

EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION: ANY ROLE IN CLASSROOM TEACHING – LEARNING PROCESS IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS?

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Abstract. The place of effective communication is so central and indispensable in the classroom teaching and learning process. Teacher in the classroom requires effective communication skills in marshaling his/her points before learning that could lead to the attainment of educational aims and objectives in the school can take place. In this presentation, the following were discussed among others; the concept of teaching, the concept of learning, internal and external factors in the child's growth and development, the concept of communication and communication process in the classroom, the channels and styles of communication, nonverbal, visual communication, communication and classroom teaching skills, communication barriers and solutions to barriers to effective communication in the classroom. It was concluded and recommended that teachers' should therefore try as much as possible to reduce impediments tagged 'communication barriers' by complying with the discussed classroom communication skills in order to ensure the goal attainment of teaching- learning in schools in Nigeria.

Keywords: effective communication, role, classroom, teaching/learning

Introduction

Effective communication has always been and still an important aspect of human daily living. Its place is so central not only in the formal organisation but in every human society. More than ever before, its importance is heightened by the fact that the whole world has now become a global village due to the development of modern technology. Good as communication is, its effectiveness could be hindered by any existing gap. Thus, the term ‘communication gap’ not only signifies failure in communication among groups of people in the society but also between and among various levels and classes of people in an organisation. Incidences around one and one personal experience suggest that larger percentage of crisis in any organisation, and even at home, result from breakdown in communication. The historic failed Tower of Babel in the holy Bible (Genesis 11: 1-9) could not be completed despite the huge invested human and material resources because of their inability to communicate effectively among themselves.

Teaching-learning situation in the school requires skillful and effective communication. In the school system, quite a number of pupils fail not because they have low mental ability to cope academically or lack readiness for learning but because of ineffective communication of some teachers in the classrooms, coupled with the fact that most often the teaching language is secondary and foreign to the learners. The phobia of many children in Mathematics may not only be due to the fact that they cannot do some mental sums and solve problems of simple calculations but because of the language and terms used in teaching the subject. Thus, in this presentation, different methods that the teacher can use to ensure effective communication in teaching- learning in the classroom and ways of preventing barriers to such effectiveness are discussed.

Teaching as a concept

Teaching involves sharing experience between the teacher and the learner. It has to do with the expression of an intention with the aim of bringing

about a desirable change in the behaviour of the learner. In the view of Salami (2009), teaching involves a kind of communication that has an impression in the mind of the learner in such a way that he or she accepts the desirable new experience.

As an aimed job, teaching enables the teacher to be interested in the development of the pupils through certain subjects in the school curriculum. In order for the teacher to facilitate pupil's overall development in the school, certain specialised knowledge and skills are required. It equally requires competencies through specialized professional training. According to Salami (2009) a teacher should be: (i) academically equipped to teach effectively and confidently; (ii) capable of inspiring the children under his care and be ready to learn throughout life; (iii) able to meet the emotional, physical intellectual and social needs of the Child's personality development; (iv) capable of exercising intelligent appreciation of the global world sensitive and flexible to changes and effective innovative practice; (v) ready to promote continuity of thought on the desirable elements in the moral, cultural and social heritage of the society he/she services; (vi) help the children to develop critical thinking and scientific attitude to life problem solving; (vii) able to help the children to develop attitudes that will promote the desired solidarity and unity of the society; (viii) able to help the children to appreciate their cultural and aesthetic values; and (ix) able to help pupils to learn patterns of relationships and inter-relationship that will help them to function effectively as members of the society.

Considering the above, a teacher can be seen to be a unique individual who is expected to be functional in transmitting specific body of knowledge, help in the maintenance of fundamental social values, wage war against mediocrity, and enhance search for excellence in the functioning of the school.

Generally, the teacher in the school can be said to be performing instructional roles, administrative and executive roles as well as social roles. For the instructional roles, the teacher is a motivator, an organiser of learning, an instructional planner, an ego supporter, a resource person, an information giver, a manager

and a counsellor. In his administrative roles, he/she can be seen as a disciplinarian, an evaluator, a record keeper, a resource person, a programme planner, manager and director. His social functions include; organising and co-ordination of people, appreciating people's peculiarities, parents' surrogate, a welfare worker, an ego supporter, a value bearer and a disciplinarian.

In the classroom, where teaching and learning take place, effective communication is the veritable tool and bedrock upon which the indispensable and significant roles of the teachers are built. It enhances complete and meaningful interaction between the teachers and the learners. It is noteworthy that many of those problems and failures emanating from the school result from ineffective communication in the classroom or the entire school system. Successful teaching and learning can only take place when there is effective communication in the classroom.

Learning as a concept

The word "learning" is an household word. It is such a difficult term to define as different writers, and scholars define the term differently. However, psychologists and educationists oftentimes define it as a relative permanent change in behaviour as a result of an acquired knowledge, practice and experience in a given environment. Learning can be viewed to be an act of acquiring new or modifying or enforcing existing knowledge, behaviours, skills, values or preferences that may involve the use of different types of information. Learning, therefore, can either be intended or unintended. People can learn through schooling, personal experience and personal development and training.

According to Owuamanam and Owuamanam (2002), most human activities in the three educational domains of the child are learned. Such activities were observed to include perception, reading, swimming, driving, singing, interpersonal skills and interpersonal relationships, morals as well as values. Learning of the child in any of the activities mentioned above depends on such a child's maturation. The child must be matured enough before he or she can be

successful in any training, practice and observation. For example, a child who learns how to walk and walks must have been matured enough to perform the activities before he/she can do so. In the school system, equally, the pupil must be of school age before he or she can comprehend and assimilate the classroom teaching no matter the level of such a child's intelligence quotient. The following are features that can be observed in learning: it is a lifelong process, it is a universal process, it is a process geared towards achieving specific goal(s) as the individual adjust to the environment while progress and developments are bye products of learning. They posited that learning of the child can be influenced by either internal or external factors, that is, the nature and the nurture influence on the child's growth and development.

The concept of communication

The word 'communication' is such a common concept that has no single accepted way of defining it. In this context however, communication, according to Schemerhorn (2002), is an interpersonal process of sending and receiving symbols that have messages attached to them. It has equally been described by Baran (2004) as the transmission of a message from a source to a receiver, while Smith (2009) presented it as an interactive process of providing and passing of information that enables an organization like the school system to function officially and for employees to be informed about developments within the system. Simply, it is passing of meaningful messages from one person to another or group of people.

Babatunde (2009), referencing Laxswell, (n.d) came up with a simple component of communication as involving: "who says what in which channel, to whom, and with what effect?" Also, Ogden (2005) perceived communication to be the process of increased community or sharing between participants on the basis of receiving and sending messages.

Communication does not only connote transmitting a message, rather, it entails understanding of the transmitter's message by the receiver. Effective communication in the classroom therefore, is the act of teacher inducing the pupils to interpret an idea or a concept taught in the manner intended by the teacher. For learning to take place among the pupils in the classroom, the pupils must have a clear-cut interpretation of the teacher's teaching. Thus, effective communication in the classroom involves the encoder (the teacher) and the decoder (the pupils) understanding their interactions.

Communication process in the classroom

A good understanding of the principle and process of communication will avail the classroom teacher the opportunity to pass his/her pedagogical knowledge and skills across to the pupils in the classroom with ease. This process occupies a central position in the classroom daily interactions as learning only takes place when the pupils understand the message of the teacher through his teaching. The concept 'process' can be viewed as any phenomenon which indicates a continuous change in time or any continuous operation or treatment. On this note, one can perceive classroom communication to be an activity that is ongoing, dynamic, not static but continuous. Three fundamental elements are to be noted before an effective communication can take place in the classroom. The elements are: the communicator (teacher), the message (the impacted knowledge), and the receiver (the pupils).

In Fig. 1, the teacher serves as the source of the message who is obliged to teach certain concept for pupils to understand and learn in the classroom. The instructional method indicates the teacher's teaching approaches to ensure that learning takes place. The approaches include among others; the instructional material, the method of teaching adopted and most essentially the language and style of passing his/her lesson across to the pupils. The receivers are the pupils who are being taught to learn and acquire knowledge in the class. This can only take place when effective communication takes place. The reactions from the

pupils which are observable in their behavior serve as feedback to the teacher. When the pupils respond positively or knowledgeably to the teacher’s questions or evaluation, then effective communication has taken place, and vice-versa. The indicated ‘noise’ implies any form of distraction that serves as impediment to the effectiveness of teaching–learning process in the classroom.

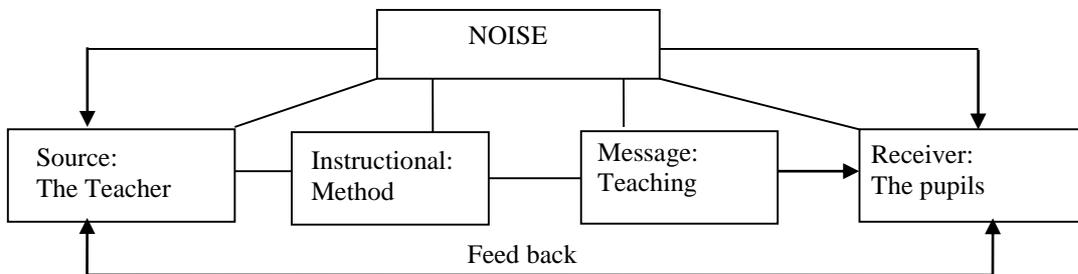


Fig. 1. A self-designed diagrammatic expression of elements of effective communication in the school system

Communication can be said to be effective in the classroom when learning actually takes place among the pupils. In the classroom teaching and learning situation, effective communication may be said to serve both functional and psychological purposes. Communication becomes functional when it satisfies the aims and objectives of teaching in the classroom while it becomes psychological when it enhances the interpersonal skills and interaction of every member of the classroom. In the school system, these should be encouraged.

Channels of classroom communication and learning in classroom

Basically, channels of communication in teaching-learning situation in the classroom can either be formal or informal.

The formal channels of communication

Vertical and horizontal forms of communication are the most common ways of communication flow discussed by Alabi (1988) and Fashiku (1997). In

the classroom, where teaching-learning takes place, vertical communication is the formal method employed by the teacher as the classroom manager in teaching, giving directives, passing instructions to the pupils, and indicating goals for learning to take place among the pupils in the classroom. Vertical communication is a formal channel of communication in the classroom that can either be downward or upward.

Downward communication in teaching learning

It is a communication flow from the classroom teacher to the classroom pupils. The language here is formal and the tone is specific in bringing about understanding and instructions and relationships in the classroom. The teacher passes information and the lesson's procedure and practice in the school system, sets an objective and provides the means of evaluating the lesson which will serve as a form of feedback on the intended transmission and acquisition of knowledge by the pupils.

Upward communication in teaching learning

Olubadewo (1992) viewed upward communication to be a flow of information from the employee at the bottom of the management to the top management, in the classroom, upward communication is concerned with the communication that emanates from the pupils to the teacher. Fashiku (2007) posited it as the channel through which the low ranking, the staff, relay their interest to the management. In like manner, it serves as a channel through which the classroom pupils make known to their teachers the extent to which learning has taken place through the questions they responded to or ask from the teacher in the classroom. Upward communication serves as sources of improvement in teaching-learning situation in the classroom. It reveals the degree of teacher's success in his/her lessons in the classroom. It equally encourages meaningful participation of pupils in the classroom and finds solutions to some pedagogic problems.

Horizontal communication in the classroom

This kind of communication is also called lateral communication system. It is a communication type that takes place among the people of the same levels in a given setting. In the classroom situation, horizontal communication takes place among and between the school pupils. It occurs in their various learning interactions and discussions. This can be in the form of a pupil explaining certain concepts that are difficult to others without the teacher's involvement. Usually in horizontal communication, the language is informal and interaction occurs in a relaxed mood. Horizontal communication promotes team work, and it is more effective with the encoder and the decoder.

The informal channels of communication

In any organisation, informal communication may be said to represent all modes of communication which are not formalised. More often than not, when formal channel of communication fails, informal communication can be very strong and may even take precedence over the formal communication in some cases. In teaching and learning that takes place in the classroom, this can take a form of advice, information, discussion, gossips and rumour otherwise called the 'grape vine'. The inherent problem in informal communication (rumour/gossip) is that it may be detrimental to the attainment of the stated aims and objectives of classroom teaching. The teacher therefore should discourage this among the pupils and for this to be discouraged pupils should promptly be kept abreast of any information that may affect their learning and progress in the class.

Communication styles in classroomteaching and learning

In the views of Bolaji and Alabi (1994), there are three basic forms of communication in the school while Nawankwo (2014) discussed verbal and non-verbal communication. Fashiku (2007) included communication through electronic and mechanical devices.

Oral or verbal communication in the class

This is the commonest form of communication; it involves talking to one another and face to face interaction between the teacher and the pupils as well as between and among the pupils. This type of style can be adjudged most significant and effective means of classroom interaction between the teacher and the pupils in knowledge acquisition. It allows for an immediate feedback such that, the teachers teaching can be reinforced with facial expression, body gestures, voice inflection and a combination of such other physical devices. This method of communication should be used and encouraged in the classroom.

Written communication in the classroom

This is more of a formal method of communication in teaching learning-situation in the classroom. It occurs when the teacher presents his facts and figures on the white or the chalk board while explaining things to the pupils. It includes such chalkboard summary, writing of questions and answers for the pupils, giving assignments and even giving the pupils short notes to copy in the classroom. In doing this, the teacher needs to write in a simple and clear language, the handwriting must be legible and his writing on the chalkboard must be from left to the right hand side. Equally, the teacher needs to check the pupils' notebooks from time to time in order to ascertain that correct information is written by the pupils as given by the class teacher.

Non-verbal communication in the classroom

It is another form of communication that is very important because the real intention of the communicator is shown through body gestures as the eye contact, facial expression, postures, dress and even physical setting of the classroom (Nwankwo, 2014). These paralinguistic make non-verbal communication to be more effective than oral and written form of communication. In teaching-learning process, the teacher in most cases ensures that learning is effectively

imparted by complementing both oral and written communication with eye contact with the pupils, facial expression, postures and even touching or patting them at the back for a good response to the teacher's teaching or question.

Visual communication in the classroom

This is equally effective in teaching-learning situation in the classroom because it involves the use of relevant pictures in conveying teacher's message to the pupils. In the classroom, this involves the use of such teaching aids as pictures, overhead projectors, multisensory communication system, and a host of other instructional materials not mentioned. In using this type of communication method, the teacher should be precautious enough to avoid, overdisplay of such pictures which may distract the pupils' attention.

The teaching aid to be used should be bold and legible, the painting or colour must be well appropriate and should be appropriately used during the lesson. This type of communication method helps the retention ability of the pupils as whatever they see, they do not forget easily.

Communication by means of electronics and mechanical devices in the classroom

With rapid technological improvement in the society, people have been communicating through the use of electronic and mechanical devices like the telephone, radiophone, handset, the e-mail, fax and the internet. These are modern communication devices that turn the whole world to a global village. Teachers can give assignments to pupils to surf on the net, check their result online and engage in some other online registration in the school. The teacher can as well teach his lessons online. All these methods are now in place. not only in the advance countries of the world but equally in developing countries like Nigeria.

Communication process and the classroom teaching skills

Teaching skills are complex behaviours that are used in facilitating teaching-learning in the classroom. These skills can only be effective if they are well complemented and conveyed through appropriate communication method. Among such skills are the following (Ajayi, 2001): (i) *Set induction*: This skill, otherwise called pre-instructional orientation, is concerned with the skills required by the teacher while introducing the lesson. This skill is required by the teacher while introducing the intended lesson in such a way that the pupils' attention will be captured and their anxiety to learn will be aroused. In doing this, the teacher must use the appropriate channel, language, and style of communication, putting into consideration the pupils' age, environment and even time in doing so. When appropriate communication skills are used in introducing the lesson, pupils will learn better and faster in the classroom; (ii) *Stimulus variation*: This is another skill required by the teacher to inculcate knowledge. Better in the pupils, this skill is needed in the classroom to prevent boredom and make learning more interesting. The teacher needs to change from time to time the stimuli or the mode being used in passing across his message to pupils in the classroom. In doing this, the teacher requires a good sense of humour and appropriate communication skills to prevent or remove boredom from the pupils. For example, body movement, gestures, focusing interaction analysis, pausing, shifting sensory channels, from one sense to another requires different forms of communication (these were identified and discussion earlier). The teacher can shift from oral, written, verbal, non-verbal or visual communication by means of electronics in removing boredom from the pupils and make them active learners in the classroom; (iii) *Use of instructional materials and illustrations*: Another teaching skills that require the use of effective communication in the classroom is the use of instructional materials and illustrations which are carrier of relevant information in facilitating the learners' understanding of a particular fact and concepts. The teacher in the application of this skill needs a contribution

of both non-verbal and visual communication techniques. Quite a number of teachers lack the required and appropriate knowledge and skills in making use of this technique. A number of teachers over display the instructional materials which distract the pupils' attention in learning; they could also make use of wrong colours, writings on the instructional materials that are not bold enough, wrong timing in its use, and a host of such other errors can be observed in their use of instructional materials and illustrations; (iv) *Reinforcement skill*: Reinforcement skill is another vital skill the classroom teacher need in ensuring effective learning among the school pupils. They are gestural skills from the teachers to either encourage or discourage certain responses from the pupils in the classroom teaching leaning situation. More often than not, the teacher makes use of this skill to motivate the learners to be proactive and be well involved in the classroom activities. An effective communication system is required in the teacher's efforts to reinforce pupils' attempts to answer his/her questions in the class. The teacher makes use of verbal words as: good, excellent, that is good enough, what if you say it the other way, why not this and a host of such other motivating statements. As well, other body gestural skills can still be used to reinforce pupils' response politely. The teacher can ask the pupils to clap their hands for a pupil's correct response to the question just asked, nod the head, or even smile as a sign of appreciating the correct answer given by the pupil to the question asked. Facial cues like a frown or a strong quizzical look or shaking of the head lightly can be used by the teacher to disapprove a wrong answer; (v) *Questioning skill*: This skill is otherwise known as the Socratic Method. It is very important to be understood by every teacher. The teacher makes use of questions at every stage of his lesson. Questions are useful at the beginning, middle, and at the end of the lesson. Certain categories of questions are good while some other ones are bad. This is the more reason why the teacher needs to have good communication skills in asking his questions at different levels and stages of his lesson to facilitate effective learning among the pupils. Good questions are not leading but thought-out and are supposed to enable the listeners to

think rightly. One of the right ways of doing this is to ask a question, pause for a while, and then call a pupil's name to answer it; (vi) *Recognising attending behaviour*: Quite a number of pupils in the class have a lot of behaviours that the teacher needs to attend to; among such behaviours are noise making, emotional instability, loss of attention and even problem of indiscipline. These forms or behaviours, if not properly managed by the teachers will impede the attainment of the aims and objectives of learning in the classroom. In solving the problem, the teacher needs to make use of a combination of communication skills. The teacher needs to re-arrange the classroom sitting position in such a way that 100% of the pupils will be under the teacher's cone of view. This will make every pupil to think that the teacher is looking at him or her each time he/she wants to be unruly. Teacher's direct eye contact with any pupil whose mind wants to stray from the lesson is required to command the attention of such erring child. Also, the teacher's mere pat on any pupil's back goes a long way to tell such a child that he/she is being appreciated. This will especially prevent such a child from being wayward (NCE, 1996).

Communication barrier in teaching learning process

Personal experience and other supportive evidences abound that successful communication in the classroom is difficult to achieve. There are certain effective communication obstacles which when not adequately considered and avoided may impede learning in the classroom. Some of these obstacles are: (a) inadequate verbal communication skill of speaking and listening; (b) problems of meaning; (c) contradicting verbal and non-verbal message; (d) noise in the environment; (e) distortion; (f) message overloading; (g) wrong timing; (h) perception problem; (i) auditory problem; and (j) psychological problem, among others, hindering classroom effective communication.

The teacher in the classroom can prevent this problem through the following measures: (a) The teacher should speak at the levels of the pupils using clear, simple, and concise words that will be meaningful to them; (b) Use an

appropriate channel in impacting the needed knowledge; (c) Encourage quick feedback; (d) Use in most cases face-to-face communication; (e) Emphasise the salient points in teaching through repetition of the points; and (f) Each the lesson with appropriate instructional materials and the teacher's action should correlate his communication.

Conclusion and recommendations

In this presentation, the following areas have been touched; the concept of teaching, the concept of learning, internal and external factors in the child's growth and development, the concept of communication and communication process in the classroom, the channels and styles of communication, communication and classroom teaching-learning, communication barriers and solutions to the barriers to effective communication in the classroom.

The place of effective communication is so central and indispensable in the classroom teaching and learning process. Teachers in the classroom require effective communication skills in marshaling their points before effective learning that could lead to the attainment of educational aims and objectives in the school can take place. They should therefore try as much as possible to reduce impediments tagged 'communication barriers' in order to ensure effective goal attainment of teaching- learning in the classroom.

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