

CLASSROOM INTERACTION AS THE PRECURSOR TO HAUSA LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

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Abstract - Classroom interaction refers to the process through which the collaborative construction of two or more participants is produced. It also refers to a situation where learners interact freely under conducive atmosphere and the quantity and quality of language use increases and consequently facilitates intake. It is in this light that this paper opens with a look at the concept of interaction and the types of classroom interaction. The paper also analyses aspects of classroom interaction and the role of input-to-intake in classroom interaction. It further evaluates the roles of the teacher in classroom interaction. It gives a number of useful recommendations one of which is that proper guidelines and procedure for Hausa language classroom interaction be formulated. It concluded by advocating for Hausa language classrooms to imbibe the culture of collaboration and cooperation in form of teacher - student, student-student, inter/intra group, interactions and collaborative negotiations.

1. INTRODUCTION

Classroom interaction refers to the working together of learners and the teacher in the classroom to promote collaborative and cooperative exchange of ideas and information that influence language learning and development. This refers to the process where learners' participation in classroom activities appears consistently effective in promoting their language development. The teacher as a fulcrum makes the quality of the interaction counts. As a resource facilitator in the classroom, he ensures that classroom interactions are meaningful and relevant to real life experiences of the Hausa culture.

The Hausa learner, through interaction with the teachers, materials, texts etc are also given the opportunity to control their own learning, become empowered self-confident and self-reliant. Thus, instead of becoming passive (to be filled by teachers), learners have the opportunity to be part of the decision making process about the type of training they receive, language problems to be tackled as well as language skills and knowledge to be transmitted. This supports the view that learners should be given the opportunity to participate in the selection, prosecution and evaluation of language tasks. To this paper, classroom interaction is not just a reciprocal contact where the teacher dominates the classroom discussion (chalk and talk) but a collaborative construct (between teacher and students, students and students, students and instructional materials, students and texts etc) where the learner is the most important variable. It is in this light, that all these components that affects and influence attitudes, skills and academic future of Hausa

language students are analyzed. It is pertinent to us as Hausa language teachers to understand the significance of classroom interaction.

2. THE CONCEPT OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION

Classroom is referred to as a social environment that plays an important role in the development of Hausa language students at all levels. Since the classroom is a social environment, students' experiences within it help to develop their behavioral, social and academic skills. It follows then that, the quality of the interactions that learners (Hausa language students) have with their teachers has a predictive validity on later academic success (Rollins et al, 1995).

A typical Hausa language classroom composition has many features such as class composition, student and teacher characteristics, students' interactions with peers and teachers, classroom values and classroom beliefs all these influence students' academic performance (Leaf et al, 2008).

Wagner (2010) adds something significant to our understanding of the concept. He defines interaction as reciprocal events that require at least two objects and two actions. He opines that classroom interactions are events that take place between a learner and the learner's environment, its purpose is to influence the learner in a way intended to change his behavior towards educational goals. Thus, to him, classroom interaction has two goals: to change learners' behavior and to change them towards achieving their goals.

Hamre and Pianta (2001) added another dimension to the concept. They speculate that, students react to their relationships with their teachers when students perceive that they have close and positive relations with teachers, they (students) are more inclined to trust and like those teachers and, in the process are motivated to learn.

Empirical studies from Wagner (Op. Cit) and Ladd (1997) discovered that kindergarten students who had a close and positive relationships with teachers performed better in readiness tests, which measured the students' letter recognition, visual matching, school language, listening and quantitative skills. Burchinal et al (2002) examined K12 through early school students and found that the correlation between close relationships and higher language skills occurred only at early relationship with their teachers.

To cap, classroom interaction, to this work, is a way of preparing pupils/students towards adulthood or to the right way which will eventually promote success and self-fulfillment in their lives. Others such as Ibrahim (2002), Adewale (2000), Pianta et al (2001) etc have also contributed to the area.

3. TYPES OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

The concept of classroom interaction has defied a single definition. Thus, it is seen as a highly organised recurring pattern whereby participants interact in a routine-like manner; the teacher asks a question, the learner responds and, the teacher evaluates the responses. Various scholars among which are (Coulhard, 1977; Sinclair and Coulhard, 1975; Mitchell, 1985; Barnes, 1976) have given their stand on the types of classroom of interaction and how such interaction affects language development. However, the stand of Thurmond (2003) will be adopted and maintained in this work. He defines interaction as:

The learners' engagement with the lesson content, other learners, the instructor and the technological medium used in the lesson through interactions with other learners, the instructor and technology results in a reciprocal exchange of information. The exchange of information intended to enhance knowledge development in the learning environment.

Consequently upon the above, four types of interaction can be adduced:

- a. Learner – Course content interaction;
- b. Learner – Learner – learner interaction;
- c. Learner – Teacher interaction; and
- d. Learner – Technology interaction.

3.1. Learner – Course Content Interaction:

This implies a situation where the learners interact with the course content through media such as texts, television, audiotape, computer etc. these materials allow students to interact with the content with or without the assistance of the instructor. Through this, their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills are developed.

3.2. Learner – Learner Interaction:

Many scholars maintained that knowledge is actively constructed and skills positively improved through interaction between learners. For instance, in the area of Hausa literature where students discuss many aspects of a given text, such students will not find it difficult to understand such texts. Johnson (1995) supports this view; he maintains that, if learner-learner interaction is well structured and managed, then it can be an important factor of cognitive development, educational achievement of

students and emerging social competencies. Naegle (2002) agrees with the stand, he opines that, talking of students with their peers about the content of the lesson is a powerful way for them to reinforce what they have learned. In essence, this type of interaction develops learners' capacities through collaborative works.

3.3. Learner – Teacher Interaction:

This type of interaction according to Coulhard (2007) has received a great deal of attention from scholars from a wide range of disciplines. This is the type of interaction between a teacher and student (s). In such a situation, the teacher using his pedagogical content/methodology knowledge takes part in an interaction with his student(s) about the course content, asks questions, uses student's/students' ideas, teacher gives directions, criticizes or justifies students' talks/responses.

In such an interaction, students benefit from the teacher's use of his pedagogical content/methodology knowledge to guide the interaction on the four Hausa language skills.

3.4. Learner – Technology Interaction:

Moore (1999) tag the interaction between learners and technology as an interface interaction. This is particularly true about distant learning classes where students use technology to interact with each other students. However, the use of technology is also evident in other areas such as the Internet, videotapes, audiotapes and so on that students can use for educational purposes.

Whatever the type of interaction used, the focus remains on three key areas and these are:

- a. **Individualization:** This refers to the situation where the teacher instructs each student to draw from his prior knowledge in analyzing the areas discussed.
- b. **Collaboration:** This means that the teacher should allow students to work together as a group or a team in analyzing the areas discussed.
- c. **Authentic Assessment:** This implies that, assessment is used as an artifact of learning activities through individual and group ongoing projects rather than at a point in time.

4. ASPECTS OF CLASSROOM INTERACTION

As established by linguists, classroom interaction consists of two major aspects negotiation of meaning and feedback.

4.1. Negotiation of Meaning:

This is a communication strategy used in the classroom to maintain the turn-taking in a classroom discussion. To Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), it is the verbal exchange that occurs when the speakers seek to prevent breakdown of communication. They opine that negotiation of meaning is the central discourse structure, that is, for learners' output to be comprehensible to other learners in such a way to attract the necessary interaction.

From the comprehension perspective, different processes could be used to repair interaction. Alison (2007) provides these processes. She maintains that, through the processes of repetition, segmentation and rewording interaction can serve to draw learners' attention to form meaning relationship and provide them with additional time to focus on encoding meaning. In this context, repetition entails repeating to the students the exact speech/text as it is when others do not understand; segmentation entails the students to repeat utterances/text by dividing it into segments with a rising of falling intonations and rewording entails using other sample words.

4.2. The Role of Response/Feedback:

Linguists have emphasised the important role response plays as one of the key factors that promotes learning in classroom interaction. Thus, response creates a situation where learners notice errors and recognise the need for correcting them. To this end, Mackey (2007) posits that, through interaction that involves feedback, the attention of the learners is drawn to the form of errors and is pushed to create modifications. In such a situation, the teacher must be conversant with the necessary feedback (explicit/implicit) and correction strategies.

Ellis and Foto (1999) aptly summaries negotiation and feedback as situation where:

Interaction contributes to acquisition through the provision of negative evidence and through opportunities for modified output; interaction then, is rich of meaning negotiation where the learners can receive feedback from their interlocutors.

5. CLASSROOM INTERACTION, INPUT-TO-INTAKE AND HAUSA LANGUAGE LEARNING

To Shook (1994), language input refers to the learning materials presented to the learners. To this work however, language input refers to language content made available to the learner and what the learner subsequently selects for processing because of his intake which result into his output.

A number of factors determine where one process certain aspects of language made available to him. These factors include the understanding the cognitive process of learning language and learners limited capacity to process language input (Leow, 1995).

Generally speaking, a learner's inter-language is determined by how he consciously or unconsciously used his learning strategies. The conscious part refers to the awareness that a learner is learning a new language or something new about a language and this shows him as actively participating in the learning process (Stern, 1975). The unconscious part, refers (in the case of Hausa L2 learners) to what a learner impose (through transfer or interference) from the structure of his L1 (in the area of phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics) to his L2 (Schlinker, 1972). Another possible strategy is for a learner to attempt to guess the system of the target language (over-generalisation).

Though scholars like Krashen (1976, 1977) are of the view that language cannot consciously be learned. This may be true where Hausa L1 students are concerned. With Hausa L2 students however, the views of scholars such as McLaughlin (1978) and Corder (1976) who opine that L2 students employ strategies such as storage (monitoring), retrieval and use of information in L2 learning are apt to this work.

To this paper, learning strategies are seen as the specific activities, behaviors, procedures and techniques used by L2 students to acquire a second language. The above are consciously used by L2 learners to facilitate their comprehension, internalization and usage of L2. Knowing these about his students allows a teacher to plan his language lessons better. Brown (1994) has identified four such strategies, and these are transfer, interference, generalization and simplification.

6. TEACHERS' ROLE IN CLASSROOM INTERACTION

It is an understatement to say that most students will not engage in interaction without the teacher initiating it. Thus, the role of the teacher is the classroom interaction and controlling the turn-taking is complex, varied and important. Tricia (2006) sums this up aptly as follows:

As a controller in eliciting language words; as an assessor of accuracy as students try to pronounce words; as a creator of pronunciation; as an organizer in giving instruction of the peer work, initiating it, monitoring it and organizing feedback; as a promoter while students are working together and as resource if students need help with words and structures during their peer work.

This is the basis of communicative language teaching, that is, the ability of the teacher to adapt himself and change roles as classroom interaction demands. Through such roles the teachers buttressed his place in the classroom as solid and the Chinese adage his watch word: the adage read thus:

Rather than approaching the edge (of the water) admiring the fish, it's better to take step back and prepare to cast a net over the water (and catch the fish).

This implies that all hands should be on deck to produce interactive Hausa language lessons where the all round language development of our L1 and L2 students is the ultimate goal.

7.CONCLUSION

The extent of Hausa learners' involvement and participation in classroom activities are useful tools in explaining their growth and progress in it. The involvement of students in selecting, prosecuting and evaluating language learning tasks in Hausa language classrooms is, without any iota of doubt, a motivating factor in teaching and learning. Thus, the essence of interaction is to ensure communication between Hausa language teachers and students in the classroom as well as the aspects of collaboration and cooperation in the form of teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, inter and intra group discussions, collaborative negotiations, exchange, turn-takings and general participation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the importance of interaction to Hausa language teaching, the following are recommended:

- I. Experts in the area of interaction among Hausa language teachers to come up with the areas relevant to its teaching;
- II. For such areas identified as important to form a part of the Hausa language teaching curriculum in all Colleges of Education;
- III. For seminars/workshops to be organized by NCCE to update teachers' knowledge on the classroom interaction;
- IV. For proper guidelines and procedures for Hausa language classroom interaction to be formulated.
- V. For Hausa language learners to be fully involved in selecting, prosecuting and evaluating Hausa learning tasks.

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