



FUNDS OF KNOWLEDGE AS SCAFFOLD FOR LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASS

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ABSTRACT

Funds of knowledge have to do with students' innate wealth of knowledge acquired through their socio-cultural experiences. The knowledge potential brought to the classroom can be harnessed and used as a scaffold for students to transit from what they know to the goals they want or ought to attain. In this work it is discovered how learners' funds of knowledge could be sourced, sometimes in collaboration with family members to enhance teaching-learning process in the English language classroom. This is necessary because English language is not just a core subject but the language of instruction for all other school subjects. Students' funds of knowledge have been reported to create good classroom atmosphere, and facilitate students' participation in contributing to learning contents. It helps learners to view instructional activities as meaningful. It is pertinent that the development of all four language communication skills (receptive and productive) is taken into consideration in planning lessons with knowledge funds in the English language classroom.

Keywords: Funds of Knowledge, Socio-cultural Experience, Scaffold, Communication Skills

Introduction

The word “fund” has to do with a supply of something; a kind of reservoir to be drawn upon. Funds of knowledge, therefore, could be defined as personal life experiences acquired by students mostly outside school, through their socio-cultural interactions. Volman & Glide (2021) see funds of knowledge as what students acquire in their families, among members of their peer groups, in their communities, through popular culture and the social media and internet. It is therefore regarded as the background knowledge that a learner has, which is viewed as an asset, and serves as a foundation for further learning. This will help

learners to view instructional activities as meaningful, instead of an approach that merely teaches rules or facts for learners to memorise and regurgitate during tests and examinations. This work therefore attempts to spell out how funds of knowledge can be used for understanding concepts and language skills.

The English language class is usually a large one, not only because English is the language of instruction, but it is a subject that is needed to be passed for students to make advancement in their educational careers. Researchers in the field of English language teaching and learning in Nigeria (Jen &



Adakonye, 2016; Muhammad, Ya'u, Aliyu & Hassan 2018; Saleh, 2021; & Mbegbu & Uzoegwu 2022) have emphasised the fact that most English language classes have many students. As a result of class size, the English language teacher has the advantage of having a mix of students with a wide range of not just academic but socio-cultural diversities. The multiple identities and ethnicity, and knowledge garnered from these which students bring to the classroom, could be drawn upon by the English language teacher to build into the lessons taught in order to make them more worthwhile to the learners.

The socialisation function of education is increasingly becoming popular. This is because people's awareness is gradually being drawn to responding to social and ethnic diversities as a plus – something that can be used to enhance interpersonal interaction and social cognition of learners and in the process also enhance their communicative skills. Aguilar, Kiyama, Gravitt, and Moll (2011) point out that this will happen when learning exercises are structured, such that students get to know each other better and thus are made to gain from each other's experiences.

A community is a group of people who speak the same language and exhibit the same culture. Communication skill is improved through interaction. The English language classroom should be harnessed to create an atmosphere of social cohesion where the funds of knowledge of each learner is freely shared with others for a multiplication of knowledge content that can help students' comprehension and enable them to possess

better communicative skills. According to Subero, Vujasinovic, & Esteban-Guitart (2017), leveraging on students' fund of knowledge enables them to get to know each other better. It also helps to improve on the level of respect among students. It improves interactions, increases involvement in learning, and creates an inclusive environment that engenders a positive learning atmosphere in the classroom.

Focusing on students' competences, skills and knowledge acquired outside school could serve as a scaffold that could help them climb faster in language skill acquisition and communicative competence in the English language classroom. In this work, scaffolding is metaphorically used to mean that learning experiences could be directed in such a way that students' fund of knowledge would assist them in their areas of weakness so that their mastery of language and communication skills will be better. One advantage of the scaffolding strategy is that it produces a learner-centred, rather than a teacher-centred class. According to some scholars (Van de Pol & Beishuizen, 2010; Van Driel, Slot & Bakker, 2018) scaffolding guides learners till they reach higher levels of competence and skills acquisition that may have been difficult without the scaffold. With such scaffolding, students take ownership of their learning experiences; the teacher then acts only as a guide.

Extant studies (Van de Pol and Beishuizen, 2010; van Driel, Slot & Bakker, 2018) point out that there are some advantages of scaffolding, such as giving the teacher the opportunity to monitor and facilitate learners' progress until learning skills are mastered, to



ensure that concepts and skills are internalised, and to provide positive learning environment. Thus the learning atmosphere becomes a mixture of learning and fun, and because scaffolds are not permanent, they are only temporarily used till learners obtain mastery.

The goal of most English language teachers is to ensure that learners master language and communication skills. This is exhibited in learners when they are able to demonstrate the ability to decode messages, when they express themselves easily and understand non-verbal, social and cultural nuances of the language (Idialu, 2020). In essence, learners are expected to become fluent and confident. Nigeria is a multilingual nation where English is a first additional or second language (EFAL/ESL) for most students. It is therefore necessary that strategies that will give learners opportunities for using funds of knowledge that they have gathered from their social-cultural backgrounds are brought into the English language pedagogy.

Expected Language and Communication Skills to Master in the English Language Class

The major language communication skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The first two are audio-oral skill, while the last two that involve written material (reading and writing) are literacy skills. These areas of language communication are often intertwined and it is difficult to concentrate on teaching or learning one aspect without concurrently developing skills in one other skill. Of all the four language skills listening is one of the most neglected in teaching language skills in most English language

classes (Idialu, 2020). However, listening is a language skill that if well learned and mastered could positively affect speaking and writing. Therefore, language teachers should consciously plan their language teaching strategy to include helping learners to improve listening skills. Mabekoje (2009) and Khasawneh (2021) agree that in teaching listening skills, learners could be taught to listen to detect main words identifying topic ideas, get meaning of words from context, recognise cohesive devices, retain what is heard in short and long term memory and so on. Instructors should be well versed in these and more and be able to achieve reasonable goals in their listening comprehension lesson.

Speaking is one of the productive skills expected to be taught in the English language class. The two productive skills are speaking and writing because they are the avenues by which we can ascertain what the student has learnt. They are therefore called the expressive skills (meaning avenues for expression of knowledge or ideas). Abdikarimova, Tashieva, Kyzy & Abdullaeva, (2021) point out the important of speaking skill as it develops learners' confidence and encourages class participation serves as self-esteem booster. A well-developed speaking skill stimulates imagination through spoken language. It helps learners' fluency and enables them to cope with utilitarian activities including public speaking, performance at interviews, asking and answering questions in class and so on. In teaching speaking skills instructors should note the importance of correct use of stress, rhythm and intonation, appropriate use of vocabulary, pitch, and ability to produce distinctive sounds especially among similar



sounding words in order to avoid ambiguity or malapropism.

Reading involves the ability to interpret visual/graphic writing through mental and intellectual perception as a result of learning that is acquired in a particular language. Mbegbu & Uzoegwu (2022) established the fact that reading does not involve just mere interpretation but understanding of meaning, the writer's trend of thought, leading to knowledge acquisition. Reading types like skimming, scanning, literal, inferential, critical, creative and evaluative reading should be taught. Both Loud and silent reading help to improving reading skill. In teaching silent reading, reading speed will be improved through constant practice.

Writing is a very important language skill that is needed not only in the English language class but in all subjects and courses of learning. The micro skills needed in writing are the use of correct orthography like spelling and mechanical accuracy, accurate word order, use of appropriate vocabulary that suite the essay type and the topic of deliberation. Writing of outline and grouping of ideas into units of paragraphs should be well taught. According Saleh (2021) aver that writing should be taught in such a way that learners will be able to develop utilitarian skills in aspects like summary writing, minutes taking, petition writing, different forms of letters and essays.

Essence of Scaffolding with Funds of Knowledge in the English Language Class
The cultural relevance of funds of knowledge addresses an important pedagogical strategy which is moving from the known to the

unknown. Ramos & Kiyama (2021) emphasise that not only does drawing from knowledge funds provide powerful cultural relevance to the students, that in itself makes for easier understanding and assimilation of new facts as the teacher will be routing the lesson activities from what the learner is familiar. This provides an easy step to new knowledge that the teacher wants the students to acquire. Working from the students' knowledge funds therefore provides a familiar environment for going into learning goals to be attained.

Teaching students through their knowledge funds help students appreciate their cultural diversities as something to be gained from. This makes them more appreciative of the differences in their personalities, ethnicities, nationalities and cultures. According to Glide & Volman (2021), it helps to breed a society with people who are more tolerant of each other and students who grow in developing great social capital, as drawing from the knowledge funds will create a better interactive class. This is because students get the opportunity to know one another and the knowledge of each learner's life experiences contributes meaningfully to the knowledge bank of all participants in the teaching-learning process.

Teaching and learning through funds of knowledge provides the teacher the opportunity to clinch a connection with the students by getting to know more about their home cultures and when necessary connect with their parents also. Hogg (2016) and Bronkhorst & Akkerman (2016) point out that it not just connects learning materials at a greater depth with classroom activities, but



provides opportunities for learners to have in-school and out-of-school relevance in tackling life problems. This is because learners learn from interacting with others and the experiences they get help them to gather knowledge that they can transfer in their personal life encounters.

Pedagogical Strategies for Infusing Funds of Knowledge into the English Language Class

Strategies for infusing students' funds of knowledge may be meta-cognitive, self-regulating, social and mostly affective. They may involve, crowd-sourcing knowledge or pooled knowledge through brainstorming, listening for specific information, writing and presenting oral reports and speaking and writing in functional contexts within and outside school, like presenting a welcome speech, writing application for job, responding to interviews and so on. Scholars (Baker & Rodes, 2007; Hogg and Volman, 2020) agree that applying knowledge funds strategy positively affect learning outcomes. Application of knowledge funds of students in the English language funds can be done by looking at how students' experiences can help them to flow naturally in the acquisition of the four language skills – listening, speaking, reading and writing. This can be done by the teacher taking an inventory of the students' ethnic groups, geographical locations and occupation of their parents/guardians and the students' life experiences. The teacher could then get written, audio, or audio-graphic materials that are focussed on the students' diverse funds of knowledge and use them as materials for teaching listening skill, speaking, reading and writing skills

Designing of teaching units should therefore, be related to specific funds of knowledge. According to Poole & Haung (2018), if lessons are built on learners shared funds of identity, learning becomes an avenue to promote students' social capital. Linking students' lives and experiences outside the school also helps in contextualising the contents of the curricula.

In both listening and writing comprehension passages, teaching materials should be as true to life as possible in order to boost students learning motivation. Njeru (2013) observed that some Kenyan students who were hitherto regarded as low performers rapidly improved when they were taught with materials close to their true-life experiences. For example, it is easier for students to relate with the contents of a passage that explains what happens in harmattan in a class in Africa, than a passage that discusses winter and snowing. It is also easier to tell students to write on how one of their native dishes is prepared than to ask them to explain how to prepare foreign dishes. This method of using students' funds of knowledge as a starting point in teaching the language skills could be regarded as a scaffold because as their language communication skills develop to an appreciable extent, materials outside the scope of their funds of knowledge skills could be gradually introduced. This is because learners cannot be taught based only on their funds of knowledge as holistic learning should widen the learner's horizon. This is why the use of students' funds of knowledge in teaching English language communication skills is hereby considered as scaffolding.



Funds of Knowledge and Listening Comprehension

A pedagogical for strategy involving the use of funds of knowledge in listening comprehension could be that as passages are being read, the students are made to listen and take note of aspects of those materials that are similar or different from their own life experiences. They could also be asked to take note of what is entirely new to them or what they have learnt from a cultural experience that is different from theirs. For example, a teacher can teach listening comprehension by reading, or asking students to read passages on fishing, canoe making, net weaving and other things connected with people coastal regions. Another passage could be on cattle raring and herding; poultry farming; cloth dyeing and so on (Njeru, 2013).

The passages could also be on festivals, naming ceremonies, traditional marriage, or any life experiences that capture the varied knowledge funds of students. Students could be made to select which of the topics they would like to listen to first, but there could be rotation of topics until all topics have been listened to in the listening comprehension classes and questions asked to see how well each student has comprehended what they listened to. In some cases students may be given a hint on what to listen to or get from the passage, audio, or audio-visual material. This may likely help the students to listen more attentively. The students may be shared in pairs, or made to work in small groups, or made to listen as a class to each material. Apart from the teacher getting materials that are focused on the knowledge funds of students, the students themselves may bring voice-note interviews or other audio, audio-

visual, or written materials about for example, methods of honey harvesting, gold smiting, iron smelting, perfume, or soap, or wine making, baking, and other funds of knowledge materials that the students can bring to the class. The opportunity of bringing the materials themselves could lead to increased motivation. It will also help to connect the family and community to the class. Apart from these, it makes contents of learning materials more realistic and relevant to the students.

The materials for teaching listening skill should be brought in few days before the day they would be used in class and such materials should be evaluated, grey areas clarified and mistakes corrected and errors pointed out and reverted before they are used as teaching materials. Knowledge funds for teaching any of the language skills is an all-embracing pedagogy, therefore no student should be excluded. They should all be encouraged to contribute in one way or the other to the funds of knowledge bank. Those who cannot bring learning materials for one reason or the other may be visited in their homes to find out what socio-cultural or occupational experiences of the parents or guardians can help to enrich the teaching-learning process of the student and others. Joves, Siques & Esteban-Guitar (2015) have verified that tapping funds of knowledge from learners' families is a successful strategy. Therefore, funds could be tapped from learners or their family members through interviews and the knowledge funds thus acquired used in one form or the other in the English language teaching and learning process, especially for creating materials that



would be suitable for listening comprehension for the class.

Funds of Knowledge in Teaching and Learning of Speaking Skills

Apart from listening skill, speaking skill is an important communication skill that students should be taught, trained and encouraged to master. Sometimes, students do develop lathophobic aphasia (the failure of speaking a language for fear of making mistakes). This according to Sugarman (2015) happens when learners are still grappling with the use of language. English language, though a language of instruction and the lingua franca in Nigeria, is the First Additional Language (FAL) for many learners, as most of them had often mastered their first language L_1 before coming to school and so the teacher needs to patiently groom learners to speak confidently in English language. This is why students' funds of knowledge serve as an important scaffold for teaching speaking skills. This is because it is easier for learners to speak on a subject that they are familiar with, leading them from the known to the unknown.

In teaching speaking skills with students' fund of knowledge, there are several strategies that a teacher could adopt. For example students could watch, listen to or read materials that are familiar to their acquired funds of knowledge. The students could then be randomly picked to talk about what they have watched, listened to or read. They could explain aspects of the learning material that are different from, same as, or new, compared to their personal experiences. Again, students could each be made to explain some of their funds of knowledge

without necessarily listening to, watching or reading any material in class.

Students' speaking skills could also be enhanced when topics of debates are coined from funds of knowledge bank that they and the teacher collectively bring to the class. While not necessarily correcting students while speaking, the teacher and the students who listen to their class mates while speaking should note areas of error or commendation-worthy aspects that should only be brought forward and analysed after the speaker would have finished making his or her presentation. In the process of correcting students the teacher should ensure that derogatory words and expressions that will discourage them or subsequent speakers are not used. Then, the evaluation or critiquing of students speeches should not be all about correcting mistakes or pointing out errors, but also commending what was well done. When learners realise that the intent of the lessons and practical exercises is to make them better speakers, they are most likely to gain confidence through frequent practice and be better motivated speakers (Glide, & Volman, 2021).

Funds of Knowledge in Teaching and Learning of Reading Skills

Reading is one of the core communication skills because a large percentage of knowledge gained in school is through reading. Therefore, students should be trained to read well so that they can do well not only in English language and general communication but are able to gain better understanding in all subjects. Many students that find reading difficult, have been discovered to have limited vocabulary in the



materials they are being presented (Voman & Glide, 2021). Scaffolding with reading materials that emanate from their own funds of knowledge would make such materials easier to grasp till they are able to branch out into reading materials of new or added knowledge funds.

The teacher may bring in materials that reflect the variegated funds of knowledge to the class. The students are then trained to do silent reading and reading aloud. During silent reading, questions that will test students' comprehension, skimming, scanning and summary and critical reasoning skills may be included in the given texts. Another strategy of teaching reading skills through students' funds of knowledge is to ask them to bring audio, video or audio-visual or written versions of their own funds of knowledge. The written forms could be corrected, restructured for effectiveness, while the spoken and audio materials could be transcribed into reading passages with exercises for the students to read either silently or loudly in class and the exercises done in like manner. In the read-aloud exercise, the teacher and the classmates of the student who reads before the class should take note of, apart from the contents, aspects of pronunciation, pitch and rhythm that could be bettered. This should be gently corrected after the reading to allow the student and other students to learn.

Funds of Knowledge in Teaching and Learning of Writing Skills

The highest language communication skill is writing, and it is one of the language skills aspects where students' funds of knowledge can be used as a scaffold in developing

communication skills especially in essay writing (Subero, Vila & Esteban-Guitart, 2015). Willing parents and wards could be invited to school to speak about or give practical demonstration of their occupational endeavours that students can learn from, after which students can be made to write essays on the seminars or workshops that they had participated in. Students can also go on field trips to companies or factories within the locality of their school, or they could send video clips of how certain things like how palm oil is processed, how different soaps and creams are made and so on, and students may be asked to write essays based on the video they had watched or places that they had visited. The bottom line is that their writing should be based on the knowledge funds the students have acquired.

In using funds of knowledge in teaching writing skills all members of a class may not necessarily write on a single topic. The teacher may coin at least four essay topics from the students' knowledge funds. The teacher may also write many essay topics and ask students to vote the four most preferred topics. From the four or any number of topics the teacher prefers, students could then be asked to write on their preferred topics. Funds of knowledge in essay writing can be based on any of the essay forms including narrative, descriptive, creative, expository or argumentative writing. They could describe how a ceremony is performed in their locality, how something is made, a story about an experience or an imaginary story based on happenings in their community.

Apart from essay writing, writing exercises in grammar and lexis and structure, should



reflect students' funds of knowledge. While teaching grammar for instance the text choice as learning materials should have sentences that reflect things that students can relate with. Students should also be encouraged to write sentences that reflect that background life-styles even in the process of expressing the level of their knowledge of the learning materials or topics taught. In teaching proper nouns for example, students could give examples of names and locations indigenous to their native lands as proper nouns. Another aspect of writing skill that can be enhanced by the application of knowledge funds activities is encouraging students to keep journals as they go about information gathering in their attempt to bring "funds" to the knowledge bank of the class. The language use of students could be evaluated as the teacher reads through students' journal to check not just the contents but how sentences are written to note students' areas of strength and weaknesses as a guide for further teaching.

Conclusion

This work has pointed out that Funds of Knowledge draws on students' knowledge, skills and experiences. It entails the use of true to life activities where the teacher is seen not just as an educational facilitator but also as a resource person that doubles as a socially relevant personality. Scaffolding with students' funds of knowledge is a pedagogical strategy that links learners' knowledge and experiences with their curriculum. Their funds of knowledge serve as scaffold providing what is known as a source to launch out into acquiring new skills and knowledge. One benefit of leveraging on students' funds of knowledge is that it

positively affects their personal and social functioning and creates room for social cohesion in the classroom. It enhances students' engagement, learning behaviour, learning attitudes, collaborative skills, self-confidence, and general well-being in the classroom. Apart from the positive classroom climate that Funds of Knowledge scaffold creates, the learners cultivate a sense of initiative and responsibility in the collaborative creation, collation and contribution of materials to the contents of the learning bank, rather than just being objects of the actions of others.

Recommendations

From the foregoing in this paper, it is established that funds of knowledge is a tested and trusted platform on which the enhancement of students' communication skills in English language can be achieved. It is recommended that this is explored by both the teachers and the parents from learners. Teachers are encouraged to allow the students to express themselves in their awareness of socio-cultural contexts and exposure to social media that can contribute to their communication skill up scaling in the English language classroom.

The four basic aspects of communication skills should be borne in mind in creating language learning activities by teachers and learners. This will foster rapid improvement in the teaching and learning process of the teachers and students respectively. The English language curriculum could be reviewed to create room for the application of funds of knowledge from the students.



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