

APPLICATION OF RESOURCE-BASED LEARNING (RBL) IN NIGERIAN LANGUAGES TEACHING AND LEARNING: THE CASE OF IGBO LANGUAGE

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Abstract:

At this technological dispensation, foreign languages are already on board with ICT applications and advancement with different language courses online thereby encouraging independent study of these languages. Teaching and learning of Nigerian languages cannot be said to be at a comparable rank with these foreign languages in this respect. In view of the seemingly lack of interest in the Nigerian languages study and usage, it is believed that the application of Resource-Based Learning in this scenario will rekindle interest as well as place Nigerian languages study in a comparable terrain with their foreign languages counterparts. This paper explored the possibility of applying Resource-Based Learning in the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages in this ICT dispensation. It is delimited to the application of RBL on the teaching/learning of Igbo grammar, culture and literature.

1.1 Introduction:

Language study is one of the disciplines that experiences low patronage in our school system. Where it enjoys significant patronage, observations show that it is mostly in favour of foreign languages like the English, French, German etc. to the detriment of Nigerian languages. A lot of efforts, interest, time, resources are vested into the study and promotion of the foreign languages by the Government, NGOs, as well as private agencies, all at the expense of our indigenous languages.

Language has a variety of components such as phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. In the same manner, language teaching is approached from different perspectives. The teaching of any language component attracts its own challenges vis-a-vis selection of appropriate methods, strategies, learning activities, instructional materials and learning experiences. A lot depends on the teacher in the planning and implementation of learning activities for achievement of desirable learning outcome. It is obvious that a method or strategy that is suitable for teaching a grammar lesson may not be for a lesson on culture, literature or pragmatics etc. At this period when interest in the study of Nigerian languages is dwindling, application of RBL in the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages could possibly ease off the teachers' stress as well as provide opportunities for independent study and explorations in the languages, the Igbo as a case.

1.2. What is Resource-Based Learning (RBL)?

Resource-Based Learning is an educational model designed to actively engage students with multiple resources in both print and non-print form (CMLEA 1994). It has also been seen as a means by which teachers can greatly assist the development of attitudes and abilities of independent life-long learning. Hill (2001) intimated that RBL is neither a new teaching/learning nor tied to any single learning theory but simply used as a supplement to more instruction-based teaching methods. To Rowntree (1991), RBL is a pedagogical strategy that offers the learners the capacity

to depend far more on materials and far less on face-to-face teaching than they do in other types of teaching system. Its application is born out of the need to cater for the range of abilities, learning styles and particular needs of different cohorts of students. RBL is built on the principle that individual learners would be attracted to the media or resources and contents that attract or strongly appeal to their style of learning and interest (Farmer, 1999). For this reason perhaps, Doiron and Davies (1998), confirmed RBL student-centered rather than teacher-centered.

1.3. How is RBL Planned and Implemented?

RBL unit is not planned in isolation. An effective RBL unit is collaboratively planned by both the teacher and the media specialist or a Librarian-teacher. They normally will plan in advance, deciding who takes responsibility for certain aspects of the lesson. The teacher naturally designs the experience while the media specialist locates and makes available relevant resources for achieving the particular educational goal. The media specialist also guides the students on the ways to use the resources, the processes needed to find, use and present information.

A properly planned RBL unit is teacher-planned but learner-directed in the sense that learners take responsibility for choosing resources both human and otherwise that appeal to their own learning preferences, abilities and interest from the plethora of resources collated by the media specialist. The teacher ensures that the resources are graded to serve the needs of different categories of learners. The teacher provides guidance and feedback to students during the research process. The teacher is at the forefront of students, assessments.

1.4. RBL Materials:

List of materials relevant for RBL practices is inexhaustible. Thompson and Henley's (2000) list ranges from traditional reference books to the internet; innovative games inclusive, maps, music, audio materials, video, cultural artifacts, field trips etc. The fact is that once the instructional goals have been clearly defined(in a way that will reflect higher order thinking skills and problem solving abilities), and the teacher in collaboration with the media specialist have decided the acceptable student's artifacts/products, the media specialist goes ahead to select and gather resources in a variety of formats. If he is good enough, he will get materials or resources relevant to the unit, locate internet websites and even produce his own web-quest on aspects of the unit, invite resource persons as well as gather books for additional resources.

2.1. Application of RBL in the English Grammar Lessons:

It is a popular view that grammar is one of the most boring and obscured subjects in the school curriculum. It acquired a reputation for dullness perhaps because of the methods and techniques employed in teaching it. Allen and Widowson (1985) for instance, described the methods as, "repetitious, mechanical parsing of sentences, the rote- learning of paradigms, word lists and artificial rules of diction, old-fashioned handbooks which quoted abundantly from the classics of English literature". The presence of linguists in the early sixties brought some development in grammar pedagogy which criticized the traditional grammar teaching as unscientific. Later on, in the field of second language teaching, some language teaching theories sprang up doing away with the rules and drills that characterized grammar teaching and emphasized development of automatic speech habits (Direct method, Situational, Communicative method etc). Stevick (1986) was among the scholars who supported a de-emphasis on drills. He saw explanation as the most common way in which teachers have attempted to give students direct help with grammar.

However, one of the most popular crusades now in the teaching of grammar is the teaching of grammar in the context of reading, writing and speaking (Haddox 1998). Other proponents of teaching grammar in context point out that teaching of grammar in isolation does not lead to improvement in students' speaking and writing; it rather retards development of students' oral and written language.

Application of Resource-Based Learning in the grammar teaching and learning will help in changing the old reputation of dullness. Many of the English RBL grammar lessons are online. In fact, there are a variety of grammar resources available online to the students. Some of them are presented as mini lessons which offer the students the opportunity to choose resources that best suit their interest and individual needs. Some of the online resources and assignments are quite collaborative. Some of the online resources available in the English grammar are hereunder presented:

- a. **An online mini-lesson on grammar sequence.** This offers the following lessons;
 - Verb Choice:** where students are encouraged to explore and draw conclusions about verb use which they can apply to their own writing.
 - Action is character:** where the students explore character traits with adjectives. In the lesson plan, students become one of the major characters in the book and describe themselves and other characters using lists of accurate, powerful adjectives. This lesson is concluded as class discussion where the students support their lists with details from the novel.
 - Choosing the best verb:** This is an active and passive voice mini-lesson. For most students, speech and informal writing flow naturally than it flows in formal writing. This is because students frequently choose passive voice in their formal writing believing such verbs to sound more academic and formal. This mini-lesson helps students explore verb choice in a variety of online resources.
 - Every punctuation marks matter:** this is a mini-lesson on semicolon. It models the uses of semicolon with their rhetorical significance explained. Students explore these resources and try to apply them in their own writing.
 - Avoiding sexist language by using gender-fair pronouns:** This is another online lesson plan where students are made to respond to a short prompt that includes no information on the participant gender. At the end of the exercise, students and teachers analyze the narrative for the use of pronoun to discover what the pronoun choices reveal about the language use.
- b. **Carolyn Steering Deer Web-Based Grammar Resources:**

This project was on grammar course (Grammar and Syntax) which required discrete point teaching of grammar rules and syntactic patterns. The course was paired with basic writing for ESL writers with the goal to enhance students' use of grammar to refine written composition or essays. The lesson was web-based in order to teach students ways to use the medium to creatively enhance research. The assignment for the project was derived from the content where students were ultimately taught grammar to be able to identify and correct errors in their own writing.
- c. **CUNY Write site**

CUNY write site provides three groups of grammar resources/lessons such as;

 - General Reference which is a list of grammar topics that enables students easily find what they need.
 - Hot Spots which cover many of the most common grammatical problems such as sentence boundaries, 's' endings, articles and verb forms.

- Error Analyzer which enables individual students to know their needs and what they should work on. CUNY Write site is recommended for people who want to improve and refine their writing skills.

d. Dave's ESL Cafe

Dave's ESL Cafe popularly called Dave's writing class is another online grammar resource with hotlinks section consisting different topics. The website gives access to free quizzes and exercises about vocabularies, grammar, dictation and reading comprehension. The grammar lessons are graded with topics on linkers, adjectives, adverbs, articles etc.

2.2. Application of RBL in the Igbo Grammar Lessons:

Websites can be created for the teaching and learning of the different parts of speech (word classes) in Igbo. Lessons can include, Igbo sentence structures (syntax) (stressing the SVO word order and the SV variation, as well as the absence of Case in Igbo), use of pronouns (stressing the absence of gender in Igbo). Generous examples can be given in contexts which the learner can follow to generate his/her own appropriate patterns. These lessons can be graded to suit the basic/elementary, intermediate and advanced learners of Igbo language. If this is applied, not only that the disadvantaged native speakers and the non native speakers of Igbo would benefit from the lessons, the Diaspora learners of Igbo would take advantage of the online lessons. This will facilitate independent study of the language which is one of the benefits of RBL. In addition to creating online Igbo grammar lessons, well written Igbo proficiency books can be cut or burn into CDs and made accessible both online and in the bookshops so that those who cannot have access to the conventional classroom delivery can take advantage of both the CD and the hard copy.

2.3. Application of RBL on Igbo Culture Lessons:

Documentaries can be run online on different aspects of Igbo culture. **The Iri Ji/Ofala/Ahiajoku** (new yam) festivals, **Igba Nkwu** (traditional marriage) ceremonies and the likes can be recorded and documentaries ran on them. The communal **Ibo Uzo** (village clean up), **Inu Iyi** (swearing), **Igba Mmonwu** (masquarade), **traditional dances**, **Igbo traditional occupation/ Crafts**, **iru mgbede** (fattening room) can form online culture lessons. Apart from video recording of real live events of these and running commentaries on them, these and other Igbo cultural practices can be acted out by the learners under the guidance and supervision of both the teacher and the media specialist. This is RBL significantly at work. These activities whether experienced online or acted out by the learners under the facilitation of the teacher and the media specialist will provide opportunities through which learners will gain vocabulary, knowledge, ideas, skills, attitudes and appreciation that would serve as tools for life.

2.4. Application of RBL on Igbo Literature Lessons:

Both the Igbo oral and modern literature can form online lessons. In fact the earlier the Igbo oral literature in their different genres are documented and taught as online lessons, the better for the Igbo people. This has become very necessary given the level of neglect meted out on Igbo literature of any kind by Ndiigbo themselves. The Igbo folktales, folksongs, anecdotes, riddles, proverbs, idioms, lullabies etc, are going extinct with no one to tell them to the younger generation which is the most natural way of preserving them. This negligence is in vogue not minding the rich didactics they import. Creating online lessons on them is one of the practices that will not only facilitate their appreciation but would provide strong impetus for their reactivation and possible preservation. Apart from developing audio-visual CDs on Igbo oral literature, learners can also take roles and act

out the stories just as it can be done for the contemporary literature.

Furthermore, Igbo parents delight in buying for their children or wards, CDs (film) that teach letters of English alphabet, poems/ rhymes, cartoons and simulations, colors, animals and wild life etc, which provide a kind of immersion into the English language and culture for the children thereby developing the children's language facilities, interest and apt in the English language. This is done at the detriment of the Igbo language. These children who by their exposure to the language learning facilities mentioned above have become literate in English early in their lives can hardly identify letters of Igbo alphabet, articulate it, recite it, form words with it let alone read and write the language. The children can hardly sing Igbo songs or tell stories in Igbo. They also cannot name colors in Igbo let alone naming and identifying wild animals. But all these competences are already developed in them in English.

Conclusion

Application of RBL in teaching and learning of Nigerian languages (Igbo) will be quite educative and rewarding especially as it has been seen as a cheaper and more flexible means of delivering courses to the students. If language learning CDs (films) containing letters of Igbo alphabet, Igbo poems/rhymes, folktales, colors, wild life, puns, lullabies, spelling etc can be developed in the Igbo language and the children are exposed to them, it will enable the children develop vocabulary at the different domains of life as well as linguistic and communicative competences in the language. Apart from the CDs, time should be devoted by text book writers to develop in their varieties, children's books that would reflect the language contents contained in the CDs.

There is no gainsaying that early exposure to language teaching/learning resources described above will facilitate teaching and learning of Igbo grammar in later years. It will also facilitate development of permanent literacy in the language. Creating of websites for different lesson contents is not just pertinent but an imperative in order to reach out to those who cannot take advantage of the traditional real life classroom interaction with the language teacher. If these measures are taken, not only the highly disadvantaged native speakers of Igbo (as our children are now) will benefit, the Igbo second language learners (as we have them in some Colleges of Education) and the Igbo in Diaspora will benefit, too.

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