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**FOSTERING GENERIC SKILLS (1) IN A LANGUAGE
CLASSROOM FOR GLOBAL COMPETITIVENESS**

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Abstract

The need to develop generic skills for effective competition in today's world has become imperative. To carry out this study, a descriptive survey design was used to determine how a language teacher can help to develop generic skills in the students. A group of teachers of the 'Use of English' from the sampled universities (University of Nigeria, Enugu campus 12, Nsukka campus 28 and Godfrey Okoye University, Enugu 15) was used. The total number being 55 was used because it is a small population. The study is therefore designed to find out the specific generic skills that should be emphasized by the English language teacher and to find out what methods/strategies that can be used by English Language lecturers to foster generic skills inherent in language lessons. A 28 item questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection while analysis was by means and standard deviations. 2.50 was the accepted mean and anything below it was rejected. The results showed that many generic skills can be fostered through proper teaching of English language and recommendations were made.

Introduction

Theoretical Framework

Many theories have been adduced to underscore the most beneficial learning strategies to use and actualize the aims and goals of education. One of such theories that is key to language learning is the constructivist theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Bruner and Ausbel (Izuagba, 2009:101). Also included are the cognitivist/Participatory theories. These theories state that man has innate abilities and potentials and as an intelligent being he is an active participant in the learning process and his actions are purposeful and goal oriented.

Today's world is characterized by information and knowledge driven economy. It becomes imperative for nations to upgrade their skills to be able to compete favourably. The cognitive/ constructivist theories require that the learner should be able to reconstruct the environment in other to fit into the new scheme of things. This is vital in today's world. Any nation that fails to meet up with the demands of today's technological and information driven world is thrown into economic recession and consequent underdevelopment. That is the fate of many third world countries. The result is that such countries are ridden with poverty, disease, unemployment and ignorance.

The world economy seems to be taking a nose dive with increased consumption and reduction in production. The third world countries are at the receiving end of fake, adulterated and hazardous products. And with no capacity to take our destiny into our hands, the future seems bleak as the economy continues to dwindle and low income abounds.

The education system of our country must rise to the challenge by adopting a competitive approach in the content, implementation and evaluation of our curriculum. The system must focus on how to upgrade the skills of our students and undergraduates for them to be able to compete in the global frontiers. One of the ways to do this is through the development of key skills (otherwise known as generic skills) in our younger generation. According to the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA 2011), one of the key missing variables in Africa's growth and development is the coherent, organized application of knowledge. This includes the proper handling of information and knowledge which has become very crucial in today's world, without which our people cannot compete favourably in the larger world economy. This constitutes an important aspect of production in a knowledge

economy. It involves the ability to generate knowledge by learning how to find and use and manage information and other resources to advantage. This requires strong skills in analytical reasoning, problem solving skills, oral and writing skills and others referred to as core generic skills. Just akin to exposing the student at the basic level, to verbal and quantitative reasoning to enable them to develop lifesaving, survival skills and growth and competitive skills.

Generic skills are the non-technical skills needed for adaptability in the work places (Caleb & Ekpo 2015). Generic skills act as the interface for the development of technological skills, aiding in the adaptation of individuals at new work places, new life situations and exigencies. Generic skills aid the development of new skills and promotion of old ones while on the job or elsewhere. Kearns (2001) defines generic skills as key competencies that can be used across a large number of different occupations or situations and they provide a platform for the development of employability skills needed by young people and adults.

Ikonta (2015) believes that personal characteristics of learners are factors that may affect learning and these are seen in terms of what has been popularly termed 'generic skills' (European Commission 2002; Obanya 2007; George 2011). This implies that part of the roles of education in schools should be to provide generic skills needed to facilitate the acquisition of new knowledge. Acquisition of generic skills prepares young ones to learn how to learn. (Graddol 2007:72).

English Language taught in the right classroom situations aids in the development of generic skills. Properly organized classroom promotes learning and proper interaction is fostered in a conducive classroom. It has been stated that good classroom methods 'should enable pupils to develop language skills which emphasize communication ... for real practical purposes in real practical purposes (in or out of school). (Eurydice Survey, 2006). The European Commission for Education and Culture (2002) noted that CLIL (which is a language teaching method) can integrate language into the teaching of the content of other subjects). The need to develop communication skills for life is crucial to survival especially in an information driven economy. Today's world economy is technologically based. It is fast moving and it is competitive. The need to express and interpret facts, data, thoughts, and feelings both in writing as well as orally is exigent. Communication skills are important for expressing clear ideas about things and to help people operate well in their work places.

English Language by its nature possesses the potential qualities that make it generic. Interestingly, English seems to have joined the list of basic skills (Graddol, 2007:72), performing the role of a functional skill (Esu, 2010:17). Nigerian Educational, Research and Development Council (NERDC- cited in Esu, 2010) refers to English language as 'primus inter peres' of all school subjects and maintains that:

- a) English has the widest reach than other languages of the world.
- b) It is the second and official language of many countries in the world.
- c) Competence in its use smoothens the way in many situation and transactions.
- d) It is the predominant language of the net, World Wide Web and the social media.

In the Lower and middle basic school, children are drilled on quantitative and verbal reasoning. The verbal reasoning training is a means of developing critical generic skills out of the language component of the basic school programme. It stresses critical thinking, problem solving, application of language skills to the basic tenets of daily living. These are fundamental skills required by young people to succeed in life. At a higher level comes the GMAT (Graduate Matriculation Examination). These exams expose students to situations that demand critical thinking, problem solving, team playing, co-operative attitude, basic application of ideas, resourcefulness use of contextual clues in solving new as well as familiar problems, insight, proactiveness, innovativeness, competitiveness, trial and error, creativity etc. Generic skills fostered through English Language. Teaching can go a long way in providing the required solutions to situations that require them.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is two pronged-

- a). to determine specific generic skills that an English language teacher should emphasize in a language classroom.
- b). to determine the methods and strategies of developing generic skills by teachers of English.

Statement of the Problem

Today's world demands higher skills. That is what Onyia (2016) refers to as survival skills in his discussion of competitive skills for the future generation. Many students who graduate from our universities still perform below average in their job interviews. World Bank report (Dabeleen 2010) laments the low level of language and communication as well as technical skills credited to Nigerian graduates. These are skills that equip young people for a competitive future. In the absence of these skills a person may graduate in first class and still fail to meet up with his peers in the present competitive world. Therefore this paper sets to find out what generic skills the English Language teacher should emphasize in his classroom and what methods and strategies to be effectively employed.

Research Questions

1. What specific generic skills should the English language teacher emphasize?
2. What methods/strategies can be used by English Language lecturers to promote generic skills?

Research Method

A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. Purposive sampling method was used. All the lecturers teaching Use of English in The University of Nigeria Nsukka and Enugu Campuses, Godfrey Okoye University and Enugu State University of Science and Technology were used for the study. This gave a total of 58 subjects. The instrument for the study was a 20 item questionnaire and a checklist. The instrument was a 4-point rating scale which was face-validated by 2 experts from the Measurement and Evaluation of the Faculty of Educational Foundations. The cut-off mean was 2.5 was set as scores equal to or above 2.5 were accepted and scores below were rejected. Test retest reliability was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. The coefficient was 0.78 while the mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

Result / Data presentation

1. What specific generic skills should the English language teacher emphasize?

Table 1: Generic skills emphasized by the English language teacher

S/N	Identified Generic Skills	Mean X	Std. Dev.	Decision
1	Cognitive Skills	3.74	0.72	Agreed
2	Communication Skills	3.82	0.56	Agreed
3	Interpersonal/Interactive	3.68	0.71	Agreed
4	Mathematical/Numerical Skills	2.27	0.99	Reject
5	Information & Communication ICT Skills	3.68	0.60	Agreed
6	Reasoning Skills	3.76	0.73	Agreed
7	Team Player Skills	3.66	0.69	Agreed
8	Adaptive Skills	3.45	0.78	Agreed
9	Creativity Skills	3.66	0.61	Agreed
10	Planning and Analytical skills	3.58	0.72	Agreed
11	Organizational Skills	3.64	0.62	Agree
12	Problem Solving Skills	3.67	0.70	Agree
13	Note –taking skills	3.58	0.72	Agree
14	Editing	3.64	0.62	Agree
15	Technical skills	2.24	0.98	Reject
	Grand Mean	3.94		

The results shown in **table1** reveal that communication skill with a mean of 3.82 (Std 2,701) is the highest followed by cognitive skill with 3.74 as mean (Std 2.645). Most of the skills listed in items 1 to 15 are very crucial generic skills that can be emphasized by the language teacher judging by their high scores of 3.44 to 3.82. Only item 4 Mathematical and numerical skills with a mean of 2.27 and technical skills with a mean of 1.24 were rejected as not being up to the mean of 2.50.

Research Question 2: What methods/Strategies should be used to develop generic skills in language classrooms.

Table 2: Methods and strategies used for developing generic skills in language classrooms

S/N	Items for generic skills development	Mean X	Std. Dev.	Decision/ Comment
1	Increase student talking time (STT)	3.78	0.67	Agree
2	Use of task-based learning	3.24	0.78	Agree
3	Use of cognitive organizers	2.86	1.04	Agree
4	Use of probing question types	3.56	0.62	Agree
5	Encouraging small group interactions	2.77	0.88	Agree
6	Giving students passages to analyze	3.49	0.59	Agree
7	Using higher and lower order question types	3.86	0.98	Agree
8	Giving them written materials to edit	2.68	0.90	Agree
9	Giving them puzzles to decode	2.35	1.01	Reject
10	Giving them dictation exercises	2.63	1.06	Agree
11	Using questions to elicit information from students	2.63	1.06	Agree
12	Encouraging peer learning	2.73	1.08	Agree
13	Involving students in many activities	2.88	1.16	Agree
	Total	3.04		

Table 2 shows the summary of the mean and standard deviation for the methods used by teachers of English to cultivate and encourage the development of generic skills among students. Of all the listed items, no 7 which is using higher and lower order question types with a mean of 3.86 has the highest score followed by item 1 which is increasing student talking time (STT) with a mean of 3.78(2.672). The result also indicates low mean scores of 2.86 (2.02233), 2.73 (1.66170) and 2.35 (1.304) for items 3, 9 and 12 respectively. It goes to show that teachers of English do not make effective use of many strategies that can help develop generic skills.

Discussion of findings

The results identified many generic skills which are akin to language learning. This is why some experts have indicated that English language has the status of a generic skill because of the fundamental roles it plays in facilitating life in school, at home, in work places and even in the global economy (NERDC cited in Esu, 2010). We live in a world without boundaries, as it were, which has necessitated that we speak the same language. It must be a language that is used and understood by most people. That language is English language. It has a universal appeal. Onuigbo (2015) calls it 'the language of the age'. The language that keys people into the world wide web. It fosters the greatest interdependence and the greatest inter relationship and has the greatest impact on the world economy. The ability to compete starts from the ability to gain knowledge and knowledge comes through information and information comes through language and the language that has the widest reach is English language. It therefore has the potential to foster good communication, (item 1) , interpersonal and interactive skills (item3) and adaptive skills (item8). Where would the world be in the larger world economy without the possession of generic skills that come through proper learning of English language such as interactive skills, reasoning skills, problem solving skills, team playing skills, good organizational skills. It will be a herculean task to transact business at a global level without a good knowledge of English language and the attendant generic skills. No one can claim to be ICT compliant without adequate knowledge of English language because the system is configured in English language and most of the information one will need to access are in the English language. English is an indispensable language for anybody who wants to participate in the world economy. For Onuigbo (2015) argued that if the whole world has become the socio economic and political constituency of powerful nations that are determined to improve their comparative advantage by capturing the world resources, it is important that others key into the transmission lines (language) to be able to benefit from that important resource. It can be seen that the world economy is tied to the English language since it is the world language that opens their resources to a greater number of investors. For over one decade, Nigeria has aspired to be part of the world leading economic team through the projections of Vision 20:20-20. Unfortunately the Nigerian economy has taken a down turn into recession. Our education system is therefore challenged to proffer solutions that can pull us out of

the economic recession and make us able to compete in the larger world economy. The education industry in Nigeria is therefore challenged. The problem is how to make our learners more proactive and competitive, more result orientated and better trained for work in the future.

Given the above scenario, there is every need to adopt innovative methods and strategies for teaching school subjects especially the core subjects which every learner must take. English language is one of the core subjects and the most central to the progress of young ones in and out of school. But the results in table 2 indicate that several methods and strategies relevant to the development of the generic skills are not upheld.

There are innovative methods of teaching the language skills with a view to increasing communicative ability and developing other generic skills like cognitive skills, reasoning skills, problem solving skills and adaptive skills. Our teaching must take place in conducive classrooms incorporate group learning and allied methods which encourage interactive learning, peer review and competition, leadership activities, adaptive qualities and organizational prowess. Our teachers must use questioning strategies skillfully to elicit information and ideas from learners. According to Blooms taxonomy, lower order questions dwell just on recall, rank ordering, organizing etc of ideas already touched but higher order (HOTS) questions delve into analyses, synthesis and drawing conclusions and even being creative. This is the height of cognitive reasoning, and the application of problem solving skills. The learners would want to know why things happen one way and not another. They develop the ability to predict, forecast and take decisions that can lead to changes and these make for competitiveness that lead to improvement in the world.

Conclusion

Certain subjects lend themselves to being central to everyone's success in life. English language is one of them. That is why it is a core subject and so has the chances ability to enhance a student's overall success in any field of endeavour. A lot is expected from teachers in the way they manage their classrooms to help to develop these generic skills which are essential to survival especially in today's economy.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that:

1. Teachers of English should adopt better methods of teaching to improve the generic skills inherent in language learning.
2. Also they should endeavour to grow leadership and organizational skills in their students during English language lessons
3. The teachers should employ good classroom organizational strategies to foster the generic skills in our students.
4. All teachers should explore avenues to grow the generic skills in our students through the different subjects

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//To be able to make inferences.// // unemployment, and underemployment, lack of productive or creative genius.

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