

Evaluating the Linguistic and Pedagogical Skills of English Language Teachers in a Multilingual Milieu

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Abstract

This paper evaluates the linguistic and pedagogical skills of English language teachers in a multilingual milieu. The survey research method was adopted in this study. The target population for this study comprised teachers and students in public secondary schools in Ado-Ekiti. A total of one hundred teachers and one hundred students were drawn from three separate schools. A self-constructed questionnaire was carefully and specially designed to obtain the necessary data required for the execution of this study. Percentage and frequency counts were used to analyze the data. Findings revealed that language teachers evaluate pedagogical contents regularly. It showed that the aspects teachers evaluated most were the cognitive skills of grammar, followed by essay writing but it is surprising that teachers do not frequently evaluate affective skills of oral English, comprehension and dictation. Moreover, of all the linguistic skills, listening, speaking and observation were less frequently evaluated while reading and writing were averagely evaluated. Finally, findings revealed some constraints to the effective pedagogical evaluation to include large classes, non-challant attitude of students, inadequate facilities, wide syllabus, lack of motivation, incompetence and inadequate time. Based on the findings, it was recommended that regular exposure to educational opportunities where teachers could be made to learn innovative evaluative techniques should be made available in schools.

Keywords: Evaluation; Linguistic skills; Pedagogical domains; Constraints; Language teachers.



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1. Introduction

Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural state. Research avers that Nigeria has over 400 languages (Azikiwe, 1998). This linguistic milieu places students learning English as a Second Language at a disadvantage position because they come to school with a broad range of linguistic experiences from their homes that influence the learning of English and other school subjects. Therefore, teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse students must implement language sensitive approaches that will reflect students' backgrounds and needs.

To meet these language needs, students must be offered opportunities to learn the linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening is a receptive skill. It is an essential tool for receiving information in any learning situation. Listening is more than hearing sounds and noises; it is the process of hearing, identifying, understanding and interpreting spoken language (Gbenedio, 1996). Speaking is a productive skill and it is the ability to produce, pronounce and comprehend sounds accurately.

Learners are taught and are expected to produce the segmental and suprasegmental phonemes such as monothongs, diphthongs, triphthongs, and how to stress words, with appropriate tone, tonality, intonation, syllable, pitch and rhythm. Speaking is one of the linguistic skills that showcases that a learner has been taught a language. Reading is a literacy skill. It is a vital means by which a reader assimilates and interprets ideas, facts and information printed materials. Reading is regarded as the core factor in the learning process because all academic and professional competencies depend on one's ability to read. Writing, on the other hand, deals with the graphical representation of a person's thoughts, ideas, feelings and imaginations in print or electronic forms. As an important language learning tool, no learner can successfully learn without scribbling something on paper either as feedback or materials for reading at a later time.

Other pedagogical contents of the English Language include phonology syntax, semantics, and morphology. Phonetics deals with the scientific study of speech sounds, the articulation, transmission, and reception of speech sounds. It is the linguistic unit of language that entails the segmental and suprasegmental phonemes (Azikiwe, 1998). Semantics is the aspect of language that deals with meaning. It addresses the categories, relationship and contrasts involving meanings of words in utterances such as the denotative and connotative meanings of words (Azikiwe, 1998). Syntax refers the rules governing the use of linguistic principles or language. It studies the structure of the units of grammatical analysis that are larger the word, phrases, clauses, sentences and the whole discourse. It involves the selection and orderly arrangement of words to form meaningful or semantically arranged word patterns. Morphology studies the internal structure of words. It is the linguistic unit that governs the rules for word formation and is classified into two groups namely lexical (nouns, verb and adjective) and functional (determiner, preposition and conjunctive).

Research has shown that inadequate mastery of English language invariably affects students’ performance in other subjects and the quality of education generally. English language teachers therefore have important roles to play in improving the quality of education through increased proficiency in the English language (Ofuokwu, 2010). To effectively carry out all this, there is the need to evaluate the linguistic and pedagogical skills of teachers in schools. Evaluation plays the role of determining the quantity and quality of the language the students have learnt, it helps in identifying the strengths and weaknesses of students as well as the curriculum, determine the effectiveness of the teachers, the methodology, instructional materials and even the grading of students (Azikiwe, 1998). Its coverage includes the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. Under the cognitive domain, the focus is on vocabulary, grammar that learners have learnt. The affective domain includes the ability to communicate with others, read voraciously all written materials with the intent of appreciating the aesthetics of the written texts. The test for psychomotor involves proper pronunciation of words and writing (Azikiwe, 1998). How much of the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of learning do language teachers disseminate and evaluate in schools? What percentage of skills and aspects of the target language is possessed and used by learners? All these questions form the focus of this paper. The study therefore seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What linguistic and pedagogical skills do teachers evaluate regularly?
2. What pedagogical techniques do teachers utilize in classrooms?
3. What pedagogical variables hinder teachers from evaluating learners?

2. Methodology

The survey research method was adopted in this study. It was used because it enables the researcher to elicit responses from the people. The target population for this study comprises teachers and students most especially those in the public secondary schools in Ado-Ekiti. A total of one hundred teachers and one hundred students were drawn from three separate schools. They were respectively selected from both the senior and junior schools in Ado-Ekiti Local Government area. The respondents in this study are teachers and students selected from JSS1-JSSIII students in Ado local Government area. A self-constructed questionnaire was carefully and specially designed to obtain the necessary data required for the execution of this study. The instrument covers various aspects of the respondents’ personalities. The questions sought information on the teachers and students’ involvement in pedagogical skills. The questionnaires were administered to the teachers and students in the designated secondary schools. Both male and female students were selected in the schools respectively. The schools were visited and the questionnaires were distributed. The questions were answered independently by the teachers and students in order to ensure correct and sincere responses. Percentage counts and frequencies were used to analyze the data.

3. Results

Research Question 1: What linguistic and pedagogical skills do English language teachers evaluate regularly?

Table-1. Linguistic and pedagogical skills teachers evaluate frequently

	9.5	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Do English language teachers evaluate students frequently?	75	75%	25	25%
2.	Which aspect of English language do your English teachers evaluate regularly?				
	a. Grammar	58	58%	42	42%
	b. Oral English	20	20%	80	80%
	c. Essay writing	60	60%	40	40%
	d. Comprehension	25	25%	75	75%
	e. Dictation	5	5%	95	95%
3.	Which skills of language does your teacher evaluate regularly?				
	a. Listening				
	b. Speaking	10	10%	90	90%
	c. Reading	30	30%	70	70%
	d. Writing	65	65%	35	35%
	e. Observation	50	50%	50	50%
		5	5%	95	95%

The students’ responses vividly show that language teachers evaluate the pedagogical content regularly. It shows that one of aspects teachers evaluate most is grammar (58%) followed by essay writing (60%) but it is surprising that teachers do not frequently evaluate Oral English (20%), Comprehension (25%) and Dictation (5%). Moreover, of all the linguistic skills, listening (10%), speaking (30%), observation (5%) are less frequently evaluated while reading (65%) and writing (50%) are averagely evaluated.

Research Question 2: What pedagogical techniques do teachers utilize in classrooms?

Table-2. Major pedagogical techniques teachers utilize in classrooms

	Item	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Which evaluation devices are utilized by your language teachers in the classrooms?				
	a. Observation	5	5%	95	95%
	b. Check-list	20	20%	80	80%
	c. Oral examination	40	40%	60	60%
	d. Questionnaire	60	60%	40	40%
2.	When particularly do your teachers evaluate in the classroom?				
	a. Before the lesson	30	30%	70	70%
	b. During the lesson	80	80%	20	20%
	c. After the lesson	60	60%	40	40%

Table 2 clearly portrays that the teachers’ pedagogical techniques are mainly questionnaire and written examination with 60% and 75% as the highest rank but less of observation (5%), checklist (20%) and oral examinations (40%). Again, it shows the evaluation is done mostly during lessons (80%) and after the lessons (60%).

Research Question 3: What pedagogical variables hinder teachers from evaluating learners?

Table-3. Constraints to pedagogical evaluation of students

	Item	Yes	%	No	%
1.	What are some of the constraints that hinder language teachers from pedagogical evaluation of learners?				
	a. Non-challant attitude of teachers	70	70%	30	30%
	b. Inadequate facilities	80	80%	20	20%
	c. Large classes	90	90%	10	10%
	d. Wide syllabus	85	85%	15	15%
	e. Incompetence	20	20%	80	80%
	f. Inadequate time	85	85%	15	15%

Table 3 clearly portrays some of the difficulties and problems hindering pedagogical evaluation of the learners, such as inadequate facilities, large classes of wide syllabus and inadequate time. This is indicated in the result as the highest ranks are 80%, 90%, 85%, 95% and 85% are in the affirmative while the lowest responded in the negative form.

Teachers’ Responses

Research Question 1: What linguistic and pedagogical skills do teachers evaluate regularly?

Table-4. Linguistic and Pedagogical skills of language teachers

	Item	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Do English language teachers evaluate students frequently?	95	95%	5	5%
2.	Which aspect do you evaluate regularly?				
	a. Grammar	80	80%	20	20%
	b. Oral English	25	25%	75	75%
	c. Essay writing	50	50%	50	50%
	d. Comprehension	65	65%	35	35%
3.	Which skills of language do you evaluate in the classroom?				
	a. Listening	20	20%	80	80%
	b. Speaking	10	10%	90	90%
	c. Reading	70	70%	30	30%
	d. Writing	75	75%	25	25%
	e. Observation	15	15%	85	85%

Table 4 indicates that language teachers evaluate more of grammar (80%), essay writing (50%) and comprehension and less of Oral English (25%) and dictation (20%). It also reveals that reading (70%) and writing (75%) ranked the highest among the skills evaluated while listening (10%), speaking (20%) and observation (15%) skills are neglected.

Research Question 2: What types of evaluation techniques do teachers utilize in classroom?

Table-5. Pedagogical techniques of teachers in classes

	Item	Yes	%	No	%
1.	Which evaluation devices are utilized by your language teachers in the classrooms?				
	a. Observation	6	6%	94	94%
	b. Check-list	25	25%	75	75%
	c. Oral examination	80	80%	20	20%
	d. Questionnaire	30	30%	70	70%
	e. Written examination	80	80%	20	20%
2.	When particularly do your teachers evaluate in the classroom?				
	a. Before the lesson	35	35%	65	65%
	b. During the lesson	55	55%	45	45%
	c. After the lesson	80	80%	20	20%
	d. Not at all	-	-	100	100%

According to the table above, most teachers made use of questionnaires (80%) and written examination (80%) to measure or judge the learners learning capacity. Devices like check – list, observation and oral examination are rarely evaluated. It is vividly seen that 35% of the teachers evaluate before the lesson, 55% and 80% evaluate during and after the lesson respectively.

Research Question 3: What are the variables that hinder teachers from effective evaluation of learners?

Table-6. Constraints to effective evaluation of students

	Item	Yes	%	No	%
1.	What are some of the constraints that hinder language teachers from pedagogical evaluation of learners?				
	a. Non-challant attitude of teachers	75	75%	25	25%
	b. Inadequate facilities	80	80%	20	20%
	c. Large classes	95	95%	5	5%
	d. Wide syllabus	85	85%	15	15%
	e. Lack of motivation	80	80%	20	20%
	f. Incompetence	-	-	100	100%
	g. Inadequate time-duration	90	90%	10	10%

Table 3 vividly portrayed that all the variables affected effective evaluation, especially large classes (95%) followed by inadequate time (95%); wide syllabus (85%), inadequate facilities (80%) and non – challant attitude of students (75%), all teachers agreed that they are competent to teach English language.

4. Discussion

The results showed that evaluation of learners is done regularly in the class by teachers. Majority of the students and teachers claimed that the aspects of language evaluated mostly are grammar, essay writing and comprehension. The neglected skills are dictation and Oral English. Dictation has been from time immemorial a veritable means by which learners are taught spelling, speed and accuracy in writing which could help in development of the writing and listening abilities of young and matured learners. This supports the assertion of Mohammed (2009) that dictation is one of the oldest language activities that has been neglected claiming it is teacher-centered and old-fashioned. It must be noted that dictation is also a major means of developing the listening skills of learners and so must be utilized, taught and evaluated in schools. Furthermore, the result showed that oral English is not pedagogically evaluated as other aspects too. Oral English is that aspect of English Studies that is often not taught in both primary and secondary schools because most language teachers are incompetent in articulating both the segmental and supra-segmental phonemes. Another major reason for this is lack of language laboratory and other facilities that could help in teaching and learning this aspect. Moreover, students do not have interest in studying Oral English because at both internal and external examinations, they have discovered that they are always evaluated theoretically. The practice

has remained that schools do not emphasize Oral English in the daily activities of students. A learner who attempts to articulate right sounds is sometimes looked at as outlandish.

The result revealed that listening and speaking are downplayed in most languages classes. Little wonder the oral proficiency of many learners is affected. Oral communication involves the ability to listen and speak effectively codes that are meaningful to interlocutors. One of the means of developing listening is dictation which is equally not evaluated as revealed in this study. This corroborates the findings of Ofodu (2016) that listening, dictation, read-aloud, cooperative reading and storytelling for teaching listening are grossly neglected in schools. Listening is an active communication skill that teachers and learners must utilize and emphasize in the teaching and learning process. If this skill is properly handled at the primary and secondary levels, learning at the tertiary level will be a herculean task as such students will not be effective learners at that level. Dictation is another learning that learners and teachers can use to develop their listening, spelling and vocabulary skills. Where this is sparingly done, such learners are sometimes at sea when they come in contact with other students who are flexible in spelling.

The findings on time of evaluation revealed that majority of the students and the teachers claimed that they evaluate mostly during and after lessons. This is a welcome development because it shows students have sufficient time to participate in classroom evaluation thereby making language classes learner-centered. It must be stated that timing and task accomplishment are very vital concepts that teachers must consider constantly in language classes. Sufficient time should be allotted to teaching and evaluating all skills and aspect of language lessons.

On the issue of evaluation devices used in language lessons, it is quite appalling to discover that teachers do not use observation and checklist as evaluation techniques/devices. These devices allow teachers to get firsthand information about learners. Uzoagulu (1998) asserts that observation allows teachers to watch learners, events, or situations to see the trends which can be compared and reported for educational decisions.

The result revealed that there are various constraints which hinder effective evaluation of learners by the teachers. A good percentage of the teachers and students complained about poor facilities, wide syllabus, and large number of students in each period and in conducive environment as constraints. These are major variables and problems facing the students and teachers in language classes. For instance, poor facilities which include but not limited to physical and human for pedagogical effectiveness are virtually absent in many schools. There are schools where English teachers are graduates of Physics, Geography, and Social Studies. They teach and evaluate English studies. This is an aberration of the teaching profession that must be corrected in order for the expected academic performance of students to be guaranteed.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper concluded that language teachers concentrate more on the cognitive and psychomotor domains more than the affective. The cognitive and psychomotor domains in this stance are comprehension, writing and grammar, while the affective are the oracy skills of listening and speaking. It is very pertinent for teachers to recognize that to train to complete total learners there is the need to teach and evaluate the learners in the three domains. Therefore, it recommends that teachers should be frequently exposed to seminars and conferences where the expressive, receptive and literacy skills of speaking, listening, writing, observation and reading could be properly taught. The government should also provide all the appropriate facilities that could aid pedagogical effectiveness and evaluation.

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