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Widening and Narrowing Pedagogical Spaces: Imperatives for English Language Teaching Approaches

Abstract

The English language is the most widely-spoken language in the world. This fact deserves serious consideration for educators at all levels of the education system, but more so for those who are tasked with the teaching of English to learners whose Mother Tongue is not English. Globalisation, the internationalisation of education and migratory trends are largely responsible for narrowing the interconnection of world peoples via various means. For this very reason, English language pedagogical issues exist in multilingual countries as well as in those countries that have a migrant multilingual population. This paper explores the value of, and benefits to be gained, from employing tailor-made pedagogical approaches in English language teaching. It contends that the all-embracing educational landscape necessitates a parallel move with the fast-changing times. It also explains why and how pedagogical spaces should be widened and narrowed. The discussion draws from a wide literature base, research findings and personal experiences, but zeros in on theoretical frameworks such as constructivism, social constructivism and scaffolding. The paper concludes with the assertion that the widening and narrowing of pedagogical approaches have become an imperative in an ever-changing world. This is especially pertinent for countries that are concerned with the development of productive and participating citizens, which in turn stimulates and produces national development.

Keywords: pedagogy, Mother Tongue, migratory patterns, globalisation, constructivism, social constructivism, scaffolding

In the face of glocalisation's frustrations and challenges, the call to revisit pedagogy resounds loud and clear. A one-size-fits-all pedagogical approach belies the very essence of education, which has teaching and learning at its core, and development, expansion and sustainability as its framework. — Gertrude Shotte

There is no true pedagogy without criticality, without dialogue, without change, without reachability, without impartiality, without interdependency and learner empowerment. — Gertrude Shotte

Introduction

The realities of how languages play a major role in various national and international activities, render the English language the most widely spoken in the world. The use of the language in political, economic, social, and culture discourses, as well as in academic, business and trading legalities has earned the English language its global status (Gohil, 2013; Rohmah, 2005). This status brings with it a respectable level of importance for

developmental growth of the global citizenry. It is for this incontestable reason that educators at all levels of the education system should pay focused attention to English language teaching. This descriptive paper focuses on English language learners, but targets the pedagogy employed by teachers who are tasked with the teaching of English to learners whose Mother Tongue is not English.

The expression *the world is a global village*, finds full resonance in the outworkings of globalisation, the internationalisation of education and migratory trends. The increasing high levels of interconnection among societies across the world are largely responsible for narrowing the interconnection of world peoples via various means (Purba, 2021; Chirico, 2014). It follows therefore that English language pedagogical issues exist in multilingual countries and in those countries that have a migrant multilingual population. It is against this backdrop that the paper explores the value of, and benefits to be gained, from employing tailor-made pedagogical approaches in English language teaching. Obviously, it becomes necessary for the all-embracing educational landscape to be in step with the fast-changing times.

Following a brief note about the methodology, the paper takes a peek at the concepts and the theories that frame the discussion. It next explains why and how pedagogical spaces should be widened and narrowed. The explanations were strengthened by some practical examples and suggestions that are based on personal experiences. The paper concludes with the assertion that the widening and narrowing of pedagogical approaches is vitally important in all teaching learning activities, especially in the teaching of English for learners whose Mother Tongue is not English. This is especially pertinent for countries that are concerned with the development of productive and participating citizens, which in turn stimulates and produces national development.

Methodology

There are voluminous data sources that addresses the topic under discussion. In order to expand and support my information base and to discover what other researchers have found about the said topic, I employed a literature-based methodological approach, where the literature is the main data source. Snyder (2019, p. 334) affirms: "a literature review is an excellent way of synthesizing research findings to show evidence on a meta-level and to uncover areas in which more research is needed, which is a critical component of creating theoretical frameworks and building conceptual models". The meta-level used here does not focus "on data, as reflected by the operationalization of variables, the magnitude of effect sizes, and the sample sizes", but on narrative review (King & He, 2005, p. 670). The paper is wholly qualitative in nature and is built within conceptual and theoretical frameworks. Personal experiences also formed part of the discussion.

One of the limitations of the qualitative design is researcher bias because of personal experiences and/or the area of expertise, which may lead to the possibility of making incorrect assertions, or even making erroneous inferences. In building and presenting the discussion, I constantly reflected on the limitations of the approach, with a view to avoiding, as much as possible, the surfacing of biases and subjectivity in content selection and data analysis.

Conceptualisations and theoretical perspectives

Globalisation, internationalisation of education, migratory trends and pedagogy are the main concepts that bound the claims presented in this paper. Associated to these are several theories that support teaching learning practices. The confines of this paper do not allow the space that can demonstrate a full interaction with the concepts and related theories. It will therefore present brief perspectives on constructivism, social constructivism and scaffolding, as well as show their connection to other useful theories.

Concepts

Globalisation

This is a concept that is so complex that it has attracted numerous debates on definitional levels. Put simply, it is the influential methods used by organisations to do business on a global scale. It refers to the global-scale changes that happen in political, economic, social and cultural spaces of life (Purba, 2021; Appadurai, 1996). For the purpose of this paper, I will concentrate on Appadurai's (1996) five proposed 'scapes' – ethnoscape (global migratory trends), technoscape (links people via technology), finanscape (unstable economies), mediascape (information flows), and ideoscape (political ideologies). There are inextricable continuous interactions between the scapes, which have serious implications for teaching learning activities around the world.

Internationalisation of education

The literature shows a strong developmental link between internationalisation and higher education, within cross-border activities (Marginson, 2022). Given that international, regional and local share a complex relationship that interacts on various levels, which are encased by cultural hybridity, it seems safe to conclude that the internationalisation of education can also be interpreted within other non-tertiary education processes. Knight contends that the integration of international dimensions into teaching learning and research activities, is what creates an international stance (2004, p. 7). This means that non-tertiary institutions who integrate international dimensions on the basis of their action research work, can too be linked to an internationalised status. In a world that is influenced by the globalisation 'scapes', it is a step in the right direction for educators to embrace the incorporation of international elements into their pedagogic activities.

Migratory trends

Migration is not a new phenomenon. Little wonder that it generates a plethora of discussions in national, regional and international settings. Both in and out migration impact education in many ways. But immigrant learners are the ones who seem to be negatively impacted most. European Network of Education Councils (2013) notes:

> *... excellence and equity should be regarded as the two sides of the same coin, since offering equal opportunities to all students is critical in the process of building the pedagogical context in which all children are ambitious and are challenged to learn and develop, discover their talents and achieve high standards of the learning outcomes.*

Clearly, immigrant learners need to have appropriate support if they are to have a smooth integration into a given learning institution. They should also be allowed to experience educational attainment, and success in the labour market.

Pedagogy

The word pedagogy is generally linked to teaching, but it denotes much more. I employ Friesen and Su's (2023) explanation as the framework for this paper. They see pedagogy as "limited neither to sets of instructional strategies or political programs, nor to what occurs in institutional settings and professional practices…, but as a broader conception of human becoming". Taking this position, Friesen and Su link pedagogy to an "unavoidably ethical activity" that is primarily undertaken for the learner.

Theories and related methods

Constructivism and social constructivism

The theory of constructivism is ascribed to the works of Jean Piaget and Jerome Bruner. Lev Vygotsky has the credit for social constructivism. Both theories are concerned with how knowledge gained via personal experiences, is constructed and understood. They propose that learners are active participants in their learning. Emphasis is placed on meaning and understanding via a discovery-based approach (Akpan et al., 2020). Sometimes it is necessary to plan discovery-based activities that are outplayed in group settings. This is the precise point where social constructivism enters the theoretical discourse.

Language, interpretation and experience are at the heart of knowledge attainment specific settings where people interact. In these settings knowledge becomes socially constructed. But knowledge is also co-created because it was developed within a group setting. What is demonstrated here is the meeting of 'old' and 'new' knowledges, which prompts action after new knowledge is processed mentally. In social constructivism, there is the acquisition of knowledge within a social context, and this in turn supports cognitive development. Undoubtedly, educational learning spaces are ideal places for the cultivation of learner's social interaction. Bruner and Piaget also support the idea that cognitive development happens in a social space where people influence each other. Constructivist and social constructivist pedagogical approaches are instrumental in motivating learning, which is made possible by applying Piaget's readiness principle to all learning activities. When a learner's development is stimulated, learning as well as the desire to continue to learn, happens spontaneously. This practice facilitates a smooth transition to Bruner's spiral learning ideas.

Scaffolding

This term was coined by Bruner who connected it to Vygotsky's work on Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) – skills or knowledge that learners gain with the help or guidance from others, hence the common use of the term Vygotsky's scaffolding. Although closely linked to Vygotsky's social constructivism theory, scaffolding is actually a teaching method that "helps students learn more by working with a teacher or a more advanced student to achieve their learning goals" (Sarikas, 2020). The literature reviewed points to the effectiveness of scaffolding, but with a caveat to be mindful of creating passive learners (Ibid. et al.). Other theories that are used alongside scaffolding are Maslow's hierarchy of needs, Gardner's multiple intelligences, Ausabel's advanced organisers and Bloom's taxonomy of objectives. The application of theory to pedagogy is a beneficial exercise for learners and teachers alike.

Widening and narrowing spaces

The theorisation of space offers more than explanations of the physical, but also the social meanings that occur within the said material spaces. This acknowledgement points to the unavoidable interrelationship between the material space and the social interaction that governs activities in that space. Wang and Wang (2022, p. 732) claim: "Learning space is not restricted to a physical space where learning occurs intentionally… it also involves a variety of interpersonal, socio-cultural and institutional context…". They further note that an "interactive learning space is indispensable to the implementation of collaborative learning" (Ibid.). Wang and Wang's theorisation of the widening and narrowing of space is used in this paper.

Physical space is a crucial element in a learning environment. Sometimes it becomes necessary to have different seating arrangements to accommodate effective learning. Equally important is the consideration given to the value of interpersonal and socio-cultural spaces. In these spaces, educators have numerous opportunities to bring the aforementioned theories to life. The application of constructivism and social constructivism theories may necessitate a widening and/or a narrowing of physical or interpersonal spaces. Learning does not only take place in a standardised seating arrangement, but also in situations where a personal and/or collaborative style is necessary. Some tasks can be dealt with singularly, others need a shared formula, either with peers or a facilitator. For pedagogy to work at its best, there may be even a need to widen or narrow institutional spaces, although there is the recognition that they are governed by national policies.

The relationship between space and pedagogy is clear. Effective planning is likely to result in effective teaching learning interactions and success.

Why revisit pedagogic practices?

The fallout of globalisation, the internationalisation of education and migratory trends have brought about challenging situations for educational institutions. Teacher education institutions and other training organisations are compelled to respond to the ever-changing educational landscapes. However, in some cases, some of the pedagogical practices fall short of meeting high-quality-education expectations.

An English language focus is chosen because English is the most widely-spoken language in the world. For reasons beyond the scope of this paper, English is the official language of many countries, but Mother Tongue and other dialects are widely spoken. The switching between languages is a common occurrence. There is also the situation where English is only spoken at school and at other commemorative events. But teachers and learners live in these very communities, hence the compounding of the language issue. Yet, it is expected that the teaching of English should be taught in a way that produces English language excellence. In situations like these, the need for the utilisation of sound pedagogy is very critical, especially as challenges compound with the changing times. The next section takes a peek at some successful pedagogic examples.

Some practical examples

The examples cited here are based on personal experiences gained from various teaching learning situations in different countries – all have English as an official

language, but regularly use other languages and dialects. All the activities undertaken were framed within the earlier-mentioned theories and techniques.

I have selected a *Parts-of-Speech* theme as the background for the examples chosen because these parts are the cornerstone of meaningful communication. The eight parts of speech (noun, pronoun, verb, adjective, adverb, preposition, conjunction, and interjection) are words we read, speak, hear and even think! Each has a particular function and occupies a particular position in any given sentence. Elsewhere (Shotte, 2013, p. 153), I note: "… it is not just the word itself that matters; how it is used in the sentence, its position in the sentence and its meaning also need some consideration if one is to know what part of speech a specified word is". Knowledge of how the parts of speech operate, aids the understanding of sentence construction and how speech should be interpreted. But equally valuable, is the knowledge that helps in the improvement in writing skills.

Example 1: The presentation-practice-production (PPP) approach

The PPP technique is one of the successful methods that I have used for English language learning. For presentation, the teacher takes the lead and the learner plays a subordinate role; in the case of practice, it is a balanced teacher-learner collaboration setting; and with regard to production, the learner takes the leading role, while the teacher facilitates if necessary.

Example 2: The music-poetry approach

I hail the music-poetry approach for its highly successful rates. There is no limit as to what teachers can do to present lessons in a variety of interesting and exciting ways. This is because poetry and music are inextricably linked since they are two peas in the same pod. I refer to the following explanation because it worked then, and it is still working today (Shotte, 2013, p. 150):

> Both poetry and music are easy to 'digest' because of their rhythmic nature. They also have the power to evoke deep-seated feelings, which suggests that these tools can be used not only to help children to learn, but also to help them 'bring back to mind' what they have been taught. The all-embracing nature of poetry and music puts them in a strong position to be the 'perfect' catalysts for teaching and learning.

The universality of both music and poetry, together with the global reputation of the English language, are practicalities that teachers should consider in reframing pedagogy.

Example 3: The think-about-it approach

Speaking, listening, reading and writing are essential English language skills if learners whose Mother Tongue is not English, are to become masterful in the use this universal language. I have added another skill to the list – *thinking*. From the literature reviewed, this skill is not mentioned alongside the other four, although none of them is fully functional without it. Interestingly, being occupied in receptive or productive mode, demands a respectable degree of thinking for successful engagement to be attained. The receptive skills are listening and reading, and the productive skills are speaking and writing. I place thinking squarely in the intersection of both modes. The art and act of thinking is unrehearsed and unstructured, which make thinking an available and convenient skill to embrace.

The three approaches mentioned in this section offer sufficient scope for the reviewing and reframing of pedagogy at any point on the teaching learning spectrum. The balance and scope that they continuously create can help teachers to allow learners to become active participants in their own learning.

Conclusion

The main focus of this descriptive paper is on pedagogy for teachers who teach English to learners whose Mother Tongue is not English. It acknowledges that the English language is the most widely spoken language in the world, and that its spread continues as a result of globalisation, the internationalisation of education and migratory trends. The paper's focus on pedagogy draws attention to the need for teachers to use techniques that relate to various teaching learning theories. Constructivism and social constructivism are the two main theories that guide the discussion, but reference is made other related theories such as Gardener's multiple intelligences, Bloom's taxonomy of objectives and Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and techniques such as scaffolding, spiral learning and the principles of readiness. In this context, it explains how spaces can be widened and narrowed. Examples of three teaching approaches based on personal experience are cited as practical and successful techniques – *the presentation-practice-production (PPP) approach, the music-poetry approach*, and *the think-about-it approach*.

The paper makes clear that named three approaches are as convenient as they are easy to use. Together, and singularly, they offer sufficient latitude for the continuous reexamining and refashioning of pedagogy at any point on the teaching learning continuum. Their self-replicating nature creates stability and balance. This increases a teacher's ability to help learners to be active participants in their own learning.

In this era of ever-changing educational landscapes, the author asserts that the widening and narrowing of pedagogical approaches is an imperative. The need for solid pedagogic environment has never been more acute. May educators never lose sight of the fact that today's learners are tomorrow's leaders.

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