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# Teachers' Questioning Behaviour and Instructional Organisation as Correlates of Students' Achievement in English Language

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*Abstract -* The study investigated the relationship between teacher's questioning behaviour and instructional organization and students' achievement in English Language. The study adopted a descriptive research design. Four Research Questions were answered. The participants were 30 English Language teachers and 450 students randomly selected from 15 Senior Secondary Schools. The instruments for data collection were Teachers' Questioning Behaviour Observation Checklist (r = .79), Teachers' Instructional Organization Obs-ervation Rating Scale ( r = .81 ) and Achievement Test in English Language ( r = .78 ). Findings revealed that teachers ask display and referential questions that are largely mono-directional. There is a positive, very strong relationship between Teachers' Questioning Behaviour and students' achievement in English Language. Teachers' Instructional Organization has negative, very weak relationship with students' achievement in English Language.

*Keywords :* *questioning, instruction, display, referential, mono-directional, achievement.*

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# Teachers' Questioning Behaviour and Instructional Organisation as Correlates of Students' Achievement in English Language

David O. Fakeye [α] & Evelyn Ayede [σ]

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*Keywords : questioning behaviour, instructional organization, display, referential, achievement.*

## I. Introduction

Inspite of the laudable importance and use of English Language as a medium of instruction and language of communication in the wider society of Nigeria, it has been noted that English Language competence of the Nigerian secondary school students has been on a steady decline since 1960. Onukaogu (2002) reported that observations and data emanating from the research on the performance of learners in achievement tests reveal that they are very poor in English Language. Akinkugbe (1994) and Oladunjoye (2005) note that poor learners of English pervade all segments of our society and stressed that if the problems associated with the teaching and learning of English are not adequately addressed that there will be serious implications. Also, WASSCE results (2006-2010) further buttress the fact that the poor performance of students in English Language is a recurrent problem that needs to be addressed. In 2006, out of 1154266 candidates that sat for the examination only 375007 (32.48%) made distinctions and credit grades; in 2007, out of 1,275,466 candidates that sat for the examination, 325,754 (25.5%) had distinctions and credit grades; in 2008, 1,369,42 candidates sat for the examination, only 188,442 (13.76%) made distinctions and credit grades; in 2009, out of 1,373,009 candidates, 356,981 (25.9 %) made distinctions and credit grades while in 2010, the percentage of students who made distinctions and credit grades in English dropped to 24.9% because only 337,071 made credit and distinctions grades out of 1,351,557 candidates that sat for the examination.

From the above result, one can deduce that only about 24% of the candidates that sat for WASSCE in the year under review had credit grades and above in English Language while a large percentage of students who sat for the examination scored below credit grades. The implication of this is that the percentage of students eligible to proceed for higher studies is comparatively low each year. This is because the entry requirement of candidates into various tertiary institutions-Universities, Polytechnics and Colleges of Education, as stated in the UTME Brochure, (2012) is a minimum of five credits which must include English Language.

A lot of factors have been adduced to be responsible for the poor performance of students' achievement in English Language and the quest fore solutions to the poor performance of students in English language has made a lot of scholars to carry out different researches. Atanda and Jaiyeoba (2011) postulate that of all the factors that could be responsible for the poor performance of students in English Language, teachers' competence ability is the most prominent. It is a general belief, as noted by Ahmad (2008), that success in teaching in the classroom lies in the teachers' hands because they are responsible for stimulating students' interest and in directing the mood flow of the class. This means that teachers' effectiveness is highly related to students' performance. The success of any teaching and learning process (which invariably influences students' academic achievement) depends on how effective and efficient the teachers are. Teachers who are the personnel in-charge of teaching and implementing educational policies designed to attain educational goals cannot be

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neglected, if the educational goals and in fact, national development goals are to be attained.

At this juncture, it is noted that success of the students in any examination also depends largely on qualified and dedicated teachers who are ready to ask good questions that will facilitate learning and organize instruction in such a way that it meets the need of the different students in the classroom. Oshodi (1998), Duyilemi and Duyilemi (2002) in their studies, reiterated that students in any country cannot perform beyond the quality of the teachers. In his own contribution, Bangbade (2004) found out that teachers' attributes have significant relationship with students' academic achievement. According to him such attributes include: teachers' knowledge of the subject matter, communication ability, emotional stability, instructional organization, good human relationship and interest in the job. He concluded that students whose teachers lack the knowledge of the subject matter, who have poor communication ability, poor emotional stability, and lack the ability to properly organize instruction do not perform like others whose teachers possess these attributes.

A teacher's knowledge of the subject matter, pupils and methodology and techniques of imparting knowledge are great attributes which have significant effects on the students' academic achievement. In his study, Elochukwu (2001) revealed that there was a significant relationship between teaches' ability to communicate effectively, asking germane questions, being organized and students' academic achievement in the secondary schools. He explained that teaching and learning processes deal with dissemination of ideas, skills, knowledge, values and attitude from the teachers to the students which must be properly organized. He concluded that teachers' ability to communicate effectively determines how much the students acquire from him/her which invariably influences their achievement each time they are tested in such aspects. One can observe from this, that, to be able to teach effectively, a teacher must be able to communicate his/her ideas efficiently and to achieve this; the message must be clear and precise. He must be able to organize instruction in such a way that it meets students need in a multi-dimensional state and be able to use teaching skills, such as questioning, properly to adjudicate accurate pedagogy in the classroom. This is what Fakeye (2007) refers to as teachers 'questioning behaviour. Questioning behaviour has to do with the nature and manner a teacher asks questions in the course of lesson, and this is considered as an important factor in improving students' academic achievement in English language. Fakeye (2007) argues that "an important aspect of classroom interaction in ESL classroom is teachers' questions which play significant roles in ESL instruction". Ayede (2012) asserts that questioning as a teaching strategy has consequent potential for influencing students' learning. Questioning is a core function of both learning and teaching; questions can stimulate students to think at higher cognitive levels, Dillon (1988).

Akandi (2009:10) suggested a variety of purposes for classroom questioning that include:

a. developing interest and motivate students to become actively involved in lessons
b. evaluating students' preparation and check on homework or classwork completion
c. developing critical thinking skills and inquiring attitudes
d. reviewing and summarizing previous lessons
e. nurturing insights by exposing new relationships
f. assessing achievement of instructional goals and objectives
g. stimulating students to pursue knowledge on their own

As one may deduce, questioning is one of the most popular attributes of teaching. For thousands of years, teachers have known that it is possible to transfer factual knowledge and conceptual understanding through the process of asking questions. Unfortunately, although the act of asking questions has the potential to greatly facilitate the learning process; it also has the capacity to turn a child off to learning if done incorrectly (Brualdi, 1998).

Fakeye (2007) identifies two main types of questions-Display questions and Referential questions. According to him," display questions are those questions for which the questioner knows the answer beforehand and such questions are usually asked for comprehension checks or clarification requests while referential questions are questions which require information which the teacher does not know; they require the interpretation and judgement on the part of the person to whom the questions are directed. Referential questions will encourage students to air their views concerning the subject matter and set the children thinking thereby enhancing their cognitive development". Questions asked by the teacher in the course of teaching can contribute to the collective understanding of the class.

The content of the questions and the manner in which teachers ask them determines whether or not they are effective. Some mistakes that teachers make during the question and answer process include asking vague questions (for example- What do you think of the story that we just read?). When questions such as the one mentioned is asked, students will usually not know how to respond and may answer the questions incorrectly. Thus, their feelings of failure may cause them to be more hesitant to participate in class, evoke some negative attitudes towards learning, and hinder the creation of a supportive classroom environment (Fakeye, 2007; Akandi, 2009; Ayede, 2012).

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Another variable of interest in this study is teachers' instructional organisation. Teachers' instructional organization entails the skilful planning and organisation of lessons by the teacher. This has also been found to be an important issue in improving students' academic achievement in English Language. The teacher as the implementer of the curriculum would have to determine how to systematically teach every topic that is lined up in the English Language syllabus. The way a teacher organizes his instruction will directly affect students' views of themselves as successful learners. Teachers organize instructions based upon their beliefs about students' learning. These teacher expectations tend to be fulfilled by students, which in turn reinforces the teacher's beliefs about students' learning. Thus, teachers' beliefs and understanding of the effects of instructional organization become crucial to the success of learning (Ames and Ames, 2004; Ayede, 2012).

It could be inferred that most of the studies cited on Teachers' Questioning Behaviour and Instructional Organization are located outside the shores of Nigeria. Besides, the extent to which the variables could predict students' achievement in English Language has not enjoyed much research attention even though the variables had been researched into in other school subjects.. There is therefore the need for further research in Nigeria on how these variables could predict students' achievement in English Language.

*a) Statement of the Problem*

The teaching and learning of English Language in secondary schools seems unsatisfactory as demonstrated by the poor academic performance of students in various examinations. Scholars have blamed the problem on the way the teaching and learning of English Language are handled in the classroom. Two of the factors that have been identified as accounting for poor students' achievement in general are teachers' questioning behaviour and instructional organization. Although, several researches conducted have pointed to the positive influence of teachers' questioning behaviour and instructional organization on students' academic achievement, most of these researches focused on other school subjects such as Literature in English, Mathematics and Biology. The extent to which the two variables could predict achievement in English Language has not enjoyed much research attention. Besides, most of the previous studies in these areas are located outside Nigeria. Therefore, the study investigated the extent to which teachers' questioning behaviour and instructional organization could correlate with students' achievement in English Language.

*b) Research Questions*

The following research questions were proposed to give direction to the study:

1. What type of questioning behaviour is put up by English Language teachers?
2. Is there any significant relationship between teachers' questioning behaviour and students' academic achievement in English language?
3. What is the pattern of instructional organization adopted by the teachers?
4. Is there any significant relationship between teachers' instructional organization and students' achievement in English Language?

*c) Scope of the Study*

The study examined the extent to which the questioning behaviour and instructional organization of 25 teachers of English Language in public and private schools correlates with, and ultimately predicts the overall academic achievement of their students in English Language in Oyo State of Nigeria.

*d) Significance of the Study*

This study helps to provide teachers with information on the types of questions and questioning behaviours that can facilitate the learning process. The study also shows the extent to which teachers' organized lessons can improve the academic achievement of students of English Language in Nigerian secondary schools. Secondary school curriculum planners and all stakeholders in Education would also benefit by noting the emphasis on inculcating proper instructional organization and questioning behaviour in curriculum planning and development.

## II. Methodology

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study is comprised of all English Language teachers and their students in Senior Secondary School, class two (SS2) in Ibadan North Local Government.

A total of 15 schools in Ibadan–North Local Government Area were randomly selected. Two English Language teachers were proportionally selected for observation from each school, making a total of 30 teachers that participated in the study. Thirty students were randomly selected among the SSII class in each of the fifteen schools for the performance test, making a total of 450 students that participated in the study. Instruments used in data collection are: Teachers' Questioning Behaviour Observation Checklist (TQBOC), Teachers' Instructional Organization Observation Rating Scale (TIOORS) and Achievement Test in English Language (ATEL).

The TQBOC has 17 items that are either ticked present or absent by the researcher in a classroom situation. The TIOORS 13 items which assessed how the teaching of English Language is organised in the Senior



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Secondary Schools. The ATEL is made up of 25 selective response objective items.

In order to ascertain the reliability of the instruments the Achievement Test was trial tested on two schools. The researcher administered the Achievement Test (test – retest) on the same class of Senior Secondary School class 2 students of equivalent status to those used in the study, but were excluded from the sample actually used in the study. Using test-retest, a co – efficient of 0.79 was obtained. The researcher then administered the Teachers Questioning Behaviour Observation Checklist and the Teachers Instructional Organisation Rating Scale in the schools and using Cronbach Alpha, co-efficients of 0.81 and 0.78 were obtained respectively The ATEL was administered on the students first. The researcher thereafter observed the English Language teachers during their lessons in such a way that two teachers in each school were observed in a day. So the same process was used in the other schools, so that at the end of each week, ten teachers were observed. In all, a total of 30 teachers were observed in 15 schools for three weeks. While the researcher was observing the teachers, she administered the Teachers Questioning Behaviour Checklist and the Teachers Instructional Organisation Rating Scale. Data collected from the study were analysed using Descriptive Statistics of Frequency Counts, mean and Percentage. In addition, inferential statistics of Pearson Product Moment. Correlation (PPMC) was used to determine the extent of relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables.

## III. Results

*Research question 1:* What type of questioning behaviour is put up by English language teachers?

*Table 1:* Teachers' Questioning Behaviour

| S/N | Questioning Behaviour | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Teacher asks questions relevant to students | 30 *(100.0) | |
| 2 | Teacher asks open-ended questions | 10 (33.3) | 20 (67.7) |
| 3 | Teacher asks follow up questions | 21 (70.0) | 9 (30.0) |
| 4 | Teacher asks for evidence to support a particular point | 5 (16.7) | 25 (83.3) |
| 5 | Teacher asks different types of questions | 12 (40.0) | 18 (60.0) |
| 6 | Teacher phrases the question first, and then call on the students | 14 (46.7) | 16 (53.3) |
| 7 | Teacher calls on specific students to answer questions | 13 (43.3) | 17 (56.7) |
| 8 | Teacher calls students' names when asking questions | 13 (43.3) | 17 (56.7) |
| 9 | Teacher selects students to respond randomly instead of following any set pattern when calling students | 16 (53.3) | 14 (46.7) |
| 10 | Teacher gives students enough time to think about the questions before answering the questions | 15 (50.0) | 15 (50.0) |
| 11 | Teacher asks questions from the entire class and try to encourage all students to participate | 23 (76.7) | 7 (23.3) |
| 12 | Teacher encourages students to consult with classmates before answering the teacher | 5 (16.7) | 25 (83.3) |
| 13 | Teacher encourages students to initiate questions | 9 (30.0) | 21 (20.0) |
| 14 | Teacher moves closer to students when asking questions | 14 (46.7) | 16 (53.3) |
| 15 | Teacher calls on non-volunteers to answer questions | 10 (33.3) | 20 (66.7) |
| 16 | Teachers repeats the questions where there is no response | 21 (70.0) | 9 (30.0) |
| 17 | Teacher modifies questions when it is not understood. | 14 (46.7) | 16 (53.3) |

**Values in parentheses are percentages.*

Table 1 On Teachers Questioning Behaviour shows that all the 30 teachers ask questions relevant to students (item 1:100%). Further, the table shows that few teachers ask open-ended questions (item 2: N=10:



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33.3%) and ask for evidence to support a particular point (item 4: N=5: 16.7%). Not many of the teachers ask different types of questions (item 6; N=14: 46.7%) or call students' names when asking questions (item 8: N = 13; 43.3%). The table reveals further that very few teachers either encourage students to consult with classmates before answering the teachers' questions (item 12: N = 5; 16.7%) or encourage students to initiate questions (item 14; N=14; 46.7%), call on non-volunteers to answer questions (Item 15; N=10; 33.3%), or modify questions when it is not understood by students (item 17: N=14; 46.7%).

On the other hand, table 1 shows that majority of teachers ask follow-up questions (item 3: N=21; 70.0%), select students to respond randomly (item 9: N=16,53.3%), give students enough time to think before answering (item 10: N=15;50.0%), ask questions for the entire class (item 11; N=23,76.7%) and repeat questions when there is no response (item 16: N=21;70.0%).

On the whole, out of the 17 questioning behaviours listed, teachers exhibited only 6 while they generally did not exhibit the remaining eleven questioning behaviours. This shows that the questioning behaviour of the teachers is a mixture of both display and referential questions that is largely mono directional.

*Research Question 2:* What is the pattern of instructional organization adopted by the teachers?

*Table 2 :* Teachers Instructional Organization

| S/N | Features of the Lesson | YES | NO |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Beginning the Lesson:** Teacher reviews topics covered in previous lessons | 27 *(90.0) | 3 (10.0) |
| 2 | Teacher states major objectives | 13 (43.3) | 17 (56.7) |
| 3 | Teacher gives preliminary overview at the start of the lesson | 16 (53.3) | 14 (46.7) |
| 4 | **During the Lesson:** Teacher outlines lecture on blackboard or overload | 5 (16.7) | 25 (83.3) |
| 5 | Teacher distinguishes topics and signals transition | 12 (40.0) | 18 (60.0) |
| 6 | He/she indicates end of sections and start of new topics | 10 (33.3) | 20 (66.7) |
| 7 | He/she uses explaining links (because, since, therefore) and other organization cues | 22 (73.3) | 8 (26.7) |
| 8 | He/she avoids excessive digression from major topics unless educational value warrants. | 13 (43.3) | 17 (56.7) |
| 9 | He/she emphasizes major points in plan (e.g, pauses, raising the voice, repeating, speaking slowly) | 16 (53.3) | 14 (46.7) |
| 10 | He/she periodically summarizes previous points | 9 (30.0) | 21 (70.0) |
| 11 | End of Lesson: Teacher plans to close lecture effectively | 10 33.3) | 20 (66.7) |
| 12 | Teacher reviews main topics | 15 (50.0) | 15 (50.0) |
| 13 | Teacher previews topics to be covered in future classes | 7 (23.3) | 23 (76.7) |

**Values in parentheses are percentages.*

Table 2 shows that in the aspect of beginning the lesson, teachers review topics already covered (item 1: N=27; 90.0%) and give preliminary overview at the start of the lesson (item 3: N=16; 53.3%). However, they do not state major objectives (item 2: N=13; 43.3%). During the lesson, table 2 shows that out of the 7 features listed, the teachers performed well on only 2. To this end, they used explaining links and other organizational cues (item 7: N=22; 73.3%) and emphasize major points in plan (item 9: N=16; 53.3%). For items 4,5,6,8 and 10, the teachers do not outline lecture on chalkboard, they do not distinguish topics and signal transitions, do not indicate end of sections and start of new topics, do not avoid excessive digression from major topics nor do they periodically summarize previous points.

Table 2 further shows that in the aspect of end of lesson, half of the teachers review main topics (item 12: N=15, 50.0%) while few of them plan to close the lesson effectively (item 11: N=10, 33.3%) and preview topics to be covered in future classes (Item 13: N=7; 23.3%). It can therefore be concluded from Table 2 that teachers organize instructions is in line with acceptable conventions of moving the lesson to align with curriculum progression.

*Research Question 3:* Is there any significant relationship between teachers' questioning behaviour and students' academic achievement in English language?



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*Table 3 :* Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing relationship between Teachers' Questioning Behaviour and student Academic Achievement in English Language

| Variable | Mean | Std. Deviation | N | R | Df | Sig. | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| QUESTBEH<br>ACHVT | 25.1667<br>8.8978 | 2.9453<br>3.1648 | 450<br>450 | –·064<br>.644 | 449 | .172 | Significant |

Table 3 shows that there is a positive, very strong relationship between Teachers' Questioning Behaviour and Students' Achievement in English language (r = - .64; df =449; p>.05). This means that teachers' questioning behaviour has positively influences students' achievement in English language. The relationship is significant. This implies that teachers' questioning behaviour significantly influences students' achievement in English language.

*Research Question 4:* Is there any significant relationship between teachers' instructional organization and students' achievement in English Language?

*Table 4 :* Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing relationship between Teacher Instructional Organization and Students' Achievement in English Language

| Variable | Mean | Std. Deviation | N | R | df | Sig. | Remarks |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| INSTRORG<br>ACHVT | 18.8333<br>8.8978 | 2.3312<br>3.1648 | 450<br>450 | –·035 | 449 | .464 | Not significant |

From Table 4, Teachers' Instructional Organization has negative, very weak relationship which is not significant with students' achievement in English language (r = - .035, df = 449; p>.05). This means that Teachers' Instructional Organization has no significant relationship with Students' Achievement in English Language.

## IV. Discussion of Findings

*a) English Language Teachers Questioning Behaviour*

The results of data analysis revealed that English Language teachers questioning behaviour is a mixture of display and referential questions. However, they used predominantly low order questions and few incidences of referential questions. This finding corroborates the findings of Aschner (1961); Wilen (1991) and Fakeye (2007) who found in separate studies that majority of teachers' questions were on the lowest cognitive level, emphasizing facts, not higher level thinking.

*b) English Language Teachers' Pattern of Instructional Organization*

Findings from the study also revealed that English Language teachers' pattern of instructional organization follows the traditional order of progression of lessons where curricular progression is aligned with methodology. This finding negates that of Oderinde (2005) who submitted that teachers' pattern of teaching in the classroom was characterized by poor pedagogical approaches. It also contradicts the observation that what obtains in English Language teaching-learning process is frontal teaching characterized by heavy reliance on textbook and devotion of a considerate amount of time to practise exam-type skill. However, it accords with the suggestion of Gunter et al (2003) that instructions should be organised in such a way as to align curricular progression with instructional methodology.

*c) Teachers' Instructional Organization and Students' Achievement in English Language*

The results also showed that teachers' instructional organization has negative, very weak relationship which is not significant with students' achievement in English Language. This finding negates the popular belief that the way the teacher organises his instruction will affect students' learning. It also negates the views of Gunter et al (2003) that notable learning takes place when students are taken through a clearly sequenced instructional process. The reason for this contradiction might be because of some other stronger factors other than pattern of instructional organization, might affect students' achievement in English Language.

*d) Teachers' Questioning Behaviour and Student' Achievement in English Language*

The results of the study further showed that there is a strong relationship between teachers' questioning behaviour and students' achievement in English Language. This result confirms the findings of Cotton (1988) and Akandi (2009) who in separate studies reported that teachers' questioning behaviour had significant impact on students' learning. In another study, Fakeye (2007) reported that teachers questioning behaviour had significant influence in developing and guiding the thought processes of students and the quality of students' responses.

## V. Conclusion

It could be concluded from this study that teachers' classroom behaviour as exemplified by their questioning behaviour and pattern of instructional organization when properly handled and deployed in the



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English Language classroom could enhance effective teaching and learning of the subject. These two variables have the potentials of eliciting cognitive activities ranging from simple recall to complex inferences. In addition, teachers and students' questions are a powerful metacognitive activity through which individual students can foster their own comprehension.

## VI. Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

Teachers of English Language should structure questions specifically for the purpose of diagnosing students' needs and for bridging learning gap among students in order to increase their performance in subject. The English Language teachers should desist from frontal teaching that is characterized by heavy reliance on textbook and devotion of a considerable amount of time to practise examination type skills. Rather, they should adapt instructional organization patterns that align curricular progression with their instructional methodology. This will simplify teaching-learning process .Also, English Language teachers should note that even after they have planned their lessons, a lot of interactive planning often occurs right in the classroom in response to students' interest or needs and as a result of this, the teachers should be flexible enough to respond appropriately to each situation as it warrants. English Language teachers should attend, on regular basis, seminars, conferences and workshops that will expose them to proper deployment of questions in the classroom to optimize learning. This also has the potential of acquainting them with various patterns of instructional organization that can make for effective teaching and learning of English Language. Curriculum designers and planners should plan curriculum content in such a way that curricular progression is aligned with instructional methodology. Also, curriculum design should take care of monitoring instructional operations and introducing instructional content that is relevant to students and permitting growth as well. Textbook writers in English Language should ensure that questions provided for each exercise are such that are capable of stimulating students' thought processes and not factual operations only.

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