

PRAGMATIC APPROACHES FOR PROMOTION OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES IN ENGLISH LESSONS: A CASE OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN NAIROBI COUNTY

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the pragmatic approaches teachers use, to assist pre-school children as they learn English in Nairobi County. It adopted a descriptive survey design and employed qualitative approaches. Questionnaires and observational schedule were used to collect data from 22 pre-school teachers and 300 pre-school children. Data were analyzed using percentages, mean and frequencies and were presented through narratives, tables and graphs. The findings of the study revealed that teachers who have good pragmatism skills and are flexible achieved that level of reinforcement that lead children to good performance in English. The study also established that a of the English language should be willing to try a variety of strategies to see what works best with the pre-school children and should have effective classroom management technique so that proper learning can take place. The study concludes that flexibility is important and that teachers who work with children should be patient, enthusiastic and friendly to the children. It recommends that pre-school teachers should learn more concepts of educational psychology in order to understand that children learn differently and that they need flexible learning space and a variety of learning resources.

KEYWORDS: Promotion, Activities, Classroom, Approaches, Pragmatic

INTRODUCTION

According to the National Association for the Education of young children (1998), the most important aspect of a teacher in early childhood development is enthusiasm and passion for children. This goes well beyond interacting with them, and beyond wanting to make a difference to each and every child. Teachers should have the desire to unlock every child's door to learning and overcome any obstacle a child may have. Teachers working with young children should have patience and hum our in order to make the children have interest in learning. Young children have short attention span and little self-control and should therefore be kept busy with a variety of activities. Every child learns differently and this makes the teachers' work more challenging. Thus, patience combined with a sense of hum our, helps the teacher control and manage the children's behaviour while focusing on the end goal.

Bandura (1971) suggests that a teacher of young children should have learnt interactive skills for working with them. They should be able to communicate with the parents about the child's needs, skills, challenges and achievements so that both parties can help the child overcome his/her emotions. This is because every child comes to school with a unique personality and learning style and in order to reach and teach this child effectively, teachers must respond to these differences and work with each child's style and pace of learning. This will help the teacher create a warm and friendly atmosphere for learning English. Muller (1999) observes that teachers who set high expectations for their pre-school children are likely to elicit motivation for them to do well in learning English. Pragmatism, flexibility and methods of

teaching English are some of the characteristics that make a pre-school teacher effective.

Language Development in Children

Language development is a process starting early in human life. Infants start without language, yet, by 4 months of age, babies can discriminate speech sounds and engage in babbling. Usually, productive language is considered to begin with a stage of pre-verbal communication where infants use gestures and vocalization to make their intents known to others (Wood head, 2006). Language development is thought to proceed through ordinary process of learning in which children acquire the forms, meaning and uses of words and utterances from the linguistic input. The method in which they develop language skills is universal; however, the major debate is how the rules of syntax are acquired. The teacher plays a great role in helping the child to acquire both the input and output communication skills.

According to Vygotsky (1962), children learn through their interaction and communication with others in social environment. Learning takes place through the interaction children have with their family, peers, teachers and other experts. Consequently, a teacher can create a learning environment that maximizes the learner’s ability to interact with each other through discussion, collaboration and feedbacks. Vygotsky(1978), argues that language, is the main tool that promotes thinking, develops reasoning and supports activities such as reading and writing. Therefore, instructional resources that promote literacy across the curriculum play a significant role in knowledge construction as well as combination of the whole class participation, individual group work and independent learning. The teacher plays the important role of a facilitator by creating the environment where directed and guided interactions can occur. Vygotsky recognizes that learning always occurs through interaction and cannot be separated from a social context.

Pragmatic Approaches for Stimulation of Pre-School Children in Learning English

Pragmatism regards a teacher as a helper, guide and philosopher. The function of a pragmatic teacher is to set tasks to his pupils and to stimulate them to find solutions themselves. The teacher and the children solve a problem jointly where the teacher’s role is that of a guide and a director while the pupils are actors. Thus, learning becomes a co-operative venture, a joint enterprise, and a pursuit of common purposes. Education becomes a social process of sharing between the members of the groups where all are equal partners in the process (Mwangi, 2006). The whole emphasis of the method of teaching in pragmatism is on the child, not the book, or the teacher or the subject. The dominant interest of the child is “to do and to make.” The method should be flexible and dynamic. It must be adaptable and modifiable to suit the nature of the subject matter and potentiality of the children (Mittetinen, 2006). The pragmatist’s curriculum provides for creative and purposeful activities in the teaching-learning process. Pragmatism regards school as a miniature of society where a child gets real experiences to act and behave according to his interests, aptitudes and capacity. That means that knowledge is gained by experiences and experiments conducted by the learner him/herself. One exercise leads to another and so on and the area of knowledge is widened by the child. The process of reconstruction of experience goes on and leads to adjustments and development of personality. For pragmatists, education process has no end beyond itself. It is continuous, reorganizing, restructuring and integrating the experience and activities of the race. The child learns by doing and all learning must come as a product of action. Learning by doing makes a child creative, confident and cooperative (Dewey, 1962).

Teachers' Flexibility and Approaches of Teaching Language to Young Children

A teacher of young children is challenged to find new experiences to share with children. He/she should guide them and direct them to destination that interests them. As a guide, the teacher should allow the children to choose the learning and playing style that is safe to them (Johnson, 1987). He becomes a partner in learning and encourages the children to find their answers instead of providing the answers to them. Wood head (2006) maintains that play is an integral part of early childhood curriculum. This is founded on the belief that children learn through self-initiated free play in an exploratory environment.

Since teachers are partners in learning, they learn with the children and share their experiences. In addition, pre-school teachers support the children by providing activities and materials that children find useful and interesting. This means that teachers facilitate learning as they apply a developmentally appropriate environment, interesting materials and adequate time for the children to explore, play and interact. This makes the children consider learning to be easy and enjoyable. To nurture is to nourish, and nurturing a child encompasses all aspects of social emotions, cognitive and physical development. In every interaction, a teacher should nurture appropriate growth and development. Teachers must also take time to listen to a child including interpreting words and actions. Listening carefully to a child helps teachers to determine a child's needs so that they can aid in furthering the child's development.

Teachers communicate with many people throughout the day: parents, children, support staff, the general public and administration. Pre-school teachers should be prepared to communicate with all these people, feel comfortable, open up, ask questions, advice and share their experiences. Paper work, lesson planning, preparing materials and the learning environment and negotiating require teachers to have strong engagements skills. Managing a classroom requires organizational skills, attention to detail and commitment. There are many balls in the air and it is the duty of the teacher to keep them up and moving. Teaching is full of many responsibilities, roles and challenges. Like most worthwhile endeavours, it brings both success and rewards. Learning a second language depends on whether the teacher uses his/her methods of teaching effectively in order to motivate the learners (Torgeson, 2002).

Flexible classroom gives children a choice of tasks and how to do it, as well as what kind of learning space works best for them. This helps the learner to work collaboratively, communicate and engage in challenging tasks. Frost (2008) argues that what teachers should strive for are the choices that benefit the children when learning English. In her study she noted that when children have flexible and spacious classroom, they tend to do all manner of skills. Frost also notes that some children love reading from the floor while lying on their bellies, others read while standing up which makes their movement around the classroom easier. Other children love to be under objects such as the table, behind objects and around objects. Frost notes this to be awesome because it shows that the early learners have a choice of what activity position they find comfortable for them

Sitting arrangement which often determines the dynamics of the lesson can be used to motivate the children. This is why the teacher should provide a comprehensive guidance to include all children's experience and enable them to demonstrate what they do in non-verbal as well as verbal ways. This helps build a positive relationship with each child and develops a classroom community. A pre-school teacher should use songs and games and other interesting activities when teaching English so that the children get a break from the boredom of the classroom activities. Role play is highly motivating since it is amusing and at the same time challenging. It also gives individual learning experience including

reading aloud together which helps in vocabulary building and informal conversation which assists children to learn English skills (Hakuta et al, 1987). A teacher can also motivate the young children by use of news that is relevant to their daily life since most children have a prior knowledge with the study topics to be learnt. Thus, children should be incorporated in the lesson planning in order to make learning relevant to them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employed a descriptive survey design with qualitative approach. The instruments used were questionnaires for 22 pre-school teachers and observation schedule for 300 pre-school children. Data was analyzed in percentages, mean, frequencies and presented in graphs, charts and tables.

Discussion of the Findings

The main objectives of the study were to establish the influence of teachers' pragmatic approaches for promotion of classroom activities of pre-school children in learning English lessons in Nairobi County. The specific objectives were as follows:

- To establish the impact of teachers' pragmatism on motivation of preschool in learning English.
- To determine the influence of teachers' flexibility and approaches of teaching English to young children.

The findings of the are presented as per each objective.

- The first objective sought to establish the impact of teachers' pragmatism on motivation of pre-school children in learning English.

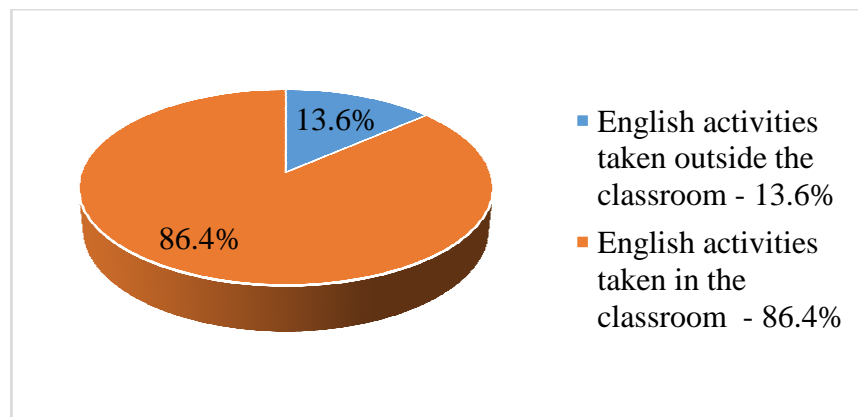


Figure 1: Teachers' Pragmatism and Motivation of Pre-School Children: Teachers' Responses

The data presented in Figure 1 show that the majority of the teachers who were under study stated that most of their English activities were taken in class 86.4% (N=19) while those who allow activities outside classroom were 13.6% (N=3). Poor performance in English in Nairobi County happens because teachers fail to provide outdoor activities that make learning of English interesting and effective. According to Wood head (2006) childhood is closely related to play. Thus, a child should have opportunities for play in order to help him learn English easily.

- Objective two, sought to determine the influence of teachers' flexibility and approaches of teaching English to young children. The teachers were asked if they provided warm atmosphere and materials for learning the oral

skills, reading and writing readiness. The participants reported that they provide an environment which supported learners in being self-directed and in working independently. They also make materials for learning easily accessible to learners. According to the participants, evolving classroom space to cater for the needs of the learners improves the learners' interest in the activities and interaction with peers. In addition, their work and grades improve tremendously.

Table 1: Teachers' Methods of Teaching

Teachers Response	Number	Percentages
Use of role play	5	22.73%
Story telling	3	13.63%
Use of poems and songs	4	18.18%
Use of pictures from the book	7	31.18%
News telling	3	13.63%

The information contained in Table 1 shows that 22 teachers use various method to teach English with 22.7% (N=5) who teach English through play, another 13.63% (N=3) uses story telling, while 18.18% (N=4) used poems and songs to teach English. The study also found out that 31.81% (N=7) of the teachers preferred to use the pictures from the books as a method of teaching English. From the observation, children participated very well in these activities and asked for more time to continue doing the activities. The finding corresponds with that of Dewey (1962) that learning comes as a result of action, discovery, exploration and reinforcement used to promote classroom activities.

Methods used to Reinforce Interest in Learning Activities

The researcher observed the children during the class session in order to identify the reinforcements teachers used to motivate learners and the impact they had in enhancing effective learning. The researcher recorded the way of reinforcement by ticking "Yes or No" for the 300 children under the study. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Types of Reinforcement as Methods of Promoting Classroom Activities

Ways of Motivation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Variance
Call of child by name	1.3.9	0.463	0.214
Clapping	1.642	0.480.	0.231
Giving presents – birth day cards	1.442	0.498	0.248
Praising words – well done	1.245	0.431	0.196
Encouraging words- keep it up	1.396	0.490	0.240

Table 2 shows that the most visible way of motivation was by way of clapping. This had a mean of 1.642 which was higher than the average of 1.5 as per the study scale. Giving presents was second with a mean of 1.442. The teachers who used encouraging words had a mean of 1.39, while those who used praising words had a mean of 1.245.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Reinforcement is important as it enhances learning and creates a warm atmosphere for the children and the teachers. Using different types of reinforcement makes learners put more effort and makes learning interesting and enjoyable. The study concludes that teachers should broaden their educational psychology by reading widely so that they can understand the behaviour of young learners and provide them with materials and flexible space and style of learning. The study recommends the use of a variety of methods of teaching so as to motivate learners and make learning enjoyable.

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