
Improving the Communication Skill of Student in Nigeria for Effective Classroom Functioning: A Counselling Perspective

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Abstract

Whether humans or non-humans, all animals have the innate potential to interact with one another. This paper exam the place of communication as a tool to improve students functioning in the classroom. The paper sees language and vocabulary as sine-qua-non for effective communication mechanism for all classroom activity. The paper appreciates the place of non verbal cues like pictures, painting, graphics and sculpture media of communication. In the paper, certain human factors are identified as inhibitions to effective communication in classroom. These include; intimidation on the part of teachers, poor teaching method, fear, phobia, poor family background and over monitoring of students. The paper adopts the inter-disciplinary approach in the discussion. Here, the socio-psychological and analytical approaches were applied in the discussion. The paper concludes that to ensure an improvement in the communication skill of the students in the classroom, the problem based learning model need to be applied.

Introduction

Whether humans or non humans, all animals have the innate inclination for social interaction. This feeling of inter-dependence is strengthened through communication. Thus, humans like the lower animals, communicate with one another.

Awotua-efebo (1988) defines communication as: “the impacting of or conveying of information or knowledge or ideas, thought, opinions, facts and or emotions”. Yahoo dictionary see communication (a) “as the exchange of thoughts, messages or information by speech, writing, behavior. (b) interpersonal import”. According to Webster New Explorer Encyclopedia Dictionary, “communication is an act or instant of transmitting (a) information communication. (b) a verbal or written message. 2 (a) a process by which information is exchanged between individuals through a common system of symbols, styles or behavior.

Communication could therefore be seen as a process of interacting with one another, using some specialized skills or apparatus.

This inter-personal communication takes many form or character and may be dyadic or group. For instance, the “sender/source can be more than one individual. The receiver/destination can because of time and space see, hear, touch, or even smell the sender/source” including encoding/decoding is a continuous process as the message is produced at little or no cost. The receiver can easily terminate the message; the feedback is immediate and very effective in bringing out behavioral change. It can create, maintain, sustain and continuously refashion relationship, partnership and intimacy.

In other respect, communication has four main components; these include source/destination, encoding/decoding, message as information or medium and finally message as stimulus/input and feedback as response/output.

As it were, communication may be verbal or non verbal. According to research, about

65% of the messages we get are communicated non verbally. Non verbal communication includes facial expression, special appearances, gestures, body movements and emotional disposition among others. Unfortunately, each of these does not have universal application for interpretation.

In corroboration, Njoku holds that, the nodding of head, stands for approval/acceptance in some parts of the world but disapproval in countries like Bulgaria and Japan. In the US, beckoning of hand stands for summoning or asking someone to come closer; where as in Vietman, it is reserved for summoning their dogs. In the west, people stand up when their superiors arrive while among the Tongans, they sit down. In the US, crossing one's leg is a sign of relaxation while in Korea, it is a social taboo.

In Nigeria schools like else where, poor communication skills is one of the factors which impedes the teaching and learning process. Worst still, the teaching and learning exercise is done with a second language (English). This paper explores how communication skills could be enhanced to improve the effective classroom interaction between teachers and students for better performance.

Theoretical overview

Psychologists in their study of intelligence have propounded several theories. Some of these analyzed the relationship between intelligence and creativity, learning, understanding, imagination and judgment. These researchers have argued that different people have different level of intelligence. In their opinion, a person may be good in one field of study but if taken to another area, may perform very badly. In the light of the above, scholars are not agreed as to what constitutes IQ or how exactly to measure it.

However, intelligence is widely accepted to be made up of the following as the ability to: (a) learn. This includes any kind of informal and formal learning through the combination of experience, education and training. (b) Pose problems. This includes recognizing problem situations and transforming them into more clearly defined problems. (c) Solve problems. This includes solving problems, accomplishing tasks, fashioning products and doing complex projects (Wikipedia).

Howard Gardner in his study of intelligence proposed a theory of multiple intelligence. He identified seven components of intelligence as follows: (a) Bodily kinesthetic. (b) Inter-personal. (c) Intra-personal. (d) Linguistics. (e) Logical mathematical. (f) Musical. (g) Naturalistic and (h) Spatial. According to Gardner, all the component of intelligence cannot be observed in a single individual in equal proportion.

Robert Sternberg also worked extensive on intelligence. In his discussion, he focuses on three main component of intelligence. (a) Practical intelligence, (the ability to do well in informal and formal educational settings adapting to and shaping one's environment). (b) Experimental intelligence, (the ability to deal with novel situations, the ability to effectively automate the ways of dealing with novel situations so that they are easily handled in future, the ability to think in novel ways). (c) Componential intelligence, (the ability to process information effectively. This includes meta-cognitive executive performance and knowledge acquisition components that help to steer cognitive processes).

Elsewhere, David Perkins (1995) rendered a detailed argument that intelligence has three main components as follows: (a) Natural intelligence; (this refers to the efficiency and

exactness of one's neurological system). (b) Experimental intelligence; (this relates to an individual accumulated knowledge and experience in different areas). (c) Reflective intelligence; (this simply means a person's system of attacking a problem situation, for learning and for approaching some intellectually challenging tasks).

Explaining further, Perkins contends that experimental intelligence is based on years of accumulated knowledge and experience in both informal and formal learning environment. To him, such knowledge and experience leads to a high level of expertise in one or more fields. People who live in a higher learning environment have a significant advantage over people who grew up in less stimulating environment.

Charles Spearman as quoted by Hayes (1994), content's that intelligence is made up of two factors—the general "G" and the specific "S". In his view, there is a correlation between scores on almost all test on mental ability i.e. people who did well on one test, tend to do better than average on all the other. To him, a general level of mental ability is responsible. He adds that performance was also aided by "S" factors such as information and skills.

Thurston in (1937), disagrees with Spearman. Using the factor analysis model, he analyzed the correlation among IQ test and instead of G factor; he found several independent primary mental abilities. These include numerical, reasoning verbal fluency, special visualization, perceptual ability, memory and verbal comprehension.

Cattell (1971), aligning with Spearman, disputed Thurston's position. While agreeing that the "G" factor exist, contends that there are two kinds of "G"; fluid G "GF" and crystallized G "GC". According to him, fluid "G" intelligence is basic power of reasoning and problem solving. It is responsible for induction, deduction, reasoning and understanding of different relations and ideas. Crystallized "G" (GC) on the other hand, is derived from the knowledge gained while applying the fluid G. it accounts for skill in problem solving.

Basic Tool of Communication

Human interaction and or communication are predicated on a certain phenomenon. The National Teachers Institute (NTI) contends that "language defines man's humanity and enables him to survive". The world over, language serves as the symbol of identity of any people. According to NTI, some language or speech groups may be homogeneous while others are heterogeneous. Similarly, Obodoegbulam, Egesimba and Dimkpa (2011), hold that language is the only medium of human communication.

Without over stating the obvious, language has two basic elements (Bernstein, Roy, Srull and Wickens (1989)). These includes symbols such as words and a set of rules called grammar. Obodoegbulam, Egesimba and Dimkpa (2011) submit that language could be expressed in words, signs, symbols, graphics, painting gestures and emotions. In any case, it promotes human communication.

Obviously speaking, language is a natural endowment to man. The National Teachers Institute agrees that "every normal child at birth is gifted with the capacity to speak". This explains the reason why every child endeavor's to speak the language of his or her parents (mother tongue). He or she acquires this with less difficulty.

Another vital aspect of communication is listening. Eyoh (1999) opines that "Listening is one of the four skills of language, especially and active and purposeful process in which the

listener participates and makes a positive contribution; by bringing his power of concentration to bear on what he hears". Listening is a psycho-cognitive process which involves decoding what is been said and making a coherent meaning out of it. A good listener tries to appreciate the main points while listening. Areas of emphasis are under-scored as one listens.

Apart from the vocalized sounds used in communication, non verbal cues are often employed in communication. A research shows that over 65% of the meaning we get from any given message is communicated non verbally. Rudolph Verderber in Wikipedia argues that "when we talk with another person, give a speech, or make a presentation, the message we are conveying is transmitted through non verbal cues as much through our choice of words". For instance, our emotional disposition tells much of our feelings.

Reading and writing is another main feature of communication. According to Santrock (2003) education and language experts continue to debate how children should be taught to read. Here two approaches are presented; the whole language approach and the basic skill phonetics approach. The whole language approach stresses that reading instruction should parallel children's language learning. That reading materials should be all encompassing and meaningful. In early reading exercises, children should be presented with their reading materials in their complete form, such as stories and poems. In this way children learn to appreciate language's communicative function (berdverber, 2003). Again, reading should be connected with listening and writing skills.

On the other hand, the basic and phonetic approach stresses that reading instruction should teach the basic rules of phonetics. Here, early reading instruction should contain simple task and that children should be given reading materials only after they are very conversant with the basic rules of phonetics.

Several factors motivate people in learning a new language. Gardner and Lambert as quoted by (Bernstein, Roy, Srull and Wickens 1989), in their study identified two of these to include instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Integrative motivation refers to individuals needs to identify with, or relate to those who already speak the language, the individual is learning.

Similarly, learning a second language is usually instrumental. An individual may be move to learn a second language for two main reasons (a) if he goes to live in a community in which the language is used as mother-tongue and therefore, the language of everyday business. (b) if in one's indigenous environment, that language provides or offer some opportunities which enables him to meet, maintain strategic utilitarian needs which his mother-tongue could not offer.

English as a Second Language

Based on our colonial experience, the teachers of English Language in Nigeria were not mindful of the future implication. Unlike the French, little or no attention was given about the phonemes of the English Language. In this instance the proper ways of pronouncing certain words were played down.

In the study of any language, a good knowledge of the vocabulary provides an added advantage. In the case of the English Language, this cannot be over emphasized. William 1999, as quoted by Obodoegbulam (2007), defines vocabulary as the total number of words

in a language. It could also refer to the total number of words known to a particular individual in a specified language. In the study of vocabulary, two concepts have emerged “Receptive and Productive” vocabularies. Those words which we know their meaning but do not use very often come under receptive vocabulary. Conversely, productive vocabulary refers to those words which we know their meaning and apply them very regularly. According to William (1999), the English Language has over five hundred thousand words. In the opinion of William, for anyone to communicate fairly effectively in English Language, he or she must at least know the meaning of three thousand words.

Communication Skills and Classroom Functioning

The classroom setting is confronted with a number of problems which affect the process of teaching and learning. One of the immediate challenges is the relationship between the teacher and the students. In most cases, students see their teacher as role model. Students like to imitate their teacher in what he says and does. His language style, mannerism, dress habit and disposition toward others. In short, students see their teacher as an institution.

Another difficulty which confronts teacher’s in school setting is the level of intelligent or entry behavior of students. Different students have different IQ and yet, these students learn in the same classroom. Some are fast learners and others slow. The teacher is then faced with the difficulty of which range to place the learning experience.

Any time the teacher appears in the classroom, students see this as the arrival of a living institution. Though, the teacher may prepare a lesson for the day, his physical appearance is the first lesson to the students. His arrival sends a signal to the students on what to expect (another exciting interaction or another dull, boring and dizzy period).

A sharp and precise objective helps the teacher to know exactly what to do in the classroom. His entry behavior and step by step presentation of the lesson makes his lesson clear and understandable. His dictions and clarity of terms helps to drive home his set objectives. Use or applications of teaching aids add more impetus to the clarity of the lesson. A teaching aid must relate to the subject of discussion otherwise, it will be a distraction. Care must be taken in selecting what constitutes an aid. The object or subject (by way of drawing or painting) needs to be sharp, simple and understandable. Including so many information on a teaching aid must be few to achieve the desired objective.

Information for the students should be presented one at a time. Anyone that is not for immediate consumption should be set aside. Any writing on the chalk board that is no longer useful has to be wiped off. It is not proper to allow irrelevant information on the board. Similarly, any teaching aid that had been used has to be put away. This will enable the student to know exact information that is still useful in the learning process.

Unfortunately, a number of students go to school ill-equipped. Socially and psychologically, many find it difficult to follow classroom activities. The problem here is that they are not able to communicate effectively.

Effective communication is a pre-requisite for optimum performance of any student in the classroom. By the time a student leaves the house in the morning, his objective is to go and learn. The extent to which this is achieved depends on his ability to cope with the classroom interaction between him and the teacher and with other students. Unfortunately, he might be impeded by several factors form achieving this.

Poor vocabulary is one inhibiting factor which prevents a student from benefiting maximally from what goes on in the class. As stated earlier in this paper, an individual need at least three thousand words to be able to read fluently. Similarly, a student who will benefit from a classroom activity may need at least one thousand five hundred to two thousand words to be able to interact effectively.

Appropriate use of tenses gives a student the needed confidence to cope adequately with the classroom discussions. A good knowledge of the different parts of speech, gives him a good command of the English Language. Since English is not our mother tongue, pronouncing words correctly gives him a needed confidence to interact properly with fellow students. Ability to differentiate between synonyms, antonyms and homonyms helps to ensure a good command of the English Language. A student should be able to master different phonemes and morphemes to enable him pronounce words correctly.

The socio-psychological disposition of student serves as vehicle for classroom interaction. If a student is happy, cheerful or in a good mood, he relates with others in a friendly manner. Conversely, if he is sad or depressed, he sees everyone that comes his way as an antagonist or enemy. Such an individual will be withdrawn and unwilling to relate with others. Here, even people who do not know the cause of the sadness, will be affected, in the form of transferred aggression. In this regard, the concept of transforming personal behavior from impulsive to reflective level forms the basis of active socio and psychological education.

The Way Forward

To improve the communication skill of students, certain practical and far reaching measures must be taken as follows;

- i.** Self confident building measures must be taken to remove fear or phobia from their eyes.
- ii.** Students should be exposed to variety of activities within and outside the classroom to enable them interact with other people.
- iii.** Language drill should be made a regular exercise.
- iv.** Students should be groomed in oratory or public speech presentation.
- v.** At home, parents should encourage free interaction among all family members.
- vi.** At home or in the classroom, students should be encouraged to ask questions to clarify areas of doubt.
- vii.** Students should be made to appreciate that painting, drawings; sculptors can be used to express one's opinion or emotions as in words.