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## Improving Learners' English Language Vocabulary Performance Using Realia in Primary Schools in Ogun State, Nigeria

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By

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### **Abstract**

*This paper assessed improving learners' English Language vocabulary performance using realia in three (3) selected primary schools in Ogun State, using case study design and qualitative approach. The literature reviewed the concept of realia, types of realia, benefits of realia in teaching English Language vocabulary and problems associated with the use of realia in the classroom. Three (3) research questions were raised and answered. Two sampling techniques, purposive and snowball, were used to select three head teachers and three most senior teachers in the schools as participants. Construction was adopted as the theory of the study and interpretivism was used as the paradigm to construct themes derived from data collected with the use of the research instrument, open-ended questions were used to collect responses from the participants. Themes derived were analysed using thematic analysis. The study concluded that teachers used realia for teaching and that those that are not available were improvised. The study recommended among others that realia used should match the words to be explained and that teachers should consider how much new vocabulary and grammar structures are in the realia.*

**Key words:** Realia, English language vocabulary, Primary schools, Open-ended questions, Themes.

In the field of language teaching, researchers have been searching for the most effective ways to teach English Language vocabularies in schools. It is commonly accepted that the knowledge of word meanings plays a vital role in language

comprehension. Therefore, vocabulary teaching should be taught effectively in order for learners to use instructed words meaningfully. The quality of realia is essential to determine the effectiveness of the class, so the realia used in the classroom need to be carefully chosen so that they bring about interaction and creativity response (Crandall, 2005).

Vocabulary can be defined as the knowledge of words and their meanings (Diamond & Gutlohn, 2006). This means that without establishing a strong vocabulary base first, comprehension and the use of a language will not be achieved. Also, learners should be able to identify words and know the meaning as well. Therefore, when a learner is effectively able to recognize and use a word in different contexts, speaks, writes and pronounces the word well, she/he has the knowledge and meaning of that word. If a teacher brings to the classroom a rose, sunflower, a rabbit, or a cat, a stove, a pan to help him/her in teaching English language vocabulary, the teacher is using realia.

Adrienne and Jordan (2000) state that realia is a term for real things concrete objects that are used in the classroom to build background and vocabulary. Realia is used to provide experiences to use all senses in learning. Realia helps to make English language vocabulary input as comprehensive as possible and build an associative bridge between the classroom and the world (Donglas, 2000).

Learners can directly connect the language to the objects mentioned in the material. Having realia in the classroom, learners can develop their multi-sensory function by experiencing the learning, through seeing, learning, touching and manipulating items (Ayelaagbe, 2016). The teaching/learning process will be effectively and enjoyable, and most of all they will not forget the activities in the classroom.

The advantages of presenting realia in the teaching/learning process are:

1. Kinesthetic learning is the type of learning that students will most effectively acquire, mostly because they will have hands – on experience.
2. The use of realia brings a welcome change in the class, a break from typical class activities such as reading and writing.
3. The unexpectedness of having to suddenly interact with real objects will keep students on their toes; it will create excitement, and they will have adequate fun (Marier, 2004).

Chiarantano (2005) proved that using realia in the classroom serves to foster a more creative and active teaching/learning environment and promotes cultural understanding. The realia used in the teaching/learning should be appropriate with the material and the learners' condition.

Chiarantano (2005) suggested some realia used for teaching English vocabulary to learners to teach vocabulary for animals, clothing, fruit, use actual objects or facsimiles thereof (pieces of clothing, toy, animals, plastic fruit). For learners in nursery/primary school, it is very useful tool in making the abstract concrete. In teaching prepositions of

place (such as on, in, under, next to, in front of, over). Objects can be placed on a desk, in a desk, under a desk and so on (Marier, 2004). If all these are used effectively in teaching learners in primary schools, it would enable the teacher to achieve the objectives of the lesson. Hence, there is need for this study.

### **The Concept of Realia**

In education, realia are objects from real life used in classroom instruction. Realia include objects used by teachers to assist learners to understand better other cultures and real life situations. A teacher of English language employs realia to strengthen learners' association between words for everyday objects and the objects themselves. In English language instruction, the realia has a broader meaning, which includes photos of objects from a country where the target language is spoken, the two meanings are closely related because of the support many types of libraries give to educational endeavours (<http://www.realia-fromwikipedia.thefreeencyclopedia>).

Marriam-Webster Dictionary (2007) sees realia as objects or activities used to relate classroom teaching to the real life especially of people studied and the dictionary also provides the origin of the word REALIA which comes from Late Latin, *Neuter* plural of *realis* which means *real* and can be use in general pedagogy. Also, Richard and Rodgers (2003) definerealialia as real-world materials that are brought to class by the learners in the form of newspapers, signs, handbills, storybook, and in the case of adults printed materials from their workplace are also another resource.

Chris, Soames (2010) defines realia as using real items found in everyday life as an aid to teaching English. He opined that using realia helps to make English lessons memorable by creating a link between the object and the world or phrase they represent.

### **Types of Realia**

Realia are of different types and its categorizing depends on the perspective one looks at realia. Sebahat Yilmaz (2011) categorized realia in three ways.

1. The Beginners: Television timetables, cinema timetables, train timetables, restaurant menus, postcards, utility bills, application forms, classified adverts, recipes.
2. Intermediate: Teenage magazines, surveys and teenage issues, newspaper article from tabloid newspapers, instructional manuals advert and flyers.
3. Advanced: General newspaper articles, magazine articles, academic material, at advanced level you can choose nearly anything, because they should have developed strategies to cope with unknown vocabulary.

Brown (2001) categorized realia into real object that can be used for learning and this can be shown to the students such as stationeries such as book, pencil, eraser, bag, pen, ruler, and so on, objects in the classroom such as table, chair, chalkboard, picture, chalk and so on, parts of the body which include hand, hair, eyes, nose, ears, mouth, foot and

so on. The replica of the object if the real objects are not available in the classroom include animals like cow, goat, frog, cat, lion, dog and so on). Vehicles such as bus, train, plane, motorcycle and so on, occupations such as doctors, soldier, steward, policeman, fisherman, farmer and so on. As a substitute of the real objects, the teacher can use dolls or toys.

### **Benefits of Realia in teaching English Language Vocabulary**

The benefits of using realia in teaching English Language vocabulary in the classroom are numerous. Ningtyas (2009) opined that realia used in the classroom make the learning experience more memorable for the learner. For instance, if the teacher teaches fruits and vegetables as vocabulary, it can be much more effective for learners to touch, smell and see the objects at the same time as hearing the new word. This would appeal to a wider range of learner styles than a simple flash card picture of the piece of fruit or vegetable. Taking clue from Bably and Majid (2011), the following are the benefits of using realia in the classroom.

- a. It stimulates the mind, and encourages creativity by involving the senses in the learning process.
- b. It saves time as learners can recognize an object immediately.
- c. Realia can be used as a valuable resource which fosters creative and active learning and promotes motivation.
- d. Using realia will generate interest and it will help to create an atmosphere that is conducive to learning.
- e. Realia brings about role-playing and games playing in the classroom e.g. the use of toy animals or puppets.
- e. Realia is more interesting than materials from the text books and can really engage the students in learning process.
- f. It allows the learners to use real materials when they leave the classrooms and paves the way for learners to connect their classroom activities with the real world.
- g. Learners are exposed to real discourses, as in videos of interviews with famous people, magazines, pictures and so on.
- h. It engages and motivates learners, at the same time.
- i. It increases learner's global awareness.

Vivian (2010) argues that realia can keep the learners informed about what is happening in the world, language change is reflected using realia, it encourages reading for pleasure, realia enables students to communicate and interact socially and makes the learners to be active learners and allows instructors to be facilitators. Daniela (2009) opined that realia used effectively in the classroom allows the learners feel comfortable and motivate them and makes language learning an educational process of self-development and discovery as well as the learning of a language.

### **Constraint Against the use of Realia in Teaching**

There are many factors that hinder the use of realia in teaching English Language vocabulary in schools. Daniela (2009) and Vivian (2010) regret that the realia can be outdated, the materials may be too culturally biased, so unnecessary difficult to understand outside the language community. Use of realia in teaching is time consuming because special preparation is needed and too many structures can be mixed so lower level learners might have a hard time decoding the texts. James (2010) added that realia are not always practical for use in the classroom (size of a real object may be too large or too small) for classroom study. He says cost of realia may be expensive and life animals would be difficult to bring to class such as snakes, cat, dog, lion and so on.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The field of education has undergone a major shift in thinking about the nature of human learning and the conditions that best encourage the varied dimensions of human learning (Vasillieva, 2010). There has been a paradigm shift in designed instruction; from behaviorism to cognitivism and now to constructivism. This study employed constructivism as the theory of this research work because of its relevance to the topic discussed.

There is no single definition of constructivism (Lovraine, 2011; Sterberg, 2000), and the term is often not defined clearly by the user. However, there is a common element in the belief that knowledge can be of personal sets of meanings or conceptual frameworks based on experiences encountered in relevant environments. People relate with their environment and as a result develop conceptual frameworks to give details of these interactions and support on negotiating future interactions.

Lovraine (2011) described two constructivism positions on teaching/learning paradigms as Without the Information Given (WIG) constructivism and Beyond the Information Given (BIG) constructivism. It is advocated that a merger of both approaches be employed.

The study adopted this theory because it allows the learners to be active participant in the lesson using realia for active construction of knowledge and authentic activities would be part of lesson presentation. Corroborating this assertion, Yaboah, Asante and Opoku-Asare (2016) opined that active learning takes place when learners are given the opportunity to engage with the learning materials. Hence, the study used constructivism because of its importance to the study.

Babalola (2007) carried out a research on effectiveness of video as an instructional medium in teaching rural children agricultural and environmental sciences. The study revealed that the pupils taught with the video performed equally as well as those taught with real object (Realia). Also, Paula and Marolyn (2012) studied the effect of using realia on concrete vocabulary learning. The results showed an improvement and learners actively engaged in the lesson. Siti and Aisyali (2012) researched into Realia: the effective media for teaching English for EYL. Also, Mery

and Johan (2012) studied improving students' vocabulary achievement by using Realia. These studies did not look into the use of Realia and the problem associated with the use of realia in teaching vocabulary in primary school the gap which this study sought to fill.

### **Statement of the Study**

The teaching of English language vocabulary was traditionally undervalued and teachers gave little attention to techniques to assist learners in primary schools to learn vocabulary effectively. Also, vocabulary teaching has been seen as a neglected aspect of English language in schools.

The teachers teaching English language did not use appropriate methodology in teaching English vocabulary to learners and it was believed that the meaning of words could not be adequately and effectively taught; some teachers felt unconfident to teach English language vocabulary in the classroom. Therefore, realia can be used to overcome all these problems and learners can learn better with all the sensories. Realia will make the teaching of vocabulary more meaning full and remain permanent in learners' memory. Therefore, there is used for this study.

### **Purpose of Study**

The study assessed improving learners' English language vocabulary using realia, the problems encountered in the course of teaching by teachers and possible recommendations were looked into.

### **Research Objectives**

The study objectives were to:

1. determine the attitude of teachers towards the use of realia in English Language vocabulary.
2. Identify the relevance of realia in teaching vocabulary and
3. Identify the problems associated with the use of realia in teaching English Language vocabulary.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were raised in the study:

1. What is the attitude of teachers towards the use of realia in teaching English Language vocabulary?
2. What are the relevance of realia in teaching English Language vocabulary in the classroom?
3. What is the problems associated with the use of realia in teaching English Language vocabulary?

### **Methodology**

The study used qualitative approach to draw from the experiences of the participating teachers. Qualitative approach was used because research questions and

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the nature of data collected which were non-numerical data (Alloh, 2018). The approach allowed the participants to respond in their own constructed sentences (Tabler, 2013). This provided rich data from the samples from three selected primary schools in Ogun State. Two sampling techniques, purposive and snowball techniques were employed to deliberately select three (3) head teachers of the selected schools who identified the most senior teachers in their respective schools to participate.

One instrument was used for data collection. And it contained eight (8)-items, open-ended questions were designed for the head teachers and teachers. They responded freely in their own language.

### **Credibility/Trustworthiness**

The study used an open-ended questionnaire to source for information. To ensure anonymity, pseudo names were used instead of the real names of the participants. Hence, A, B, C, D, E, and F were used to protect the participants from any harm. Also, the study avoided bias reporting and vivid analyses and thorough descriptions of events were used in data analysis for effective description. This would arouse the interest of the readers. In addition, thematic analysis was used to analyse themes derived from the data collected.

### **The Participants**

The study drew its participants from the Head teachers of the three selected public primary schools in Ogun State and the three most senior teachers of the schools. These participants have been teaching for about thirty (30) years in public primary schools with enough teaching experiences as primary school teacher. Hence, A, B and C stand for the head teachers of school 1, School 2 and school 3 respectively, while D, E and F are the pseudo-names for the most senior teachers in school 1, school 2 and school 3 respectively.

### **Data Presentation and Analysis**

Data collected were presented according to questions asked. Below are the written responses of the participants as presented against their pseudo-names.

#### **Question 1:** Do teachers use realia in teaching English vocabulary in school?

If yes, describe how you use them and if no, why?

- A. Yes, during the teaching teacher show the pupils realia, identifying the object with the vocabulary, by so doing, learners register the names into their memory.
- B. Yes, realia is arranged in a special place and during teaching and learning process it is shown to the learners.
- C. Yes, realia is used to teach vocabulary in relation to objects in the class and at home.

- D. Yes, realia would be placed in a hidden place and after the explanation of the vocabulary it would be shown to the pupils to make the teaching and learning real and to facilitate learning.
- E. Realia is used in teaching English vocabulary in other for the learners to understand the meaning of the difficult words correctly.
- F. Yes, by reading the English vocabulary with the learners and they would be practicing it in their daily activities.

The responses indicate that the participants use realia such as table, cup, plates etc. to explain the vocabulary during teaching in the classroom.

**Question 2:** Mention some of the realia and corresponding words use in the classroom?

- A. (i) Table - Furniture  
(ii) Cup, Plate, Spoon – Utensils  
(iii) Rake, Basket, Hoes – Farm tools
- B. (i) Cow, Apple, Coconut, Table, sand  
(ii) Cow – animal, Table – Furniture, Apple and Coconut – Plant, sand – uncountable noun
- C. (i) Pen, Biro  
(ii) Orange  
(iii) Chair and table
- D. (i) Rabbit, goat, hen, banana  
(ii) Rabbit – Animal  
(iii) Banana – Plant
- E. (i) Ball – Games  
(ii) Pot – Cooking  
(iii) Plate – Utensils
- F. (i) Table, Chair, Book, Pencil etc.

Responses indicate that concrete and authentic materials were used to teach vocabulary in the classroom.

**Question 3:** Who provide the realia to the classroom? State whether the teacher, learners or the school management (please be compliance).

- A. Both the teacher and the pupils provides realia for teaching.
- B. Teacher and pupils provides realia.
- C. Teacher and learners provides realia for teaching.
- D. The teacher provides the realia to the classroom.
- E. The teacher provides the realia for teaching in the classroom.
- F. The teacher provides the realia.

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Responses to question 3 shown that the teacher and the learner provides the realia for teaching in the classroom.

**Question 4:** Do you or teacher derive joy in using realia in teaching English Language vocabulary in the classroom? If Yes or No, why?

- A. Yes, it makes the lesson more interesting and makes teaching less fatigue.
- B. Yes, because it brings positive changes in learners.
- C. Yes, it makes teaching real and interactivity.
- D. Yes, it motivates the learners.
- E. Yes, it aids learning effectively.
- F. Yes, pupils are familiar with objects and brings more understanding.

Responses shown that they derived joy in using realia and that real makes learning more interesting, motivating, real and aids effective learning in the classroom.

**Question 5:** Do you or teacher attend any workshop/training on the use of instructional materials in the classroom? (If Yes, how often).

- A. Yes, 5 to 6 years' interval
- B. Yes, once in a year
- C. Yes, every year
- D. Yes, once in a term
- E. Yes, once in a year
- F. Yes, in a year

It was shown that responses attended workshop/training for the use of instructional materials at different periods.

**Question 6:** Does the use of realia improves academic performance of primary school pupils in the classroom (If Yes or No give reasons).

- A. Yes, it makes the pupils to be familiar with the objects and create avenue for interaction in the classroom.
- B. Yes, it makes learner to recall the lesson taught them easily.
- C. Yes, it makes learning more interesting and meaningful in the classroom.
- D. Yes, it allows recall and retention of facts in the classroom.
- E. Yes, realia allows pupils to understand better
- F. Yes, realia makes learning to remain permanent in their memory.

Responses opined that realia improves the academic performance of pupils in the classroom.

**Question 7:** Briefly discuss the relevance of realia in teaching English Language vocabulary in the classroom.

- A. Realia broadens learners' knowledge and creates awareness between the learners and their immediate environment.
- B. It makes lesson more memorable and creates a link between the object and the word.
- C. It makes the lesson clear and understandable by the learners.
- D. It enables learners to make connection between the real object and the words.
- E. It arouses learners' interest and makes learning more effective and learning fast.
- F. It makes learning easier and understandable and allows teacher and pupils to familiar with one another.

**Question 8:** What are the problems associated with the use of realia in teaching English Language vocabulary in the classroom?

- A. Non availability of realia that match the words to be learnt.
- B. The cost and maintenance of the realia and attitude of learners are problems facing the use of realia in the classroom.
- C. The authentic objects may not be adequate for the classroom use.
- D. The attitude of learners towards the use of realia, as regards the cost and maintenance do not enable learners to have access to realia.
- E. It waste teachers' time in searching for realia materials and the cost.
- F. The objects may not be easily available e.g. dog, cat.

### **Findings and Discussion of the Study**

From the data collected, the following findings were made, themes and sub-themes derived are hereby discussed.

#### **(a) Utilization of Realia in Teaching English Language vocabulary**

The study found out that teachers use realia for teaching English Language vocabulary in primary schools as revealed by the participants. In response to question 1, A said "Yes, during the teaching teacher show the pupils realia, identifying the object with the vocabulary, by so doing learners register the names into their memory" (See the response in question 1).

The finding confirms the view of Chiarantano (2005), Marrier (2004) and Richard and Rodgers (2003) which suggested that realia can be used to teach English Language vocabulary by the teacher effectively in the classroom.

#### **(b) Relevance of Realia in Teaching English Language vocabulary**

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It was found out in this study that learners benefit a lot from realia when used for learning in the classroom. This can be seen in the claim of E said, "Realia arouses the interest of the learners and makes learning more effective and fast" (See the responses in question 2).

Also realia enables learners to make connection between the real object and the words. This finding was in line with the study of Bably and Majid (2011) that realia is more interesting than materials form the text than materials from the textbooks and engages the learners in learning process and that realia generate interest and helps to create an atmosphere that is conducive for learning.

#### **(c) Types of Realia in Teaching English Language Vocabulary**

From the findings of this study it was indicate that different types of realia can be used in the classroom for teaching.

- A. (i) "Table-Furniture
- (ii) Cup, Plate, Spoon – Utencils
- (iii) Rake, Basket, Hoes – Farmtools"
- B. (i) "Cow – Animal
- (ii) Apple and coconut – plant"
- C. (i) "Pen, Biro
- (ii) Orange
- (iii) Chair and Table" (See responses to question 2)

This is also corroborated the findings of SabahatYilmax, (2011) and Brown (2001) that listed various realia that can be used for teaching English language vocabulary to pupils in primary schools.

#### **(d) Sources of Realia**

From the data collected, two major sources of realia were identified. The sources are by the teacher and the learners. The responses of these two participants testify to this.

- A "Both the teacher and pupils provides realia for teaching"
- B "Teacher and learners provides realia for teaching" (See responses to question 3)

This finding is in line with the study of Gutlohn (2006) which says that both the teacher and the learners can provide realia that can be used to teach in the classroom.

#### **(e) Problems of the use of realia in the classroom**

The participants revealed that there were different problems hinders the use of realia in the classroom. The following sub-themes are some of the participants responds.

- A; "Non- availability of realia that match the words to be learnt"

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B; ‘‘Cost and maintainers of the realia and attitude of learners’’

C; ‘‘The authentic objects may not be adequate for classroom use ‘‘ (see responds to question 8).

The finding of Eshiet (2009), James (2010) and Vivian (2010) confirms that the realia may be outdated, not easily available and the size of real objects may be too large or small to bring to the classroom for teaching.

### **Conclusion.**

From the findings of this study it was deduced therefore that teachers use realia to teach English language vocabulary in the classroom. The realia are majorly provided by the teachers and learners. Also realia may not be available for use and that life animals cannot be brought to the classroom for use rather toys and dolls can be improvised.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, it is therefore recommended that realia should match the words to be explained, more toys and dolls should be provided by the government to the school to supplement what the teacher and the learners have provided and regular training/workings should be organized for teachers on how to use realia for teaching in the classroom

Also, teachers meet to consider how much new vocabulary and grammar structures are in the realia. If students are to cope with real materials, they may have to learn to deal with topics with a lot of alien vocabulary. If the difficulty level of the materials is not at par with the students’ competency level, they might find the tasks over whelming and frustrating. Also, English language teaching objectives should not be compromised to fit materials. Before choosing every material, the teacher must consider whether the material is suitable for the learners, focusing on their competency level, cultural background, interests and so on.

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