stated because of the crucial roles they are expected to play in using education to drive development.

It is equally very important to note that the need to work very hard to produce the type of teachers that would go out to deliver their mandate with greater zeal and commitment particularly now that the government has laid serious emphasis on the production of highly qualified teachers. According to the National Policy on Education (2004:33) ...no education system may rise above the quality of its teachers, irrespective of all the facilities that are available in the school system.

In recognition of the central role of teachers in using education to drive development, the Federal Government of Nigeria indicated the goals of teacher education to include among others:

- (a) the production of highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our educational system;
- (b) the encouragement of the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- (c) helping teachers to fit into the social life of the community and the society at large and enhancement of their commitment to national goals;
- (d) providing teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations.

The efforts made at realising these lofty goals have informed the review of curricula of colleges of education in Nigeria. This review has also further informed the need to equip teachers with all the skills that they would need in improving the teaching of school subjects including languages. It is from this background therefore, that I intend to discuss the important topic of today in four sections namely; clarification of terms, language and language teaching and learning, resources and resourcefulness in language teaching and learning and benefits of teachers being resourceful in language teaching and learning.



Resources, according to the Free Dictionary on line are ‘money, materials and other assets that can be drawn on by a person or organization in order to function effectively. Resourcefulness, on the other hand, is the quality of being able to cope with a difficult situation in one’s attempt at succeeding. Thus, resourcefulness is an attribute that language teachers need to be able to successfully teach a given language and make learners learn the said language according to their abilities.

There is no gainsaying the fact that resources and resourcefulness are two concepts that language teachers need to be aware of and demonstrate in their collective efforts at promoting the teaching and learning of any language. For this to be so, efforts have to be made, right from the colleges and universities, to expose trainee teachers to all the resources that will be available to them while they are being prepared to be innovative and resourceful in their instructional delivery processes after training. It is important for us to emphasize this in order to prevent a situation where we will be demanding from language teachers on their field what we have not exposed them to during training.

Language and Language Teaching

Linguists, all over the world, are agreed that though it is impossible to define language in a straight jacket way, it can, nevertheless, be defined to show how important it is to people. According to Ferdinand de Saussure (1916-1959), language is a system of signs while to Crystal (1971), it is impossible to talk of civilization without language because it is language that makes civilization possible. Other writers have also seen language as a medium of communication or a means of communication.

According to Descartes, ‘language was the function that most clearly distinguished beasts from humans and was “the sole sign and only certain mark of thought hidden and wrapped up in the body” thus, human beings use language for different functions. Similarly, other linguists believe that people need language to be able to function normally in the society and language therefore has to be taught and learnt so that people can be competent in using the language skills. This is in addition to the fact that the ability to speak and understand a language that is being spoken actively in the environment of an individual is a natural attribute of man.

The linguistic situation in Nigeria is such that it has been said that there are close to 500 living languages in the country, (Ethnologue, 2004). This



number of languages has made Nigeria a multilingual country where several languages are competing for attention from the well-over 150 million people in the country. In addition to these indigenous languages, English and French are also competing for linguistic space in the country. Today, we have a situation where though English is the official language of education, communication, mobilization, administration of justice and economic empowerment, there is increasing demand for the use of indigenous languages more than we presently use them.

While Stork and Widdowson (1979) believe that language is a creation of man to meet man's social needs, we all know that language is very important in the school system; hence it is put in the curricula of schools for various purposes. One, language is in the curricula of schools as a tool of teaching and learning. Both teachers and learners need to communicate in school using a form of language that is mutually accessible to both parties. Two, language is in the curricula of schools as a subject that learners have to offer as subjects; and three, language is a reflection of the cultural worldview of human beings hence teachers and learners have to show an awareness of this in their use of language.

This is why the government has expressly indicated its appreciation of the importance of language in the school system by making a policy statement on it. Again, in Section 1, 10(a) of the National Policy on Education (2004:5), we have 'government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and persevering cultures. Thus, every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment'.

In addition to this, government also indicated the aim of language teaching, at the primary school level to include the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively, presumably in the local language and the language of instruction. Similarly, students are expected to offer and pass one local, national and international language at the end of the junior secondary school and offer English language as a compulsory subject at the senior secondary school level.

Apart from the language requirement in the curricula of schools, every child that comes to the teaching and learning situation has a language which she or he uses before coming to the teaching and learning situation. Language teachers are expected to show an awareness of that linguistic fact in trying to make sure that the child learns that language more or takes on an addition



language. The role of the language teacher in this context has been found in literature to be herculean because most learners find it difficult, initially, to adjust to the new realities brought about by the demand of the school.

Language Teaching and Learning

In addition to the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy in the language of the community, there is avalanche of literature that confirm that language teaching is a veritable means of helping us to empower many children and women, who otherwise, would not have had opportunity to access formal education, improve their health status and economic well-being and being in a position to compete favourably with other people who have had better opportunities in life to acquire the competence that is required in using a particular language. According to a SIL publication (2010:1), 'income improvement and hunger relief within ethno linguistic communities is achieved when life-changing information is communicated in a language that people understand well. Higher literacy rates often result in higher per capital incomes.' Thus, efforts have to be made to improve on the teaching and learning of languages.

Language teaching is a conscious attempt made by teachers to influence learners to learn more about a particular language so that she or he can use such language in a comprehensive way orally and literally. Language teaching involves exposing the learner to the parts of the language, the sound and sound property of the language, the rules that govern how the language can be spoken or written and how to avoid making mistakes when the language is used. Furthermore, language teaching involves teaching the languages skills of writing, reading, speaking and listening as well as vocabulary and grammatical structure. A language teacher therefore, is an individual who has received adequate exposure in a training institution such universities, polytechnics and colleges of education on how to teach a given language so that in the word of Odusina (1980), the learner can use the language orally and literally. Though the mere possession of certificates is not enough to guarantee that the individual concerned can successfully teach that language, it nevertheless, confers some measure of credibility on him or her.

It is therefore imperative that institutions, such as our own, that specialize in the training of languages teachers most ensure that such trainee teachers are exposed to all the body of knowledge, skills and resources that will help him



or her to discharge the obligation of teaching when he or she gets to the school system. But experience has shown that most of our institutions have failed in this regard, hence students do not see why they should study languages the way they study other subjects. In addition, we have fewer and fewer students applying to read language related courses particularly, when it comes to indigenous languages. The results of WASSCE and NECO in the last couple of years have shown that students do not only perform poorly in science related subjects, they also performed poorly in languages including English language and others.

Teachers of languages, at all levels of education in Nigeria, face many problems in their attempt at improving the teaching and learning languages. Some of the problems include inadequate supply of qualified and competent language teachers, lack of adequate textbooks by learners, negative attitude on the part of both parents and students to language teaching and learning ostensibly because it is erroneously assumed that everybody speaks and uses languages, lack of adequate resources for language teaching and learning and the inconsistencies in the language policy provisions in the National Policy on Education. In spite of these problems, however, some teachers have made efforts to improve the teaching and learning of languages in schools. This, I like to believe, in addition to the fact that people speak some of the languages, has been responsible for the existence of some of the languages that we have today. A look at Latin, a classical language that fewer and fewer people speak and learn today, shows that it has lost its status because it is not being actively spoken and learnt by many people

If language teaching involves a learner mastering the rules and nuances of the languages being taught, what then is language learning? Language learning or learning a language is a process that requires learners to actively acquire the rules and nuances of a given language under a given instructor or teacher, be able to use the language in improved communication/interaction and being able to pass a given examination in that language or using that language as a tool. Thus, when a learner is given either a test of comprehension, summary, essay, letter writing, lexis and structure in a given language, he or she is expected to use the language in facilitating a form of interaction either at the hospital, in a supermarket, the local market, in church, mosque or school, or in any situation where he or she is called upon to exhibit the knowledge that he or she has gained in learning a given language well.



There is no doubt that successful language teaching and learning depends on the quality, quantity, competence of teachers and availability of adequate and functional resources in the school system. Governments, at all levels and other stakeholders are being enjoined to make concerted efforts to improve the funding of schools and make adequate infrastructural facilities and resources available in the school system all over the country. This is because there is no way that language teaching and learning can improve without the use of these resources to aid teaching and learning.

The first task that teachers face in promoting the teaching and learning of languages in schools is to use resources to aid instructional delivery. Thus, today, several resources are available for language teaching and learning and they are being used by teachers who are worth their onions. Apart from having qualified and competent language teachers in schools, there is the need to deplore adequate and functional resources such as computers, good textbooks, interactive boards, dvds, cds, ICT and other forms of technology, internet facilities, local resources in the environment and many others in the teaching and learning situation.

Resources and Resourcefulness in Language Teaching and Learning

The need to improve language teaching and learning and ultimately students' performance in languages has elicited greater demand for the use of resources by teachers. The call to use resources is further predicated on the fact that it is not possible for a language teacher to, on his or her own, perform all the activities that learners need to learn a given language well without applying resources. Thus Heaton (1979) remarked among other things that if students are to effectively contextualize what is to be learnt within a short time and limited space, a variety of media approach (resources) must be used to present information.

Literature has shown that teachers are the first resource in language teaching and learning because they are role models in the use of such language. They are directly related to learners and they influence what learners do. They are therefore, expected to be well-educated, motivated and be ready to promote active teaching and learning. But can we all say that we are all well-educated, motivated and a ready to promote effective teaching and learning of our subjects? If this answer is no, then we have to do something to call on the government to do what is right in motivating us to discharge our duties well. I am also aware that it has been stated that most teachers in the school



system lack the prerequisite knowledge and skills that are needed to make them deliver on their mandate. We need to advise such teachers to take steps to improve on their qualifications, competencies and skills.

In addition to teachers, human beings (translators and interpreters) who own languages are the next resource that teachers have to be aware of and resort to in their attempt at improving the teaching and learning of language. Human beings are the custodians of languages; they speak and generally make use of languages in different contexts to perform different functions. When learners are exposed to practical sessions where languages are actively being spoken, students are given ample opportunity to learn from the right source. This is why immersion is one strategy by which students are exposed to learning second languages.

Language teachers are therefore, expected to create opportunities for the right owners of given languages to come to school and demonstrate the various functions that such languages can perform to students. There is no way, a person who learns a language through textbooks or through formal teaching and learning processes can be a better source to those who are learning such a language than the owners of the language.

Apart from teachers and other human beings, other resources such as computers, ICT and other forms of technology (Warner & Coffey, 2005), television sets, video cassette players, textbooks, journals, magazines, interactive boards, chats, pictures, newspapers, dvds, cds, language laboratories and several others that are needed in facilitating improved teaching and learning have to be provided in the school. There is no doubt that these are veritable resources that modern teachers need to engage learners in active learning. This is because the availability of such resources will afford both students and teachers the opportunity to engage in active discussion, sharing and explanations during the process of teaching. It has been found that the presence of these and many other resources have the capacity to provide teachers and learners with vicarious experiences that would enrich the process of instructional delivery.

Today, we all know that teaching has gone beyond ‘say after me’ or teacher-dominated to ‘let us do it together’ due to the presence and utilisation of resources. Again, we need to remind ourselves that the mere presence of these resources is not enough to guarantee that teaching and learning processes will be transformed without the resources being actively deployed



in the classroom situation. Thus the process of integrating resources into language teaching and learning process require teachers who are imaginative, innovative and resourceful. It is these attributes that can help such teachers to come to terms with the reality of having to change the process of instructional delivery to facilitate improve learners' participation in the process of teaching and learning. As stated by Okwudishu (1985: 135) who remarked that:

teachers must get away from conventional methods of delivery instruction and adopt contemporary tools (resources) and strategies if they hope to achieve their developmental objectives within the short time available to them, it has become mandatory for teachers to adopt innovative strategies in their attempts at applying any of the several resources available to them.

It is imperative that modern day language teachers have to become resourceful if they are to be able to mobilise all the resources that are available to them to promote effective language teaching and learning. The advancement that has been recorded in the area of approaches and methods of language teaching and learning has of necessity made a demand on teachers to become creative and resourceful. Language teachers needs these attributes if they are to respond to the remarks by Allan and Widdowson (1980), cited by Kolawole (2003: 12) who cautioned that language teachers must

realise that language teaching is not just a mechanical process of habit formation but a process which involves the active cooperation of the learners as rational individuals who are capable of thinking freely and acting independently.

It is a resourceful language teacher that will go beyond the classroom or language laboratory situation to utilising radio, television sets, dvds, cds, video recordings, on-the-spot discussions with speakers of a given language. It is a resourceful and innovative language teacher that will take learners on excursions to naming, initiation, worship, harvesting and marriage ceremonies among others to see language being use in performing speech acts. It is a well-prepared language teacher that will come to terms with the demand of promoting excellent language teaching and learning through the application of various forms of dialogue and role play.



There are several web addresses that language teachers can visit today in their attempts at drawing from other resource centres to improve on the performance of their duties. It is a common knowledge today that the computer can be used to teach any aspect of English language as well as other important languages of the world. Similarly, the same computers can be programmed and used in teaching any aspect of our indigenous languages to improve the quality of teaching and learning. I am aware that some of our indigenous languages now have keyboards to facilitate better writing of these languages. Such innovations can be used in the teaching situation to help teachers and learners.

It is clear from the foregoing therefore that successful language teaching and learning in our schools and colleges demand the availability of well-prepared language teachers who will go beyond the normal classroom situation in his or her attempt at promoting improved teaching and learning. The question is what will be the benefit of being resourceful and applying resources in teaching and learning languages to warrant the attention that we are currently focusing on the issue? The following section of the paper will attempt some answers to the very important question.

Benefits of Language Teachers Being Resourceful

There are several benefits that resourceful language teachers can gain when they adopt modern facilities and other resources in their teaching programme. One, teachers' efforts at promoting better language teaching and learning will be achieved. This can be measured with the level of achievement to be recorded by learners. Two, teachers will deplore less energy by simply allowing resources to work for them. There are several research reports to support the advantages of using Computer-Assisted Instruction (CAI), e-learning and e-books in promoting teaching. Three, the problem of teacher-shortage and lack of adequate textbooks will be removed. This is because teachers can deplore an avalanche of resources by merely pressing buttons when ICT and other forms of technologies are used.

Since the aim of language teaching and learning is to enable learners to gain mastery of the language and be able to use it in writing and speaking, language learners will be in a better position to learn a given language through direct contact with the speakers of such languages. This can be made possible when teachers create room for learners to explore the world of linguistic reality. There is no gainsaying the fact that there are abundant



resources outside of the four walls of the classroom waiting to be tapped by creative and innovative language teachers.

When these resources are deplored and the teaching and learning of languages is improved, the government that funds education at all levels will have value for their level of investment. This will further make it possible for the government to achieve its objective of including languages in the curricula of schools. This, I like to believe; will help the government to tackle some of the social problems facing the country due largely to the problem of unemployment. There are many things that people who are able to speak, write and use languages well can do if they are able to learn such language well. Therefore, when teachers work very hard to enrich the teaching and learning situation where languages are concerned, many more of our people will find good jobs to do.

Many languages will receive national and global attention since the number of people using them will increase. This increase will further enhance the lifespan of such languages most of which are facing extinction today because they are not being actively used. The problem of low level of literacy in the country will be effectively addressed because many materials will be produced by people who now can read and write in the languages that they have learnt well at school.

Finally, we know that the issue of language teaching and learning is in the front burner in the scheme of things in our country. This is because the number of students applying to colleges and universities to study language related courses is declining and something has to be done to change it. The something that has to be done, as far as I know, is that efforts have to be made to promote the teaching and learning of such language. This can only be possible when language teachers take advantage of the many resources that are available to them and can be made available to improve the teaching of languages in our colleges and universities.

I like to reiterate that there is no further time to waste if we want to make meaningful impact in our collective efforts at saving our languages and making sure that other disciplines do not run us out of business. The challenges that we are facing are daunting, but not insurmountable. The time to redouble our efforts is now.



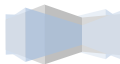
Conclusion

We have argued in this paper that language teaching and learning is facing several challenges in spite of its attraction. We have also indicated that language teachers need to adopt more of the resources – human and materials – that are available to them in promoting better language teaching and learning in the schools and pointed out that one way by which that can be done is for teachers to adopt innovative, creative and resourceful strategies in the performance of their duty. Finally, we have indicated that language teachers, students, government and the linguistic situation in our country will be better for it if teachers get out of their cocoon and take advantage of many resources that can be used to promote the teaching and learning of languages in our school.

It is our view that once we are doing what we are paid to do well and are taking maximum advantage of what nature, government and the society have made available to us, we will be in a position to say ‘uhuru’ in teaching and learning languages.

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