

ENHANCING LANGUAGE USAGE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS THROUGH GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING

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Abstract

This paper dwells on “enhancing language usage of secondary school students through guidance and counselling”. The paper addressed the following - language and language usage, meaning of guidance and counselling, different guidance and counselling services as well as how guidance and counselling can help to enhance the language usage of secondary school students. The paper noted that the seeming inability of secondary school students to use language as expected and as stipulated in the NPE could pose serious threats to their performance and achievement in their academic pursuits. Poor language development and usage among our students as indicated in the paper distort not only students’ interests but also undermine their academic performances. It is suggested among others that every student should be encouraged to visit and make use of the services provided by guidance counsellors so as to enhance their language usage for optimum positive achievement.

Introduction

The national policy on Education has come a long way. It envisaged a widespread change in nearly all the facets of our education and language is one of them. It recognized the language of the environment (mother tongue) and English as mediums of instruction NPE (2004: 9).

Language according to Muhd (2009) is a vehicle for communicating messages and meanings. Language is a tool that enables human beings to express their thoughts and feelings and gives the sense of belongingness and security. In another view, Madukwe & Ehinze (2012) stated that language is not only a means of communication and instruction but also a mark of life, identity, dignity and a means of controlling reality.

But how do our students acquire language and make effective use of it? Lamidi (2008) stresses that it happens through Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a biological endowment of humans which makes it easy for each person to acquire the language of his environment. This makes the writers wonder why our students’ use of language is very poor. The seeming inability of our secondary school students to use language appropriately and as stipulated in the NPE has raised critical questions on the standard of education which people say has fallen, credibility of teachers, the natural presence of LAD and even the efforts of government towards education.

For some time now, poor language usage among students has assumed a worrisome dimension. The consequences especially as regards academic performance of these students cannot be quantified. The pattern of ill-use of language by students has assumed an alarming proportion especially with current issues of modern technology – in the use of mobile phones, SMS, e-mail,

whatsapp etc to the extent that students' interactions, learning modes and communication generally are faulty.

Before now, (later part of the 20th c), a primary six child could write letters and interpret language but now many students of our tertiary institutions can hardly make meaningful, correct sentences. They are neither good in the mother tongue nor in the second language. So what is wrong with students' language acquisition and usage? These make the writers believe that students' language usage can be enhanced through guidance and counselling hence this paper.

Language and Language Usage:

Language is a crucial issue in the education of every individual. The major languages in Nigeria include the mother tongue, the English language (official language) and a foreign language (French). Language emanates from the culture of a given society.

Rose, Stella and Angela (2012) defined language as a complex and arbitrary system of vocal sound used by man for communication in a given community. They further emphasized that language is viewed as instrument of communication irrespective of the smallness of the language community. Language provides a medium for a student to express his/her notions. The importance of language in education cannot be over emphasized as it serves as the instrument of thought.

Muhd (2009) is of the view that language is the unique property of human beings and that any sustainable development of man be it intellectual, moral, political, social or economical depends largely on the instrumentality of language hence the need for students to improve on their language usage.

According to Bloom (1988), use of language refers to the reason why individuals speak and the ways they construct conversations, depending upon what they know about the listener and the context. For effective language usage the writers highlighted the following strategies to be adopted:

- Use of communicative behaviours
- Establishing an interactive environment which involves generation of peer interaction via play or group activities and use of intelligent peers as role models.
- Develop opportunities and motivation to communicate and provision of choice.
- Social interaction.

Based on the above assertions, language usage seems to occur most effectively when students have opportunity to use language for real purpose or activity.

The school should provide opportunities or activities that will help students develop and use language appropriately because poor language development and usage will not only distort students interest but also undermine their academic performances.

Meaning of Guidance and Counselling

Counselling: – Yahaya (2002) defines counselling as an important activity that basically assists people to understand themselves and the environment in which they find themselves, and helps them take effective decisions necessary for their personal growth and development. Okon (1984) defines counselling as collaborative intimate relationship between a counsellor and a client which allows the counsellee to freely express himself and the problem he is experiencing. Counselling

therefore as part of guidance is an interaction that involves the counsellor and the client with the sole aim of resolving problems.

Guidance: Zera in Omebe (2005) defined guidance as a process, developmental in nature by which an individual is assisted to understand, accept and utilize his attitude, interests and attitudinal patterns in relation to his aspirations. Guidance serves as a vehicle to download individual potentialities.

What could be deduced from the definitions above is that guidance and counselling could be defined as a process that caters for the need of the individual with the focus on assisting him/her explore and understand his potential. Such counselling services should be designed to guide students through improved means of communication in relation to solving their emotional problems. This is executed via the effort of a counsellor.

Anagbogu (2002) defines the counsellor as a professional, who via diagnosis, planning, predicting, interpretation and evaluation, provides educational, personal and vocational assistance to the clients in such a way that it would reflect their interest, objectives, potentialities and needs for effective adjustments. The definition above outlined the basic operational functions and roles of the school counsellors in their bid to enhance the well-being of students including improvement of good command of language.

Furthermore, in support of the above comment, Okeke (2003) highlighted the major guidance services/aids conducted in schools to include orientation, counselling, information, appraisal, placement, referrals, evaluation, follow-up and research. As earlier stated, language is the instrument for rendering these aforementioned services. For effective counselling services, the counsellor handles dissimilar issues under individual counselling and similar issues in groups. The students in groups are further streamlined into: individual to group, and group to individual.

The Role of Guidance and Counselling in the Enhancement of Language Usage

Rose et al (2012) opines that language is an important means of communication and communication leads to a better understanding of the subject matter; a child must understand and use the language of instruction properly. It is not a gainsaying, that guidance and counselling contributes immensely to the promotion of successful communication both in the classroom and outside the classroom. They defined communication as the process of transmitting information, messages, thoughts, feelings, emotion from one person to another either verbally (spoken words) or non verbally (body language).

The main aim of counselling is to solve problems through proper dissemination of information. Without proper language usage counselling, the whole purpose of communication is endangered. During guidance programme there is usually a network for communication. The counsellor may communicate with the whole class or a group or an individual. Students communicate with fellow students on one-on-one basis, in pairs or in groups. These activities enhance communication skills which include listening, reading, speaking and writing (Rose et al, 2012).

Onyemerekeya & Ugwuegbulam (2005) discussed different services of guidance programmes in secondary schools which among others are information, referral, counselling and orientation services. Through these services, language usage is enhanced as discussed below:

Information Services

Counsellors via information services educate students on proper language usage. Students are encouraged on the need to listen to radio and television as vital modern media of communication and be able to discuss in groups, some current events or issues. Guidance and counselling expose students to ideas that will enable them improve their language usage in relation to their levels of education.

Counselling Service

Iwuama (2007) described counselling as a relationship between a professionally trained competent counsellor and an individual seeking help in gaining greater self understanding, improved decision making and behaviour changing skills for problem resolution and developmental growth. Students (clients) need to redress the challenge of ineffectiveness in communication and interactions as a result of poor language usage. The counsellor analyses and interprets the rate or level of individual's language usage and proffer solution to improve students who fall below standard in expression. The counsellor allows free expression of notions and establishes conducive environment of willingness and readiness to listen to students. Moreover, the counsellors can also have a counselling session with teachers on how to improve students' language usage, giving the teachers strategies and skills to adopt.

Orientation Service:

Students are assisted to select and make use of available opportunity within their new environment. Counsellors acquaint new students with the language of the new environment. Information necessary for them to adapt well in their environment is given to them. The students through orientation services are made to understand early enough the need for them to use language appropriately so as to enhance their personality, acceptance and academic performance.

Referral Service

The objective of any guidance programme is to enable all students, regardless of individual differences to acquire the educational, occupational and social competences necessary to function in a changing society (Onyemerekeya et al, 2005). Counsellors play the role of referring students who are impeded language wise to the appropriate facilitator for proper guidance. Other techniques employed by counsellors in the enhancement of language include Group Guidance, vocational counselling technology or career counselling, seminar and workshops.

Group Counselling: Group counselling according to Ekwe, Iwuama and Nwamuois seen as a "collection of two or more persons who interact with one another in a way that each person influences and is influenced by the others." (p. 36). The counsellor and members of the group share ideas, feelings and experience together. Social interaction is imperative for language improvement. Counsellors help students to improve in the use of language via strong group cohesiveness. Members of individuals share ideas among group and involve in group discussion, brain storming, writing and speech competition. Through these, group members use of language is enhanced.

Vocational counselling/ Career day or week: Counselling in this regard exposes students to know their abilities and interest in the selection of subjects and activities that will lead to the attainment of engaging in the right career. Brown and Denga (2010) posit that counselling stands to take necessary care of individual in respect of vocational choice. Vocational information is carried out through oral or written language between the counsellor and the student. Hence it is another channel for circulating proper use of language, which will enable students to fit into the world of work later in life.

Seminars and Workshops: Through seminars and workshops students get to be endowed with knowledge from different facets of study. Resource persons on language enhancement and development are invited to deliver papers. Students are encouraged to ask questions for clarity of purpose and through such processes improve on their oral presentation and language usage.

Conclusion

Basically, language is needed by any nation for education, communication and economic activities. Language is seen as the vehicle to transmit culture from one generation to another. Meanwhile the issue of language usage has posed a host of problems among youngsters especially those in secondary school. Therefore, the need for effective communication and interaction in society calls for language usage enhancement. Furthermore, using guidance and counselling services in schools will contribute in no small measure to the treatment of this problem of wrong use of language by applying different strategies.

Recommendations

The writers recommend the following so as to enhance students' language usage through guidance and counselling.

1. The home and school should encourage students to visit guidance counsellors and make use of their services so as to enhance their language usage.
2. Students who distinguished themselves in the use of appropriate language should be rewarded by parents, school administrators and even the government.
3. Professional counsellors should try and give an all embracing counselling using all the guidance services instead of giving selective counselling.
4. Counsellors should encourage students to enroll into co-curricular activities like debate and quiz clubs so as to enhance their language usage.
5. Leadership positions should be given to students by the schools and opportunities created to allow them address staff and students; this will help to enhance their language usage.
6. Teachers should encourage the speaking of correct language (whether mother tongue or English) by the students.

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