

CREATIVITY IN LANGUAGE TEACHING AS TOOLS FOR REPOSITIONING ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Effective Language use is an essential resource in entrepreneurial education. For start-ups operating in a multilingual and multicultural clime, such as Nigeria, the English language is of essence. Creativity in the use of English is deemed a necessary factor that determines an individual's propensity to venture into entrepreneurship as well as for ensuring the corporate effectiveness of the business. We argue here that business ownership and self-employment constitute a vital part of the economy by providing employment for entrepreneurs and others in the society. This paper explains the importance of creativity in the teaching and learning of the English language as a unique opportunity which positively disposes learners to becoming either entrepreneurs by necessity or by the opportunities at their disposal vis-à-vis their linguistic ability. We conclude that the Covid-19 pandemic, though a powerful force of disruption, is also a call for 'change and reengineering of the learners. We recommend that curriculum innovation and implementation where creativity enhancing activities are given adequate attention much more than other aspects of the English language is the way to go for economic resurgence.

Keywords: Language, the English Language, Creativity in Language, Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Education.

Unemployment rate is one of the indices for measuring a nations' GDP, economic stability and growth. Nigeria is currently groaning under the weight of unemployment and this is attributable to the dearth of entrepreneurs which is known to drive the economy of any developing nation. There is no gain saying that no nation can adequately provide employment for every member of the society. Many economists and analysts have postulated that if 50% of the populace depend on the government for employment, economic recession or collapse is imminent. It is worrisome that the Nigerian situation is such that over 90% of graduates look up to government for employment after graduating from colleges and the universities. This is due in part to the fact that many of them lack the mind-set necessary for organizing and managing successful business ventures. This calls for a redirection of the nation's developmental strategy by looking inwards to create new businesses and develop the abundant and untapped youthful talents through creative language teaching as this has great impact even in all business ventures irrespective of their fields of study. Creativity in language use presents the language users with endless possibilities for making outstanding differences in varied spheres of life. The 'new normal' or covid-19 realities is a wake-up call for the reinvention of oneself amidst changing experiences and this is vital to

survival. These are times to explore new approaches, strategies, perspectives, attitudes and charting of new ways to convey and explicate meaning including new ways of thinking. This explains why Maduekwe (2007) opines that language teaching is a complex phenomenon and that teachers must reinforce the awareness of creativity in language teaching by letting the learners understand that there is much room for creativity in language system and use. As humans, language ability is our primary tool to convey meaning and it is fundamental when conducting business over international spatial and temporal levels (Jacob 2014). The power and influence of language use over the interpretation and creation of reality cannot be underestimated for without language communication would be impossible resulting in thought stagnation and ultimately mundaneness or lack of vision. Entrepreneurship needs people who have the linguistic ability to discuss, evaluate and make sense of what they are told, as well as to take effective action on the basis of their understanding otherwise there can be no genuine participation in business ventures. The English language remains invaluable to a would be entrepreneur in the wake of the 'new normal' climate that now defines the world. We are in the season of *change*, the season of *growth* and the season of *threat* depending on the choice one makes of the present situation. However, creativity in the use of the English language makes the difference in most spheres. The creative ability of English makes it an indispensable tool for inspiration and exotic imagination. The ability to make changes in products and or services in such a way that something different is created to meet the needs of a multilingual populace demands a great deal of creative thinking via language. The quality of language which learners internalize while becoming full fledged members of their community in order to effectively participate in that community has a great impact on their wellbeing in general and their economic status in particular. The legitimacy or appropriateness of the English words and expressions that are used for communication in most communities in Nigeria, determines the prevailing socio-economic stance of that community. In this clime, most opportunities for meaningful and functional language use present themselves in the English language which by default is our language of commerce, education, politics and governance among other uses. This makes it expedient to examine the teaching and learning of the English language with a focus on creativity and repositioning it for entrepreneurship which is the thrust of this paper.

The English Language Situation in Nigeria

The Nigerian linguistic situation has experienced tremendous influence from colonization which has also left her with notable historical vestiges. The most prevalent of the relicts of the British colonial rule in Nigeria is the English Language and its primacy among all the subjects in the school curriculum is incontrovertible. It has assumed an esteemed status as the medium of communication as well as a subject taught in schools among its other functions. The National Policy on Education (2013) is explicit on the essence of the English language teaching and learning in Nigeria. One of such is 'an opportunity for modern developments' and another, is 'a prospect in having a window on the world' that is, economic power and advantage. It is pathetic to observe that even in the 21st century, language teaching in general and the teaching of the English language in particular, is still ravaged by a myriad of problems while the government looks away. This can be attributed to the fact that the nation does not have an evocatively profound ideology necessary to achieve its stated policy as it concerns the English

language in Nigeria. Scholars such as Adegbite (2005) have indicted the Nigerian government and policy makers for inadequate implementation of the National Policy on Education in the educational system. Adegbite (2005) opines that there is a clear indication that the language is yet to serve as an effective means of communication in Nigeria. The manpower needs of Nigeria, demand the enactment and implementation of an ideological pathway necessary for evincing entrepreneurialism in English language education. This is necessary owing to the vital position English occupies in the socio-political and socio-economic lives of the people. The language needs of students especially at the primary and secondary levels of the educational system where the solid foundation for effective and functional language use is supposedly laid, requires much more than teaching abstract concepts as observable in our classrooms. It is pathetic to note that the Nigerian English language classrooms lack effective interventions capable of imparting entrepreneurial skills. The deplorable state of our classrooms speaks volumes about systemic rot and invaluable activities, which stifle the spirit of enquiry and creativity and has resulted in abysmally poor performance of a high percentage of students in most external examinations conducted in the country. Students must be motivated through materials and properly structured activities to stimulate their thinking faculty and enthusiasm. All these are far from the offerings in Nigerian classrooms.

The quality of English that would adequately position learners for economic sufficiency under the present dispensation rests on the teachers' ability at harnessing activities and techniques aimed at developing expressions and perceptions of the learners using task-based stimulating and challenging materials. The English language classroom is a crucible of some sort. The teachers, the students, the materials and the procedures play significant roles that could yield either docility on one hand or thought processing and mental inclusiveness on the other hand.

Infusing Creativity into the Teaching of English

Education is the quest for a process and the structure by which humans would acquire knowledge and skills necessary for survival and to function effectively by making various contributions to their society (Ajibola 2018). It is through the process of education that unique and innovative thoughts are provoked and a creative mind-set is developed. With adequate knowledge of the devastating effect of the new corona virus, many institutions have embarked on Emergency Remote Teaching which is a paradigm shift aimed at achieving institutional goals. The school may never be the same again as experts have warned that we must learn to live with the virus. In response to this sudden challenge, teaching and learning are at the moment fully online even with several attendant learners', teachers' and content challenges. While this poses a lot of challenges and problems, there are opportunities inherent in this situation. Researches have proved the positive impact of technology on English language education and this can be leveraged on to easily infuse valuable activities into teaching. In the language classroom, creativity involves the teacher exploring opportunities that help students express their unique identity and ability to boost their thinking faculty in a bid to manipulating language either to produce new situations or change the existing ones. According to Robinson (2018) creativity encompasses a cluster of activities that are needed to produce original and valuable ideas. He further opines that what people contribute to the world around them has everything to do with how they engage with the world within them. The ability to engage and contribute to the world around us resides in the power of

imagination, experiments and enquiries about the world. Evans & Jones (2007) propose exposure to mind- related talk as an aid to metacognitive understanding, encouragement-of-autonomy, modulation-of-certainty talk and free play session to boost language skills. Verner, (2017) asserts that creative language teaching sustains students' attention, builds confidence, fosters critical thinking and delivers better learning outcomes necessary for economic stability. According to Verner, six activities which the teacher can adapt in a language classroom to foster creativity include:

- Teaching through play which creates fun and helps the students free their mind.
- Incorporating Students' Interest into the Lessons: Interest in a particular subject or skill remains a propelling force which drives one to learn more.
- Celebrating Students' Accomplishment to make them feel valued, supported and freer to express themselves in other tasks demanding the use of English in the future.
- Conducting Classroom Experiments through formulation of hypotheses and then design experiments to test those hypotheses, draw conclusions and allow students present results orally in English at the end of class to inculcate valuable research and critical thinking skills.
- Encourage Reflective Thinking to boost the drive for creativity and chart the direction for innovation in language use using group project or on individual basis.
- Foster Connections Between Students to create a safe place for students to put their English skills to use in a supportive environment that encourages creativity, diversity and understanding.

In a similar vein, Robinson (2018) suggests nine clever ways to teach creativity thus:

- Set time aside for journaling
- Participate in five minutes of mindfulness each day
- Build brainstorming sessions
- Use gamification to encourage participation
- Encourage risk taking
- Leave the classroom more often
- Allow students to teach
- Use visual aids
- Encourage questions

While Verner's suggestions above can be well adapted for language teaching and learning at the higher level classrooms, Robinson's suggestions can adequately suffice for the lower levels. This is because Verner's postulations involve formulating hypotheses, analyzing of learners' surroundings and building support for one another which demand high level cognitive abilities. However, Verner and Robinson agree that gamification and reflective thinking which Robinson refers to as mindfulness are apt in fostering creativity in language teaching. Nigeria is on the verge of resuscitating and rebuilding her economy. Hence, English should be taught with the aim of inculcating skills necessary for economic sufficiency. It is pertinent to note that the emerging new world poses a lot of challenges as well as enormous opportunities which can gainfully be tapped into by only well poised individuals with entrepreneurial skills.

Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

Entrepreneurship is a human activity which involves creating and operating a new business venture for economic development. It involves risk-taking and critical thinking aimed at organizing and managing a business. Entrepreneurs assume the

responsibility and the risk of a business for the purpose of advancing themselves as well as others economically. According to Hayes (2020) an entrepreneur is a person who undertakes the risk of starting a new business venture, creates a firm, which aggregates capital and labour in order to produce goods or services for profit. Entrepreneurship is high risk but on the other hand, it portends high reward being an important driver of economic growth and innovation. By developing the spirit of enterprise, an individual develops the primal instinct for survival which propels one towards the pinnacle of economic stability. An accomplished entrepreneur progresses from a primary stage through to a secondary and ultimately tertiary echelon. In the Nigerian situation, progress could be made from becoming a nomad to a cattle rearer, to a settled agriculturist, to a trader, to an industrialist and finally to a multinational conglomerate (Robinson 2018). Conclusion here therefore, is that an entrepreneur is one who sets up or institutes, nurtures and grows a business enterprise. Jacob (2014) however, argues that an entrepreneur is someone who establishes and manages a business venture whether or not there is any groundbreaking edge in those efforts. This is because any thriving business venture has a driving force or a vision. Hence, entrepreneurship does not reside in being a trailblazer of some sort. Success or progress is not driven by vision only but by adequate skills made possible by effective language use. According to Jacob, the language used by managers and other organized organizational actors shape a diverse range of processes such as sense making.

The Nigerian government grants soft loans and offers skill development through its institutions established for such. SMEDAN, BOI and it is a general knowledge that The Central Bank of Nigeria gives loans through Micro Finance Banks to be accessed by SMEs at very low interest rates. There is currently rice revolution in the country resulting from government ban on the importation of foreign rice. This has led to an observable boost in the agro industry. In spite of these interventions Nigerian youths are yet to courageously embrace entrepreneurship. The fear of failure which emanates out of inadequate knowledge about what works, how it works and where it works overrides their determination. Arguments such as insecurity, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate power supply and lack of initial capital and support among other issues are always listed as the bane of entrepreneurship in the country. As objective and verifiable as these arguments may be, a few have been able to surmount them not by condemnations but by determination which plays a crucial role in pushing out their motivation. They have been able to speak convincingly to some organizations to provide resources or support to help them form or scale new ventures. But suffice to say that there are just very few individuals in this fate. Nigeria needs prepared individuals who will be on their mettle for entrepreneurship to drive the nation's economy to resurgence. Like cowards, many fail even before they take the first shot at the prospect of establishing a business enterprise in Nigeria. Students should be placed on the right perspective and mind-set to understand that the rich and mighty of this nation, do not work for someone else. They work for themselves! On yearly basis, Nigerian Colleges, Polytechnics and universities turn out graduates without adequate fortification for entrepreneurship. This increases the queue for the non-existent white collar jobs. In spite of the interventions offered by the Nigerian government towards the development of entrepreneurship, not much success has been recorded. In order to create or increase entrepreneurial awareness, it should be borne in mind that the English language, either as the language of instruction in the

classrooms or as a subject to be taught must be creatively manipulated to shape perceptions, decisions, actions and wealth creating possibilities of young minds.

The Importance of English Language in Entrepreneurship

Language, the tool for communication and repositioning of the minds is the key to confronting the present realities of unemployment and the ‘new normal’ which is distinctively different. Presently, the world can only be maneuvered and influenced through effective language development (Ajibola 2018). It is through language that we communicate our company services and our product offerings. Our daily operations are conditioned by the quality of our perceptions and communications. According to Maduekwe (2007) language is an instrument of liberation. It endows man with the ability to reason, lead and charge others to a predetermined action rather than being directed or misguided. It possesses the ability to unlock the mind of the individual. Language is used to do things. In other words, actions start in the form words which describe, explain thoughts, incite, threaten or persuade people to a predetermined course of action. Language is powerful enough to make or mar situations depending on appropriateness of use. For any business venture to metamorphose into a conglomerate in Nigeria, adequate communication skills in the English language is of essence. This is because Wei, Jiao, & Grove, (2018) postulate that the benefits of language learning when it comes to entrepreneurship and becoming a better entrepreneur ranges from discovering new problems and making better decisions to improving your communication skills by learning a foreign language which increases the chances of success. According to Milroy (2002) language ability influences the expansion of social networks and the acquisition of social capital. This is supported by Luo (2007) who asserts that individuals who have better English language ability are more likely to choose self-employment for such proficiency helps expand their social networks. The influence of social networks on self-employment is particularly true in a developing country where the institutional environment is full of uncertainties and hidden rules (Yueh, 2009). In recent times, natural boundaries which hitherto have been considered impenetrable have bowed to technological pressures and possibilities. This has positively influenced commerce by exposing new ideas, products and international procedures. Low level proficiency in English language use therefore, deprives one of access to economic development. English is a channel through which people demonstrate affiliation and combat cultural barriers in Nigeria and people are more likely to trust those who can speak English where distorted information exists in market transactions. The Nigerian language situation clearly demonstrates the importance of the English language as a unifying and barrier breaking tool. Nigerians are constantly migrating within and across state and national boundaries in line with market demands. Immigrants can initially face significant difficulties integrating into the economy of the host state or community and building good relationships with suppliers, retailers and customers due to information gaps. As this continues, English language remains an effective strategy for economic integration in the new environment. Therefore, in Nigeria, English language remains an instrument of social integration.

Conclusion

According to Krishna (2020) if there is anything the Covid-19 has taught us, it is the critical importance of creativity in the work place. There is no question that the pandemic is a powerful force of disruption and an unprecedented tragedy. But it is also a turning point. It is an opportunity to develop new solutions, new ways of thinking/working and new partnership that will benefit organizations and the people not just today but for years to come. There is a general assumption that start-up businesses based on English language, achieve greater success and more international recognition than is achievable in local languages. We must reengineer learners to be the best regulated personalities poised to challenge or stand in times like this. Not because they can but because it is expedient. Creativity in language teaching remains pivotal in scaling innovation, insight, expertise and entrepreneurship. According to John Dewey, 'if we teach today's children the way we taught yesterday, we rob them of tomorrow'.

Recommendations

1. There is, therefore, the need to include in our goals some relevant and meaningful language activities that could act as a source of empowerment for learners to affect and influence the needs of their societies in order to compete favourably in the world.
2. We propose curriculum innovation and implementation where creativity enhancing activities are given adequate attention much more than other aspects of the English language.
3. Provision of creative language teaching tool kits for instructors. If teachers are to help students develop their 'Entrepreneurial Thinking', then they need a teacher-friendly toolkit as frameworks for the teaching of the English language.
4. A grant from the Education Endowment Funds should be made available for the establishment of centres for the development of instructional material based on the repositioned curriculum.
5. Sensitization of teachers on instructional approaches which should be deliberately tailored towards encouraging the use of relatively unstructured and novel concepts of the English language to develop the learners' thinking faculties for the discovery of new opportunities.

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