Teachers' Knowledge, Task-based Language Teaching as Correlates of Students' Academic Achievement in English Grammar in Oyo State

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Abstract

This study investigated teachers' knowledge, perception of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State. The study adopted the survey research design of the correlational type. Ten (10) public secondary schools were randomly selected from public secondary schools in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select forty (40) SS II students and two English Language teachers from each school. 400 students and twenty (20) English Language teachers participated in the study. Three research instruments were used for data collection: Teachers' Perception of Task-based Language Teaching Questionnaire (r=.77), Teachers' Knowledge Test on Task-based Language Teaching (r=.75)

and English Grammar Achievement Test (r=.82). Data collected were analysed using Multiple Regression Analysis. Results were interpreted at 0.05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that there was a positive, low non-significant relationship between teachers' knowledge of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English grammar (r = 0.12; p>0.05). The joint contribution of teachers' knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching to students achievement in English Grammar ($F_{(2, 17)}$ = 0.24; Adj R^2 = 0.09; p>0.05) was not significant. The relative contribution of teacher's knowledge of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English Grammar (β = 0.11; t = 0.46; p>0.05) was not significant. Also, the relative contribution of teacher's perception of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English Grammar (β = 0.11; t = 0.46 p>0.05) was not significant. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that English Language teachers should create a conducive environment that will make the teaching of English grammar easy. Government should organise seminars, workshops and other in-service trainings for English Language teachers on how they can teach English Grammar using Task-based Language Teaching.

Introduction

Grammar is the spinal cord of any language and the user's mastery of it determines his competence and performance in the language. It is an invisible force that guides us as we put words together into sentences. Any person who communicates using a particular language, consciously or unconsciously becomes aware of the grammar of that language (Kumar, 2013). Turula (2011) asserts that grammar is what equals the agreed upon rules and norms of language and includes the comprehension of sentence structure. English Grammar is the way in which meanings are encoded into words in the English Language. According to Ayodele (2001),

grammar is crucial for communication to take place because it shows how language is used. It is the study of the systematic account of the rules of sentence structure, syntax and semantics of a particular language. Lester (2001), defines grammar as the internal, unconscious rule system, that is, the rules of the language that have been acquired and are used unconsciously by a speaker. It also means the scientific analysis of grammar that is, the linguistic models of grammar and transformative generative grammar. English Grammar fosters precision, detect ambiguity and exploit the richness of expression available in English Language (Bradshaw, 2013). Grammar is central to teaching and learning of languages; it is also the system or rules of language, and it is used to find ways to construct words in sentences. It is essential to learn grammar rules for forming words and making sentences (Olubodun, 2014).

Grammar helps users of the English Language to communicate more effectively. Quite simply, if users of English Language knows how English works, then they can make better use of it. A knowledge of grammar enables them to evaluate the choices which are available to them during composition. If language users understand the relationship between the parts of a sentence, they can eliminate many of the ambiguities and misunderstandings which result from poor construction. In the interpretation of writing too, grammatical knowledge is important. The understanding of literary texts, for example, often depends on careful grammatical analysis. Other forms of writing can be equally difficult to interpret. Scientific and academic writing, for instance, may be complex not just in the ideas they convey, but also in their syntax. These types of writing can be difficult to understand easily without some familiarities with how the parts relate to each other. The study of grammar enables a language user to go beyond his instinctive, native-speaker knowledge, and to use English Language in an intelligent and informed way (Amore, 2016).

Proper grammar is essential for understanding English as a second language as well as for learning a new language, since the English Language has become the pivot on which the educational

wheel of Nigeria rotates (Fakeye, 2006). The importance of grammar is underscored in making it possible for interlocutors to encode, with precision and to be able to understand one another. The corollary of this reasoning is that there tends to be a communication breakdown if the grammar is lacking in a conversation resulting in misunderstanding and disagreement. The purpose of grammar in communication is to convey thought of the language user through language. If one is not understood, then the aim of communication is defeated (Adedigba, 2015).

Despite the importance of English Grammar to students' academic advancement and success in English Language, students' performance in English Grammar, especially in external examinations has been very poor. The poor performance of students in English Grammar has been identified as the major cause of the poor results they obtain in English Language and this has been traced to spelling errors, misinterpretation of the demands of the questions and difficulty in framing their responses due to poor command of the subject. According to WAEC Chief Examiners' Report (2015), candidates' weaknesses include inability to marshal their points and answers to questions that required detailed explanations, inability to spell technical words correctly, inability to understand the words used in passages due to low level of vocabulary knowledge and ignorance of the rudiments of English Grammar. Adesulu and Laju (2015) attribute the weaknesses of candidates to inadequate preparation and rote memorisation, illegible handwriting and vague or irrelevant answers.

The major causes of the poor performance have been attributed to among others, inappropriate strategy employed by teachers (Mabekoje, 2013; Ayodele, 2001; Thornbury 1999 and Ajayi, 1996). This perennial problem of students' poor performance may be attributed to the traditional-oriented teaching in Nigeria and the fact that most teachers of English Language still emphasise teacher-centred and teacher-directed instruction. Jibowo (2012), asserts that the learners of ESL in Nigeria tend to manifest fear and anxiety in grammar classes. Therefore, the weaknesses, fear and anxiety

which students exhibit in English Grammar suggest that something may be wrong with the approach used in teaching English grammar in schools. WAEC Chief Examiners' Report (2008) suggested that there was the need for alternative approaches, methods and strategies that could relate academic contents to real life experiences to enhance high academic achievement.

In Task-based Language Teaching, the emphasis is on meaningful, holistic language practice, in which learners need to listen, read, speak, or write in order to complete a challenge. The rationale for TBLT as a teaching methodology is found in theories of language acquisition that emphasises the central role in language learning of meaningful language use allied with opportunities to notice the ways in which meanings are created through the Target Language (Long, 1996 and Skehan, 1996). Task-based Language Teaching is one of the methods generated from communicative approach which applies some interactive and meaningful activities engaging the learners to comprehend or produce an outcome using the Target Language. The tasks applied in this method are different from the traditional tasks in which the teacher instructs the students to complete the exercise (SeungHee, 2005). Nunan (2004) defines a task as a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the Target Language, while their attention focused on mobilising their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, middle and an end. The definition is in accordance with the principal of teaching grammar in communicative approach that teaching grammar should be taught explicitly and implicitly (SeungHee, 2005).

Generally, the phases of using Task-based Language Teaching consist of three phases; (1) pre-task. It is the introduction to the topic and task provision of useful input (listening, reading, brainstorming, etc.). (2) Task cycle. In this phase, the students

commonly work in small groups, are encouraged to accomplish the task and present it in written or spoken form. The teacher monitors the students' work and provides help for them in order that they are motivated. (3) Post-task. It focuses on the language used and consists of practice of the language as necessary and retrospective discussion of the task-awareness-raising. It is important to emphasise that task in Task-based Language Teaching should have a very clear objective and conclude with a very tangible sense of achievement for the learners. In all, task based language teaching is a proven language teaching approach that has yielded positive results in language teaching in any other nation. The level of effectiveness and implementation boils down to perception and knowledge of teachers about it (Willis 2006).

When perception and knowledge of teachers about TBLT are high and students are provided with various interactive and meaningful tasks, there is no doubt that students communicative competence would improve and they would also experience learning process in a better class condition. Similarly, knowing the perception and knowledge of teachers towards TBLT will also help to tell how it can be used to facilitate the learning of English Grammar especially in an environment where English Language is used as a Second Language (Willis 2006).Van den Branden (2006) notes that there is relationship among teachers' perceptions, knowledge and their actions in the classroom. What language teachers do in the classroom is inspired by what they know, believe and think. When language teachers have poor perception of Task-based Instruction and low knowledge of it, no real change will happen in an ESL setting.

Therefore, this study investigated correlation among teachers' knowledge, perception of Task-based Language Teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Statement of the Problem

Grammar is crucial for communication to take place because it shows how language is used. Communication suffers a considerable breakdown in the absence of correct use of grammar. It is an aspect of language that is crucial and central to language learning and acquisition. However, reports have shown that students' performance in English grammar is very low. As a way of addressing the problem, researchers have carried out studies on different methods and strategies of teaching English grammar in schools. Despite the contribution of these studies to the teaching and learning of English grammar, the problem of students' poor performance still persists. Scholars have therefore advocated a shift in research focus from integrative grammar instructional strategies to task-based language teaching. Studies have shown that there is a strong link between task-based language teaching and students' achievement in various aspects of English language like comprehension and summary but relationship among teachers' knowledge, perception of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar has not been given much research attention. Therefore, this study investigated relationship among teachers' knowledge, perception of Task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Research Questions

1. What relationship exists between teachers' knowledge, of Task-Based Language Teaching and students' achievement in English grammar.
2. What is the joint contribution of teachers' knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching to achievement in English grammar?
3. What is the relative contribution of teachers' perception of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English grammar?

Significance of the Study

This study revealed the relationship among teachers' knowledge, perception of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English grammar. Through the findings of this study, educational stakeholders would be guided on identifying and working on factors that could enhance students' achievement in English grammar. Also, the study would add to the pool of research on solution to the poor performance of students in English grammar and English Language.

Theoretical Framework
Communicative Language Teaching Theory

It was Noam Chomsky's theories in the 1960s, focusing on competence and performance in language learning, that gave rise to Communicative Language Teaching, but the conceptual basis for Communicative Language Teaching was laid in the 1970s by linguists Michael Halliday, who studied how language functions are expressed through grammar. The work of applied linguist developed the Communicative Language Teaching theory and its application to language learning. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) aims to apply the theoretical perspective of the communicative approach by focusing on the communicative competence as the goal of language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). According to Sreehari (2012), in Communicative Language Teaching is based on a view of language as communication, in which the speaker uses the language for some purposes; orally or literally. Littlewood (2013) claims that there are two types of Communicative Language Teaching: The communicative perspective on language is primarily about what we learn. It proposes that when we learn a language we are primarily learning not language structures but language functions (how to do things with words) and the communicative perspective on learning focuses attention on how we learn, especially on our natural capacities to acquire language simply through communication without explicit instruction.

Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) is directly derived from Communicative Language Teaching. TBLT is an approach which offers students material and the students has to be actively involved in the processing of learning to accomplish the goal of learning or complete the task (Hashemi and Darvishi, 2012). According to Nunan (2004), task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language. The task itself contains instructions for the students to make particular real-context situation in writing or speaking. Indeed, there is an opportunity for the students to use the language. Mao (2012) suggests that language teaching should interact with learning to create genuine use of the language, and that language proficiency as the goal of learning can be achieved by doing tasks.

This theory is relevant to this study because Task-based Language Teaching is a different way to teach English Grammar. It can help the students by placing them in a situation like in the real world where oral communication is essential for doing a specific task. Hence, Task-based Language Teaching aims at providing opportunities for learners to use the Target Language both spoken and written language through learning activities to engage the authentic, practical and functional use of language for particular purposes.

Methodology
The study adopted the survey research design of the correlational type. Ten (10) public secondary schools were randomly selected from twenty-three (23) public secondary schools in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select forty (40) SS II students and two English language teachers from each school making a total of four hundred (400) students and twenty (20) teachers. 400 students and twenty (20) English language teachers participated in the study. Three research instruments were used for data collection: Teachers' Perception of Task-based Language Teaching Questionnaire (r=.77), Teachers'

Knowledge Test on Task-Based Language Teaching (r=.75) and English Grammar Achievement Test (r=.82). Data collected were analysed using Multiple Regression Analysis. Results were interpreted at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research question 1: What relationship exists between teachers' knowledge of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar?

Table 1: Relationship between teachers' knowledge of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar.

Variables	N	Mean	S.D.	R	P-value	Remark
Knowledge	20	12.80	2.97	0.123	0.605	N.S.
Achievement	300	8.19	3.08			

N.S. denotes non-significant at $p < 0.05$

Table 4 indicates that there is a positive, low non-significant relationship between teachers' knowledge of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar ($r = 0.12$; $p > 0.05$). This means that teachers' knowledge of task-based language teaching is not significantly related to students' achievement in English Grammar.

Research question 2: What is the joint contribution of teacher's knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English grammar?

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Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis showing the joint contribution of independent variables to achievement in English Grammar.

Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Significant
Regression	4.436	2	2.218	0.235	0.793
Residual	160.114	17	9.418		
Total	**164.550**	**19**			
R = 0.164 R Square = 0.027 Adjusted R Square = 0.088 Std. Error of the Estimate = 3.06896					

Table 2 reveals that the joint contribution of teacher's knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching to students achievement in English Grammar ($F_{(2, 17)}$ = 0.24; Adj R^2 = 0.09; p>0.05) is not significant. This means that teacher's knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching do not predict students' achievement in English Grammar.

Research question 3: What is the relative contribution of teacher's knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English Grammar?

Table 3: Multiple Regression Analysis showing relative contributions of the independent variables to students' achievement in English Grammar.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficient		T	Sig.
	Beta	Std. Error	Beta (β)		
(Constant)	13.110	8.097		1.619	0.124
Teachers knowledge	0.110	0.239	0.111	0.463	0.650
Perception	0.073	0.160	0.109	0.455	0.655

Table 3 shows that the relative contribution of teacher's knowledge of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English

Grammar (β = 0.11; t = 0.46; p>0.05) is not significant. Also, the relative contributions of teacher's perception of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English Grammar (β = 0.11; t = 0.46 p>0.05) is not significant. This indicates that none of the independent variables relatively contributes to students' achievement in English Grammar.

Discussion of Findings
Table 1 indicated that there was a positive, low non-significant relationship between teachers' knowledge of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar. This means that teachers' knowledge of task-based language teaching is not significantly related to students' achievement in English Grammar. This finding is similar to Ellis (2006) who found that there was a positive, low non-significant relationship between teachers' knowledge of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar. This finding is against the study of Ruso (2009) who revealed that there was not a positive, low non-significant relationship between teachers' knowledge of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar.

Table II shows that the joint contribution of teacher's knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English Grammar was not significant. This means that when teacher's knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching to students' attitude to English Grammar are taken together, they do not predict to students' achievement in English Grammar. This finding is similar to Xiongyong and Samuel (2011) who found that the joint contribution of teacher's knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English grammar was not significant. This finding is not in line with Yim (2009) who found that the joint contribution of teacher's knowledge and perception of task-based language teaching to students' achievement in English Grammar was significant.

Conclusion

It was found that none of the independent variables could predict students' achievement in English Grammar. This study has provided a better understanding of relationship among teachers' knowledge, perception of task-based language teaching and students' achievement in English Grammar in Lagelu Local Government Area of Oyo State.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that English Language teachers should create a conducive environment that will make the teaching of English Grammar easy. Government should organise seminars, workshops and other in-service trainings for English language teachers on how they can teach English Grammar using Task-based Language Teaching. Parents should provide necessary materials such as textbooks, dictionaries, writing materials and notebooks for their children.

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