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By Wordu, Nkasiobi Chinyeaka & Dr. Oji, Emmanuel Wichendu
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education

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Enhancing Teacher-Learner Communication Strategies in the Classroom for Effective Lesson Delivery in the 21st Century

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I. Introduction

Communication is the act of transmitting and exchanging thoughts, ideas, opinions and information. It is, as, Mangal and Mangal, (2009) put it, a process of sharing or exchanging experiences, information, ideas, opinions, sentiments, thoughts, feelings, etc. between the source of communication and receiver through some mutually agreeable or known media either verbaly or non-verbally, face-to-face or virtually.

Teaching is communication, and teachers should be good communicators. Educationists are concerned with the communication that takes place in the classroom between teacher and learner and the latter who learns well is the one who participates well in the communication process. The essence of communication is to achieve effective learning outcomes, such learning outcomes can be facilitated by certain strategies or techniques adopted by the communicator. The communicator can use gadgets such as audio-visuals, visuals to communicate/teach or be the direct communicator as teachers or parents do.

In the formal educational sector, the teacher stands as the communicator, the channel through which learners gain knowledge of the content taught through the act of imparting is generally known as teaching. Teaching is thus a communication means adopted by teachers to achieve effective teaching and learning by the learners. The teacher's communication strategies should be such that he/she achieves the objectives of imparting knowledge, skills, ideas, attitude, and character to learners and also enables learners to have a deep grasp of the content taught in the classroom.

Classroom communication is the process by which the teacher, the learner and the instructional materials interact purposefully to achieve learning. The success of the learner depends largely on how teachers interact with the learners in the classroom (Amadi, 2006). It is therefore important for a teacher to learn how to communicate effectively in the classroom because communication is a two way process. One can communicate to others through spoken words, silence, body postures, gestures, facial expressions, written words, graphics, paintings, music and other creative forms of expression as stated by Kuma, (2008).This paper examines the role of good communication between teacher and learner in the teaching - learning process.

II. Classroom Communication

Communication in the classroom is mostly carried out through verbal and non-verbal modes in a class. When Communication is done or carried out through the use of words (oral) and written forms, it is termed verbal communication but when communication is done through feelings, thoughts, signs, gestures, etc. without the use of oral or written language it is termed non-verbal communication (Kumar, 2008).

III. Verbal Communication in the Classroom

To Live strong Foundation (2013), verbal communication is using sounds and language to pass on a message and it is seen as the primary way or tool for expression between two or more people. In verbal communication, messages, ideas or feelings, are conveyed through the use of mouth, and using spoken words for example, talking face to face, on telephone, or as a speech. It helps teaching and learning as well as forming bonds and relationships with people. The key

Author α σ: Department of Curriculum & Inst. Technology Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni. e-mails: wnkasiobi@yahoo.com, emmanuelwicendu@yahoo.com

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components are words, sound, speaking and language. For verbal communication to be used effectively in the classroom, the teacher must speak;

- ✓ Audibly
- ✓ Write eligibly
- ✓ Read loud enough for all students to hear
- ✓ Use the right vocal expression, i.e. the intonation and inflection in a spoken message which is more important than the verbal content. (Bharti, 21st January 2015).

These will give the right meaning of the words spoken and ease understanding of the message. Verbal communication in the classroom usually rests on the teacher who does most of the talking and the students talk only when they are asked to talk, like when they are asked a question or when they ask questions.

For effective verbal communication, students should be allowed to participate orally too by reading, narrating, questioning and writing in their books. This helps the teacher to get feedback from the students and helps the students to feel free and not be afraid of the teacher and also form bonds with classmates as they try to find answers to questions together(Papa, 2014).

IV. Types of Verbal Communication

There are two basic types of verbal communication:

Interpersonal Communication: This generally refers to a two-way exchange that involves both talking and listening and relies on both language and emotion to produce desired effect. It can be used to inform, inquire, argue and discuss topics of all kinds. It is vital to teaching and learning as well as forming bonds and relationships between teacher and learner and between learner and learner.

Public Speaking: Involves one or more people delivering a message to a group, it is commonly understood as face-to-face speaking between individuals and an audience for purpose of communication (HBO Documentary, 2010).

V. Effect of Negative Verbal Behaviours

For a teacher to deliver a lesson effectively, some behaviour must be avoided such as:

- ✓ Inconsistency or hidden messages.
- ✓ Rudeness.
- ✓ Raised voice and shouting at a student.
- ✓ Incoherent diction
- ✓ Too much talk.
- ✓ In appropriate language and style.

These will demoralize the students and they might withdraw from the teacher. The teacher should rather ensure that:

- ➢ Clear messages are given,
- ➢ Clear diction is used with good modulated tones.
- ➢ Show respect to students.
- ➢ Be encouraging.
- ➢ Show appropriate use of praise.

These will ensure the effective delivery of lessons, help students to feel free with the teacher and so will show interest and participate in the lesson.

VI. Non-Verbal Communication

Good communication is the foundation of successful relationships, both personally and professionally. But we communicate with much more than words. The majority of our communication as Mc Garry, (2009) puts it is without words or non-verbal otherwise known as body language.

Lopetegul, (2009) states that body language is not only what you say, it is the way that you say it. Non-verbal behaviours in the class aid retention of what is learnt.

VII. The Roles of Non-Verbal Cues

Non-verbal cues can play four positive roles. These according to Lopetegul (2009) are:

1. *Repetition:* Non-verbal behaviour can repeat and re-enforce the message the teacher is sending verbally to enhance understanding as stated by Papa (2014), drives the point home.
2. *Substitution:* Non-verbal behaviours in the class-room can substitute for verbal messages e.g. the eye can convey a message much more than words and often does.
3. *Complementing:* Non-verbal behavior can complement the teacher's message giving it the exact meaning.
4. *Accenting:* Non-verbal behaviour can give more emphasis and effect to what was spoken(Segal, and Smith, 2014)

These effects hold the student's attention, help them also give non-verbal responses which helps and enables the teacher to read the students accurately e.g. their emotions, the unspoken messages they send out and that creates trust.

Non-verbal communication is a powerful tool that helps teachers express what they really mean and to connect to their students. It is a vital form of communication, when interacting with others, we continuously give and receive countless wordless signals and this is what happens in the classroom also. Teachers should be aware of non-verbal messages in the classroom Grenville, (2013) stated that it will help them become:

- ✓ Better receivers of students messages.
- ✓ Better senders of signals that reinforces learning.
- ✓ Sure of sending the right messages to students.

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Grenville continued to say that some of the non-verbal behaviours in the classroom are:

- ✓ The gestures the teacher makes
- ✓ The way the teacher sits
- ✓ How fast or loud the teacher talks
- ✓ How close the teacher stands by a student
- ✓ How much eye contact the teacher makes.

All these send strong messages to the students. The way the teacher listens, looks, moves and reacts tells the students whether or not the teacher cares or tells how well the teacher listens.

a) The (Importance of the) Teacher in The Classroom Communication

As Unachukwu, (1990) succinctly put it, a teacher is a person trained or recognised and employed to help learning in a classroom situation in order to achieve set educational goals.

Professionally, a teacher is one who attempts to help someone acquire or change some skills, attitude, knowledge, idea or appreciation. He creates and influences desirable changes in the behaviour of his pupils, (Peretomode, 1992).In ordinary usage, the term teacher is often used to refer to anybody who imparts information or knowledge or merely instructs another.

The teacher has the most important function in any teaching-learning situation, he/she carries out the real art of teaching and some of the roles according to Peretomode (1992) are:

- ✓ He/she decides what is important,
- ✓ Plans for learning outcomes,
- ✓ Decides subject matter to be covered,
- ✓ Provides and uses instructional materials,
- ✓ Decides on instructional methods to be used,
- ✓ Decides on the overall goals to be reached,
- ✓ Develops learning experiences,
- ✓ Counsels students,
- ✓ Attends to or responds to students' personnel problems,
- ✓ Motivate students, etc.

Amadi, (2006) included other teacher's functions like:

Creates a democratic atmosphere in the class where students can freely express their ideas and opinions,

- ✓ Smiles at the students,
- ✓ Calls them by name,
- ✓ Is friendly and helpful to student,
- ✓ Is generous with patience,
- ✓ Is considerate of their feelings and
- ✓ Is alert to give service.

These prove that classroom communication lies in the hand of the teacher as he/she is solely in control of all activities that takes place in the class.

b) A Learner

Collins English Dictionary (2013) says that a learner is someone who is learning a particular subject or how to do something. Free-online Dictionary sees a learner as one who is learning and could be a pupil; an apprentice; or a trainee. A learner is someone who is taught by a teacher either at home or in a classroom in a school, formally or informally. The learner is the main concern of teaching – learning activities and the focus of the teacher and the school as a whole (Balogun, 1981). Communicating effectively to and with the learner should be a priority concern of the teacher in the classroom for the teachers work is done if he or she can communicate effectively and the desired changes in the learner is achieved.

The learner is intended to gain knowledge, or mastery of something through practical experiences or study.

c) The Classroom

The classroom is defined by (www.bing.com/bing.dictionary) as a room where people are taught, a room especially in a school or college where classes are held. For this paper, a classroom is a designated room or space where learners have been arranged in a row or column seating arrangement or other forms of seating arrangement for learning. It is a safe place where learning occurs uninterrupted by other distractions.



Fig. 1: Normal Traditional Classroom Arrangement

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VIII. Categories of Classrooms

There are different categories of classrooms. Classrooms are set up in different ways to fit the needs of the students, it could be arranged to accommodate the needs of the students' learning abilities as well as the needs of the classroom activity, and some of these settings according to Cooper (2014) are:

a) The Traditional Classroom

Typical classrooms are set up with five or six rows all facing the front. The teacher's desk is at the front and so are chalkboards or whiteboards. Storage cupboards and shelves are on the remaining walls. The aisles have enough space between them for the teacher to walk up to each student. This set up allows all the students to see the teacher and the board. It also makes it easy for the teacher to hand out papers because he or she can give paper to each student in front of the row.



Fig. 2: http://www.123rf.com

b) Horseshoe Setup

Arranging desks in a horseshoe fashion, allows student to face each other and see the teacher. The horseshoe shape is preferably a circle because the teacher and student presenters can easily enter it and walk around to engage the other students. The horseshoe usually is open at the front so that the teacher can easily reach the desk and board.



Fig. 3: Horse Shoe Classroom

c) Divided Classroom

A classroom that is split has half the desks facing right and the other half facing left. In this way, the students can see each other and the teacher or presenters can walk in the middle. This is useful for classes that are having debates or other interactive discussions. This allows the teacher to sit in the back and allow the student to take leadership roles. Desks and tables work for this set up (Cooper, 2008).

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Fig. 4: Devided Classroom

d) Desk Cluster

Desk cluster are often seen when students are doing a lot of group work. The desks are arranged in small groups, quite often facing one another. The setting looks like little islands around the room. Each group is able to communicate easily with each other and the teacher can move between the desks to guide the students. Tables work well for this set up but desks are common because many students can turn their desks to form the cluster.



Fig. 5

e) Cluster Classroom

This paper favours the traditional classroom set up arranged in rows and columns seating arrangement as it makes for effective communication in class as the teacher faces the class during a lesson delivery and so can notice the non-verbal communication messages sent by the students.

He or she can walk down the class in the middle touching and talking to individual students,

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encouraging and rewarding them verbally as the lesson goes on.

IX. Communication Barrier in the Classroom

This includes those conditions that hinder effective communication for effective teaching-learning to take place in the classroom. They include:

- ✓ Spacing: Inadequate space between seats makes it difficult for the teacher to move about as to see and attend to students individually.
- ✓ Unventilated/Air-tight Classroom will be uncomfortable, no student concentrates in a classroom that is hot and unairy.
- ✓ Wrong sitting arrangement will constitute a barrier to communication in the class. It is also very uncomfortable to learn sitting on the floor, on broken chairs, on the window, or leaning on the wall.
- ✓ Stationary or fixed seat can also cause a barrier to communication in the class as no other seating arrangement can take place no matter what activity that is taking place in the class, because the seats are nailed or screwed to the floor and thus immovable (Study mode-Training Program, 2013).

X. Conclusion

Communication strategies are plans for communicating information from teacher to learner. It is the blue print for effective communication between students or pupils in the teaching/learning situation. What is intended to be accomplished is increasing awareness of the content taught, encouraging action through learners' participation and changing behaviour of the learner positively.

The focus of the teacher should be how to help the learners settle in class, feel at home and be willing to learn. To achieve this requires the application of non-verbal communication strategy as this will ensure effective learning through: facilitation of closeness between teacher and learner, instilling confidence in the learner, and increasing the child's desire to learn. It also erodes the child's fear of coming to school as the childis now relaxed, freer and friendly, the child now enjoys being in school. Lastly, it breaks the child's phobia of leaving home, according to Ibe-Bassey (2004) effective and efficient instruction leads to effective and efficient learning and an effective classroom communication between teacher and learner as well as between learner and teacher ensures this learning.

XI. Recommendation

In view of the importance of effective communication in teaching, this paper advances the following recommendations:

1. Colleges and Universities of Education should ensure the trainee teachers are taught proper communication skills as part of the curriculum.
2. Teachers should ensure that they acquire good communication skills by practicing and attending conferences, seminars and workshop.
3. Practicing teachers should be occasionally trained on communication skills.
4. Teachers should be conversant with different classroom seating arrangement that facilitates effective communication in the classroom.
5. Teachers should use more of non-verbal communication skills in the classroom while teaching.

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