



Appraising Second Language Acquisition Theory and English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This paper appraised the concept of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and the current reports on the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria. It highlighted the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory formulated by Krashen in 1981. The theory famously known as input hypothesis was purposively chosen to analyze its possible application in English language teaching methodology, students learning, and English language teaching and learning resources development in Nigeria. The five principles of Krashen's hypothesis: acquisition-learning, the natural order, the monitor, the input, and affective filter were outlined. The paper strongly argued that for effective English language performance, English language instruction must be informed and supported by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories in order to create and provide enabling environment that offer students comprehensive English language input and encourage them to provide meaningful language output.

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: March, 2019

Received in revised form: July, 2019

Accepted: August, 2019

Published online: September, 2019

KEYWORDS

Instructional resources, Secondary Schools, Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English language in Nigeria is very important due to the position that English language occupies in the country. Researchers in language education in the country have begun to take it seriously. It has become apparent to know that students of English language considered themselves successful when they can communicate effectively in it (Nazara, 2011). Communicative competence in English language serves as a pivot for academic and professional success for the students. Regardless of the reason, teachers of English language have to place greater emphasis on finding modern ways to incorporate Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory in their English language classroom teaching practice. This paper argues that for effective English language performance, English language teaching methodologies, students' learning, and English language teaching and learning resources must be informed and supported by Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories in order to create and provide enabling environment that offer students comprehensive input and encourage them to provide meaningful performance. The paper appraises the concept of Secondary Language Acquisition (SLA) and applies Krashen (1981) SLA theory for effective English language classroom instruction.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the study of the processes through which people

learn another or other languages in addition to their first language (Teodira, 2008). The term, SLA, is commonly used after Krashen's (1981) distinction between 'language acquisition' and 'language learning'. According to him, 'language acquisition' involves a subconscious learning process in which children are exposed to meaningful interaction and natural language communication in order to convey meaning and infer rules of the language. 'Language learning', on the other hand, is linked to systematic instruction and the mastery of grammatical accurate utterances through error correction. Thus language acquisition involves implicit learning process whereby the learning takes place without one's knowledge. And, language learning involves the systematic program of presenting the input to the learner to learn.

Second language can be learnt in two different situations (Pritchard, 2003): the first is in the environment where second language is the language of the majority, and the second is in a classroom. In natural environment settings (where second language is the language of the majority), language learner is exposed to the second language freely at every time under uncontrolled communications. In the natural environment settings, language user uses the language freely to express himself. In classroom situation, second language is not used in everyday life and the amount of time used for language learning is very limited. However, the classroom setting deals

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with the controlled students' communication under the guidance of the tutor. There are also limited opportunities for students to negotiate meaning in the classroom.

English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria

English Language is a language of instruction and the subject of study in Nigeria. It carries the weight of being catalyst for academic achievement and professional success. Yet, secondary school students and leavers speak incompetently in it. Anizoba (2001) lamented that students can no longer communicate in English. In their words, Igbokwe and Asogwa (2010) state that English language studies in Nigeria had been on the decline for more than a decade and come under systematic criticism over the years. Teacher factor, inappropriate teaching methods and insufficient instructional materials have been identified as the paramount problems facing the teaching and learning of English Language (Maduabuchi, 2006).

However, it is disheartening that students are massively failing English language in the national examinations. The effects of this failure are decline in the general academic performance and the falling standard of education in the country. Daily Trust of 21st August, 2014 reported that students' performance in the WAEC examinations over the years has been declining. The percentages of students that scored five O'level credit pass including English and Mathematics in 2009 are 25.99%; 23.36 in 2010; 30.9% in 2011; 38.81% in 2012; 36.65% in 2013; and 31.28% in 2014. One begins to enquire what the root causes of this ugly trend are. Different people give different answer to the question.

Nigeria is a multilingual country where students are surrounded by a complex linguistic situation that forced them to learn both the indigenous and the English language which consequently attributed to the mother tongue interference. Adedokun, (2011) stated that poorly trained and untrained teachers of English constituted the major problems. Sa'ad (2007) based his complain on over crowd of the classrooms and stated that teaching and learning take place effectively when classes are moderate. Abdullahi, (2003) posits that teachers mostly prefer to employ traditional teaching methodologies in their English language instructions. Some students developed negative attitudes to the Subjects and were not been motivated thus making English language teachers' task difficult (Mohammed, 2002).

Krashen (1981) SLA Theory

Krashen (1981) formulated input hypothesis based on the fact that input was "all necessary for second language acquisition to take place" (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 20). He claims that language is acquired when learners understand messages. The understanding of these messages is influenced by engaging learners with the material effectively and affectively; by providing an authentic and real context of communication; by making learners interact; and by considering learners' needs and different learners' learning strategies and styles. Hedge (2000), states that it is assumed that learners have "a preferred way of approaching learning and processing information" (p. 18) and that there are "techniques used by learners to deal with input, assimilate new language, store, retrieve, and practice using it" (p. 19). For example, metacognitive, communication, and socio-cognitive strategies are very important for SLA due to the fact that learners need to regulate their learning by planning, thinking, self-monitoring, and evaluating their own learning; to communicate using strategies such as gestures; and practice the target language (Hedge, 2000). The hypothesis centered around five principles:

- i. The acquisition-learning hypothesis: this is concerned with implicit and explicit learning process. Krashen (1981) sees language acquisition as a subconscious learning process in which children were exposed natural language communication in order to convey meaning and infer rules. Language learning is a conscious process of developing metalinguistic knowledge through formal study. Second language can learned in the same process of language acquisition.
- ii. The natural order hypothesis: this hypothesis is concerned with the preferential order of language skills. He claims that students acquire second language in a certain order. The order will not necessarily be linear. Therefore second language acquisition resembles first language acquisition, but is not identical.
- iii. The monitor hypothesis: this is concerned with the learning process. Krashen (1981) states that conscious learning of the grammatical rules serves as a monitor for checking second language production. The function of the monitor on the language learner depends on the knowledge of rules of the second language acquired. He predicts that pupils who over used the monitor may be hindered in their second language

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production for fear of making mistakes. This he calls "increased affective filter." The students who underutilized the monitor contemplate on whether their second language production is correct. Optimally, the monitor should be used when the situation is appropriate, without it hindering spontaneous second language performance.

- iv. The input hypothesis: this hypothesis is connected with the acquisition process. It describes how second language acquisition takes place and how the students move from one competence level to another. When students were presented with the correct second language input, which contains some elements that are marginally above their present competence level, acquisition happens automatically (Gass & Selinker, 1994). The input hypothesis emphasizes that understanding the general content of the second language input is key to the second language acquisition. The comprehension precedes forms. This is because the students understand the input by using not only his second language competence but also knowledge of context, genre, world knowledge, and earlier experiences.
- v. The affective filter hypothesis: this hypothesis is concerned with the emotional aspects of the SLA. The SLA learners' feelings affect how much input he exposes himself to and how much of it he learns. Feelings and attitude will affect motivation, self-confidence and anxiety levels (Pritchard, 2003). Krashen (1981) predicts that the outcome of SLA will depend amongst other things on two folds: first the students' aptitude and second the students' attitude. Aptitude relates to learning and will predict how well a pupil will perform in tests which call on the use of the Monitor. The attitude to learn second language can be influenced by several factors like interest, attitudes, motivation etc. When second language is used often, to a practical end, and the pupil is motivated and interested, the learning process will be more problems free (Marschark, Lang & Albertini, 2002). This indicates that affective factors influence learners' readiness to understand messages. Low affective filter implies low anxiety and high self-confidence contributes to SLA.

Krashen (1981) SLA Theory and English Language Teaching in Nigeria

Despite the fact that no theory is free of criticism, Krashen's (1981) SLA theory contains some useful principles of second language acquisition: the principles of the acquisition-learning, the input theory, the natural order, the monitor, the affective filter and aptitude and attitude. However, in the pure forms all the language teaching and learning approaches have been criticized and found lacking (Dornyei, 2009). Contemporary SLA researchers no longer adhere to pure teaching methods, and therefore in the current "post-method" era the question is not so much "which method is best", but rather "which combination of ingredients is best" (Wik, 2011). The attention here is to analyze the five principles and explain their implementation in English language teaching, learning as well as the development of teaching and learning materials in Nigeria.

The principles of the theory informed English language teaching, learning, and the development of material resources with a view to providing effective atmosphere for English language instruction. English language teaching can be effective when:

- i. English language teachers make the content of their lessons understandable to the students;
- ii. The English language teachers delay the teaching of the rules of the language until the students understanding of the context is achieved in the early stages of the language learning;
- iii. The English language instruction should be contextual, meaningful and use-focus; and
- iv. English language teachers provide students with opportunities for interaction which allows them to use their language for communication with the purpose of negotiating meaning in real life situations.

English language is learned when:

- i. The students are exposed to comprehensible input;
- ii. The English language is used for communicative purposes;
- iii. The students interact with each other to negotiate meaning; and
- iv. The Knowledge about the English language follows students' knowledge of the language.

English language teaching and learning materials engage students when:

- i. The English language teaching and learning resources are authentic, meaningful and relevant to the students;



- ii. The resources focus on providing students with meaningful tasks;
- iii. The resources offer students grammar explanations in a context of language use rather than isolated English language practice; and
- iv. The resources call for students' interaction and negotiation of meaning.

CONCLUSION

Krashen (1981) SLA theory contributes to the understanding of how good languages are learned, taught, and how language teaching and learning resources can be developed. The presentation of the video clips shows that it is not all English language instructional practices are interactive and communicative. The students were not offered learners opportunities to foster independent learning. The learners cannot learn independently and control their English language learning process. The paper directed how English language teaching and learning can be redirected from product-oriented to process-oriented practices.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- i. Mentoring: English language teachers in Nigeria should deal with complex decisions of integrating their knowledge of SLA theory in language teaching, learning, and the development of the materials resources in order to avoid reduplicating the same mistakes from traditional learning approaches.
- ii. Supervision: the ministries of education in the country should be monitoring the teaching and learning of English language in Schools for proper English language curriculum implementation.
- iii. Workshop: the government, the international agencies, and all educational stake holders should organize workshops to educate and update English language teachers knowledge on the teaching strategies, resources development, or learners' strategies needs for effective English language instructions.

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