TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN ASHANTI REGION: EVIDENCE FROM SEKYERE CENTRAL DISTRICT

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Abstract

The study sought to identify teaching practices used in the teaching of English Language in selected junior high schools in correlation with their Mock Examination performance in Sekyere Central District. The study adopted quantitative research design with a sample of 300 respondents. The study found that teachers adopted teacher-centered approaches which did not take into consideration individual learning needs and abilities. The study identified that teachers' approach to teaching English Language was not engaging enough and that have led to poor performance in their Mock examination results. Aside the limitations associated with teacher-centred approach, inadequate instructional material, headteachers' negligence in their supervision, and poor rapport between pupils and teachers adversely affected pupils' academic achievement. The study recommends teachers to introduce more activities to engage pupils in group work, learner-centered, individual and group presentation of projects by pupils.

Keywords: *Teaching, Learning, method, content, pedagogy*

📢 Introduction

Classroom teachers over the past years are making significant efforts to improve their teaching quality and student learning experience by adopting emerging teaching and learning methodologies. Tamakloe et al. (2005) described teaching as a term which can be used porously to mean a situation in which a mother guides her daughter to prepare soup; or a carpenter guides an apprentice to make a chair; and as in a school situation where a professional teacher assists a learner to read and write. Teaching is an activity of imparting knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to learners in a situation, with the teacher acting as a guide, a counsellor and a motivator (Tamakloe et al., 2005). In teaching and learning, two complementary roles are played side by side, namely, the role of the teacher and that of the learner. Teaching and learning are therefore described as the two sides of a coin because teaching does not happen without a learner (Grabe, 2019; Alvunger, 2018; Villegas et al., 2018). Teaching is not merely lesson-having, nor merely dispensing subject-matter. Teaching is essentially concerned with how best to bring about desired change in behaviour by series of educational activities (Kyriacou, 1995). Tamakloe et al. (2005) argue that the involvement of the student in the teaching-learning process where the student is given the chance to participate fully in the process makes teaching complete. Teaching and learning should bring about democratic values where every learner feels comfortable to think-pair-share their experiences with one another. The main purpose of teaching is to create an independent learner who can think critically to solve problems. It is an established fact that there is no single best approach that can yield the desire results of teaching and learning but series of techniques, strategies and approaches that a teacher adopts will go a long way to induce learning (Boggu, 2019).

These views and observations are in consonance with modern preferences for learner-led and peer-assistive pedagogical strategies (University of Cape Coast Training Manual, 2019). The status of English Language in Ghana and the role it plays in national life are well known. As the official language, it is the language of government and administration. It is the language of commerce, the learned professions and the media. As an international language, it is the most widely used on the internet (Rahamat, 2017). Beyond the lowest levels of education, that is, from (Primary 4 to Tertiary level), English is the medium of instruction. This means that success in education at all levels depends, to a very large extent, on the individual's proficiency in English Language. It is for these and other reasons that English Language is a compulsory subject of study in Ghanaian schools (Teaching Syllabus for English Language for Junior High Schools, 2019).

The junior high school (JHS) is the entry stage for a comprehensive training in vocational, technical, agricultural and general education in Ghana. A good performance at the JHS level must therefore be seen as the foundation stage of education and the entry point into further levels of education in Ghana.

Excellent performances are measured through remotely supervised examinations conducted by the West African Examinations Council on behalf of the Ghana Education Service. The minimum requirement for admission into JHS is Basic Education Certificate Examinations (BECE) grades 1-highest and 9-lowest (Ministry of Education, 2010). Learners who excelled in English Language often got placement and their chosen programmes in senior high schools (SHS). It is at the SHS level that learners would have the opportunity to specialise or select electives subjects.

Results from the BECE are yardstick for the measurement of quality education at the JHS level by many parents and Ghana Education Service in Ghana. The Chief Examiners' Reports (2014,2015) suggests the lack of detailed explanations to questions, poor command over the English Language, poor handwriting, incorrect spelling of technical terms and inadequate study of the set texts as the main causes for most of the failures in the examination.

The mass failure of candidates in English Language at the BECE levels over the years has called for several policy intervention from key stakeholders in the education sector (WAEC Chief Examiner's Report, 2008, 2013). From 2011 onwards, Chief Examiner's report noted that the candidates' inability to express themselves clearly in the English Language had affected their academic performance in other subjects like Mathematics. Candidates' knowledge of basic grammar, tense and sentence construction was poor as noted in the report (see WAEC Chief's Examiner's Report, 2011). In some cases, there were blatant errors of punctuations such as misuse of capital letters. There were also run-on sentences. One could see many one-sentence paragraphs of so many lines (Chief Examiner's Report, BECE, 2017).

The Ministry of Education at the 24th Annual Conference of Directors of Education lamented that the poor academic performance of learners in junior high schools were attributable to teachers (GNA, 2017). The education Ministry stressed that teachers should be held accountable if learners fail to perform well in their respective schools. Similar observations have been noted by several District Directors of education across the country in relation to the disturbing trend of poor academic performance of learners in English Language (GNA, 2012).

Statistics from 2017 Senior High School Computerized School Selection System Placements, suggests a total of 36,849 candidates out of 460,941 (92%) representing 8% of the total were not placed in senior high school due to poor performance in English Language (MOE, 2017). Similarly, in 2019 a total of 460,941 of this number, 38,355 representing 8% of the candidates who sat for the BECE failed to secure placement in senior high schools due to poor performance in English Language or Mathematics (GES, 2019). Cumulatively, English Language and Mathematics remain a key challenge in achieving Universal Education coverage for all under the new free senior high school policy.

Several studies conducted in the field of English Language teaching (North Central Regional Educational Laboratory, 2003; Southeast Centre for Quality Teaching, 2003; Hawanti, 2018) opine that teachers are not properly trained to effectively design strategies to assist learners to overcome their literacy development. Thompson (2004) suggests that classroom teachers need to have an in-depth knowledge about effective strategies for teaching learners of English Language. Within this context, this study sought to examine the teaching practices used in the teaching and learning of English Language in some selected public JHS and how it impacts on learners' Mock examination performance in the Sekyere Central District.

The paper contributes to theory and practice in twofold. First, the expected theoretical benefit is that the research will significantly contribute to development of theory in the field of education, English Language teaching and learning, and the development of best pedagogical content knowledge and procedures in teaching. Second, the study also provides a new approach to instructions in Ghana, as the results of the study are expected to be useful for language teachers at all levels of education in Ghana.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to find out the practices used in the teaching and learning of English Language and their impact on the learners in Junior High Schools in Sekyere Central District

Research questions

1. What are the teaching practices used in the teaching and learning of English Language in JHS in the Sekyere Central District?
2. How does the use of teaching practices in English Language impact on learners' Mock examination performance in the Sekyere Central District?

Language Learning strategies

Second language acquisition (SLA) researchers, language teachers and teacher trainers aim to develop an approach through which languages are effectively taught in the classroom (Aljadani, 2020). Within the pedagogy literature, several models have been developed to serve as a guide to teaching instructions (Boggu, 2016). These models are built on the underlying assumptions that learners have different abilities and needs and teachers must plan their instructions to address the learning needs of pupils (Monje, 2020; Feradepi, 2019; Wilson, 2018; Adunola, 2011). All human beings are equally intelligent which is based on the belief that teachers and learners create and share knowledge with one another because each learner has a unique learning style different from each other in the teaching and learning process (Deilami, 2016). Adelabu and Nder (2013) also state that several methods such as Demonstration, Problem-Solving, Vee-Mapping, Concept Mapping and Individualized Instructions are used for teaching English Language.

One study endorses pedagogy that embraces critical thinking and reflection to bring to attention the process of our actions, belief systems, relationships, and environment (Barone, 2018; Gilakjani, 2017 & Cunliffe, 2009). Bourgeois (2019) supports experiential learning as an effective tool for learners to achieve learning outcomes. The author cites neuroscience research that proves knowledge acquisition is enhanced with experiences that consider active learning and the environment, thereby engaging emotion, critical thinking, and reflection (Ahmadi et al., 2018; Bourgeois, 2019). Lately, much of the current body of knowledge in experiential learning is derived from Kolb & Kolb's (2012) work from the vast experiences of Dewey, Piaget and Jung among others. Studies related to Language learning approaches have extensively been researched and possible suggestions are made to guide English Language teachers (Muscat & Mollicone, 2012; Chermahini & Talab, 2013; Tete et al., 2014; Boggu, 2019; Schnapp, 2020).

Methodology

The study was grounded on quantitative research design which allowed the researchers to obtain information regarding the current status of teaching and learning of English Language in public JHS in the Sekyere Central District. It also assisted the researchers to ascertain what existed in the selected schools were quantified based on the methods of teaching, medium of instruction, availability of teaching and learning materials, the use of teaching and learning materials by teachers, pupils' desire to study English Language, teachers' behaviour towards pupils and vice versa were identified by respondents in the questionnaires administered to them.

Table 2.2 Population Distribution of schools

School	Population
Ghana Muslim Mission Junior High	80
Beposo D/A Junior High School Junior High School	76
Boama Kwabi D/A Junior High School	82
Nsuta D/A Junior High School	62
Total	300

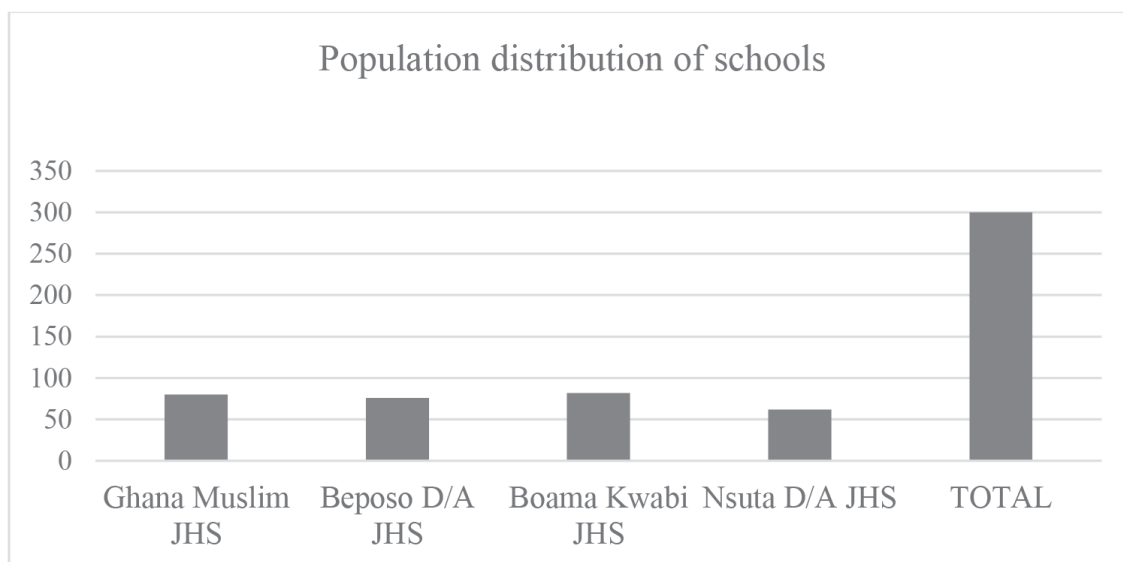Source: School Attendance Register, 2019

Figure 1: Population Distribution of Schools

2.3 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The convenience and simple random sampling techniques were employed in the study. The convenience sampling was adopted to select the JHS for the study due to their proximity to the researchers and willingness of headteachers to allow the researchers to carry out the study in the schools. Within the schools the simple random sampling technique was employed. The researchers approached any year three pupils' during break time and administered the questionnaire to them just once. The process continued until the required number of respondents was obtained in each school.

2.4 Tool of Data Collection

The study administered an eight-tem close-ended questionnaire to final year pupils. The items were; the methods of teaching employed by their teachers, medium of instructions, pupils' performances in English Language, availability of and use of teaching and learning materials, the use of teaching and learning materials by teachers, pupils behaviour towards the teaching and learning of English Language, teachers behaviour towards pupils and supervisory role played by head teachers. The data collected were analysed using frequencies and percentages.

The pupils' academic performance was measured using their End of term (Mock) Examination results.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: Teaching practices used in the teaching and learning of English Language

Table 1: Frequency analysis on Pupils' responses on teaching and learning of English Language

Item	Ghana Muslim JHS	Beposo D/A JHS	Boama Kwabi JHS	Nsuta D/A JHS
	S D	S D	S D	S D
1	10(12.5) * 70(87.5) *	30(39.5) * 46(60.5) *	10(12.5) * 72(87.80) *	16(25.8) * 46(74.2) *
2	32(40) * 48(60) *	40(52.6) * 36(47.4) *	38(46.3) * 44(53.7) *	24(38.7) * 38(61.3) *
3	26(32.5) * 54(67.5) *	18(23.7) * 58(76.3) *	24(29.3) * 58(70.73) *	22(35.5) * 40(64.5) *

	1		2		3		4	
4	12(15) *	68(85) *	0(0) *	76(100) *	0(0) *	82(100) *	0(0) *	62(100) *
5	0 (0) *	80(100) *	0(0) *	76(100) *	0(0) *	82(100) *	0(0) *	62(100) *
6	26(32.5) *	54(67.5) *	26(34.21) *	50(65.8) *	32(39) *	50(60.97) *	26(41.9) *	36(58.1) *
7	60(75) *	20(25) *	50(65.8) *	26(34.21) *	50(60.97) *	32(39) *	32(51.6) *	30(48.4) *
8	0(0) *	80(100) *	0(0) *	76(100) *	0(0) *	82(100) *	0(0) *	62(100) *

*percentages are in parentheses Source: Field Data, (2018)

Key

1. methods of teaching adopted by teachers
2. medium of instruction
3. pupils' performances in English Language
4. Availability of and use of teaching and learning materials
5. The use of teaching and learning materials by teachers
6. Pupils behaviour towards the teaching and learning of English Language
7. Teachers behaviour towards pupils
8. Supervisory roles played by head teachers

Methods of Teaching

On methods of teaching, out of 300 respondents 234 (78%) stated that they were not satisfied with the teaching methods adopted by their teachers whereas 66 (22%) pupils of them said strategies employed in teaching English Language, specifically were satisfactorily enough to enhance their understanding of concepts in English Language.

Regarding issue of medium of instruction used by the teacher, 166 (55%) of the respondents preferred to be taught in the Local Language (Asante Twi) during English Language lessons whiles 134 (45%) of them preferred to be taught in English Language. This means that majority of the learners preferred to be taught in class using their mother tongue. Of the number of participants used for the study, 210 (70%) pupils stated that they usually underperformed in English Language whiles 90 pupils representing 30% usually performed well in English Language. This means that majority of learners performed poorly in English language. 288 (96%) of the participants were dissatisfied with the available teaching and learning materials to support their leaning of English Language especially English Language text books, novels and story books in school and at home while 12 (4%) pupils were satisfied with the available teaching and learning materials such as textbooks, novels and story books to support their learning of English Language in school and at home. All pupils, 300 (100%) were of the view that their teachers never used any teaching and learning materials during teaching sessions in the classroom. Out of 300 participants, 190 (63%) respondents representing claimed they were dissatisfied with English Language as a Subject while 110 (37%) were sure their attitude towards learning of English Language were satisfactory. Out of the 300 respondents, 192 (64%) said teachers' behaviour towards them was encouraging and satisfactory whiles 108 (36%) stated that subject teachers' behaviours towards them were lukewarm and therefore, teachers did not consider them as intelligent. On supervision, all respondents 300 (100%) claimed they were dissatisfied because they did not see any form of supervision being carried out by the head teacher in the school.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of teaching practice of on learners' Mock examination performance?

Table 2: Frequency Results of Mock Examination of English Language

Score Range	Ghana Muslim JHS	Beposo D/A JHS	Boama Kwabi JHS	Nsuta D/AJHS
90-100	0(0) *	0(0) *	0(0) *	4(6.45) *
80-89	0(0) *	0(0) *	0(0) *	4(6.45) *
70-79	0(0) *	0(0) *	1(1.22) *	2(3.23) *
60-69	0(0) *	0(0) *	2(2.44) *	2(3.23) *
55-59	2(2.5) *	0(0) *	1(1.22) *	4(6.45) *
50-54	2(2.5) *	4(5.3) *	1(1.22) *	0(0) *
40-49	0(0) *	2(2.6) *	4(4.88) *	8(12.9) *
35-39	8(10) *	4(5.3) *	33(40.24) *	8(12.9) *
Below 35	68(85) *	66(86.80) *	40(48.78) *	30(48.39) *
TOTAL	80	76	82	62

*percentages in parentheses

Source: Pupils Continuous Assessment Records, (2019)

Results and Discussion

It is evident from Table 2 that learners had performed abysmally in English Language in the just ended mock examination in all schools considering their views on teachers approach to teaching English Language and these have translated into their performances in the Mock examinations. Though, this was their preparatory examination towards the final examination (BECE), pupils' academic performances in English Language were not encouraging as majority of pupils have failed to obtain a grade 1-highest. From table 2 out of 300 pupils who sat the examinations, 257 of them representing 86% scored grade 9 interpreted as lowest (fail) while 43 pupils representing 14% obtained a pass mark.

These poor academic performances of pupils were attributed to so many factors. These were poor teaching methods adopted by teachers, teachers not using teaching and learning materials to teach, inadequate text books, lack of library facilities in both schools, teachers not demonstrating pedagogic content knowledge and subject knowledge in the fields of English Language since none of the teachers had specialised in English Language in their field of study. Another factor was that head-teachers who did not teach in the schools where the research was carried out also failed to supervise all teaching activities that go on within the schools. The school head's ability to do these supervisions would have gone a long way to put subject teachers and pupils on track because head teachers' main work was solely supervisory.

In all schools, the pupils demonstrated a lack of understanding of basic grammar, composition and comprehension. As these pupils were preparing for their final Basic Education Certificate Examination, one would have thought that the candidates could demonstrate better understanding of the questions asked. This goes to confirm with the chief examiners' report in 2018 about candidates' weaknesses in English Language.

Methods of teaching were dictated by the medium of instruction for example, where English Language is used, the method of instruction has to be more interactive than passive (Pillar and Skilling, 2005). It is also argued that classroom teachers urgently need to master the techniques of teaching in order to facilitate effective study of the subject (Sifakis, 2019; Rahman,2018 & Thompson, 2004).

Conclusion

The methods of teaching by the schools which were mainly teacher-centered approaches used to teach different groups of pupils failed to address the individual learning needs invariably affected their academic performances.

The high quality of teaching that were sought by the schools could not fully achieve the learning outcomes since the schools used the same processes of teaching of English Language.

This goes to corroborate the findings of Thompson (2004) who suggests that English Language teachers should have pedagogical content knowledge and experience in order to teach English Language effectively.

The non-availability and use of teaching and learning resources for teaching and learning of English Language in the four schools made majority of learners attain poor scores, which implies that majority of them did not understand the teaching of English Language in the schools since instruction did not involve hands-on activities.

Pupil's lack of interest in English Language, teachers' negative attitudes discouraged majority of them from contributing to discussions in class and these have affected their academic performance in both spoken and written in the English Language. The lack of interest and use of distasteful comments contributed to the poor academic performance in English Language in their mock examinations. The non-existence of supervision in the schools gave English Language teachers the opportunity to teach how they deemed right and this made some learners lazy, late or absent to English Language classes. These led to low and poor academic performance recorded by pupils in English Language in the Mock Examinations.

Policy Implications

There is no single method of teaching that can satisfy the learning needs of pupils. The study recommends that teachers should engage learners in more interactive activities where they can interact, work in groups and carry out projects and make mini presentations in class enhance their communicative and written skills better. Teachers should produce and use variety of teaching and learning resources, and variety of instructional strategies that encourage pupil participation and critical thinking. This is because no single strategy can satisfy all the learning needs since learners have different learning styles and also pay attention to all learners, especially learners with special educational needs. Employ instructional strategies appropriate for mixed ability, equity and inclusivity, multilingual and multi-age classes since pupils learn best in small groups when tasks are properly designed, will go a long way to enhance their understanding of experiences learners will acquire through, discussions, panel discussion, jigsaw tasks, debates etc. and set meaningful tasks that encourages learner collaboration which leads to purposeful learning. Ghana Education Service and other donor agencies should provide library facilities in the all the schools so pupils can expand their scope of learning and this will help them in their vocabulary acquisition.

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