



## THE USE OF GAMES IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SELECTED SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PORTHARCOURT METROPOLIS, NIGERIA.

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### ABSTRACT

This work examines the use of games in the teaching of English language in selected secondary schools in Port Harcourt Metropolis. The position of English language in Nigeria and her educational system is so important that its use or lack of it immediately mirrors the status of the user. So the study adopted a descriptive survey research design to assess whether language games are available and to ascertain whether teachers make use of games in the teaching of English Language. Purposively, five secondary schools were selected and by a stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques, 100 respondents were chosen for the study. Data were obtained through a structured questionnaire, oral interview and non-participatory observation. Obtained data were subjected to analysis with the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20. Result showed five games available for teaching English language in the selected schools. These include word games, pronunciation games, reading games, spelling games and computer games. The study identified that these games are available and used in a low rate of 40% and 20% as maximum and minimum respectively. The null hypothesis of no significant association between type of secondary school and response on the use of games for teaching English Language generally was rejected at .05, alpha level of significance ( $P=.000$ ,  $X^2 = 12.698$ ,  $df_1$ ). The study therefore concludes that the use of games in teaching English Language in secondary school is low and the study recommends that Government and private stakeholders should generally make available language teachings games for the teaching of English language in view of the importance the English language is to our society.

Keywords: Games, Teaching, EnglishLanguage.

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The position of English language in Nigeria and her educational system is so important that its use or lack of it immediately mirrors the status of the

user. This is because in the absence of an indigenous official language, English language remains the gateway to commerce, communication, and sometimes the only vehicle through which

interlocutors understand themselves. However, the English language learner is so bored with the abstract method of learning the language that practical steps need to be taken to arrest the ugly trend. One of such solutions is the use of games which helps to make teaching and learning more real and effective. According to Bright and McGregor (1982), "if we want our pupils to master language skills for themselves... we had better make our language activities enjoyable, which will make teaching more enjoyable too and far less exhausting". This means therefore that games when used in teaching, concretize and simplify the lesson and motivate the student to learn since it is now more real, lively and less abstract.

The dismal performance of students in both internal and external English language examinations, the inability of students to relate what they learn in class to appropriate situations, incompetence in oral communication in English language and above all, the lackadaisical attitude shown by students to improving on their incompetence are nagging problems hampering the effective teaching and learning of English language. Accordingly, the lack of zeal on the part of the students have invariably contributed to the high failure rate among primary and post primary students in English language examination. However, a close and careful observation shows that the apathy shown by the students towards the learning of English language is a result of the teacher's inability to concretize and bring to life as close as possible those situations through which the English language learnt in the class can be used. (Lee 1979:2)

It is based on this problem that the researcher has been prompted to carry out this research which among other things aims at identifying the extent to which English language teachers make use of simulation games in the teaching of English language. A good number of investigative studies have been carried out on the nature and importance of language teaching. Bright and McGregor (1982:1) in their contribution to teaching of language have this to say: "in the initial stages of language teaching it is in general well understood that learning takes place through exposure to language used by the teacher in the classroom in situations that make the

meaning of what is being said clear to the pupil". This underscores the role of the teacher in the teaching and learning process who knows precisely what phonological, grammatical and lexical items to present in the early stages. The teacher can devise situations in the classroom which will provide the necessary exposure to language that will enable learning to take place and will also create opportunities for practice so that learning may be confirmed and correct habits established. The teaching of any language however, cannot be effectively carried out without relating it to the aims and activities for which such language teaching is intended.

Widdowson (1978:1) thus states that "the aims of a language teaching course are very often defined with reference to the four language skills, understanding speech, speaking, reading and writing. These aims therefore, relate to the kind of activity which the learners are to perform". In consonance with the fact that language teaching is essentially the teaching of skills, Bright and McGregor (1982:1) opined that: "...our business as language teachers at this level is not primarily with new knowledge. We are teaching a language to children who are going to use it for the rest of their lives. We are trying to teach, primarily, not knowledge but skills required for good listening-speaking –reading-writing".

Language teaching should therefore, be seen by the teacher as involving the teaching of skills and structures that make up the body of language teaching content. The teacher should de-emphasize the rasping traditional approach to language teaching and handle it essentially as the acquisition of skills and structures. This view is also shared by Williams (1990:20) who says that skills and structures make up the body of language teaching content. He stated that objectives for language teaching can be stated with reference to the learning or acquisition of skills and structures. Language is not just learnt by using it but by using it in situations. Disembodied words and sentences get the pupils nowhere. Activity in the sense of "doing things" is generally recommended, for children learning any subject in the curriculum. This is because children prefer to be up and doing

and become easily bored if they are forced to sit and have information drilled into them.

Supporting this view, Lee (1979:2) says: "This situation which bring a foreign language to life in the classroom are provided by gestures, by handling and touching things, by actions and incidents, by pictures, by dramatizations, by interesting stories spoken or in print- and not least by certain contest and games". Due to the various contribution of psychology to learning, teachers are better informed on how to develop the "total child". It is also now known that children learn by means of play and work. Games like language activities can be used to enhance learning. There are different types of games which the language teachers can use to teach the different language skills. Even while teaching a particular skill, there are various types of games which can be used. Piaget (1962:107) classifies games based on content and by the structures presented by each game. Spencer (1976) in his own contribution classifies games based on their goals and objectives for which they are intended. Lee (1979) highlights various games based on the four language skills which include oral games, word games, comparison games, pronunciation games, spelling games and computer games. Crystal (2010:66) also examines various word games. All of these games form part of this research.

From the foregoing, therefore, how is English language being taught in our secondary schools? Are these games that enable plausible understanding of English language in the classroom setting available for the English language teachers' use? If available, to what extent are they effectively being utilized to enhance understanding? This study therefore is to identify the use of games in the teaching of English language in junior secondary classes in Port Harcourt Metropolis of Nigeria.

## 2. METHOD/MATERIALS

This study adopted a descriptive survey research designed to assess the extent to which teachers made use of games in the teaching and learning of English language. The sample for the study consists of 100 teachers drawn by the use of stratified and simple random sampling from five purposively selected secondary schools within Port Harcourt Metropolis. An instrument titled "A Questionnaire

on English Language Teaching in Secondary Schools" was designed by the researcher and used to obtain nominal data on the use of games in the teaching of English Language in Junior Secondary Classes after due face and content validity. The questionnaire was subjected to a test retest reliability method which gave a reliability coefficient of .78 with Spearman Rho correlation. Nevertheless, oral interview and personal observation were used to supplement the questionnaire. The researcher recruited five research assistants to administer the questionnaire and conduct the interview, while the researcher on several English contact periods conducted the non-participatory observation. Information collected were not influenced hence simple percentage was used to present data and chi-square was used to test the hypothesis of independence at .05 alpha level of significance through the use of Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20.

## 3. RESULTS

**Research question:** which are the games available for the teaching of English language in the school?

Table 1 showed five kinds of games available for teaching English language in the selected secondary schools. Out of five games 40% was available for English language teaching in G.G.S.S. Rumuokwuta, FGC, PH and G.G.S.S. Abulloma while only 20% was available in Bereton College and Ojims College for teaching English language. This implies that the availability of games for English language teaching was more in the public secondary schools than the private secondary schools. It was observed also that the availability of the identified kinds of games for English language teaching was low.

**Null hypothesis:** There is no significant association between type of secondary school and response on the use of games for teaching English Language generally.

Table 2 showed that Chi-Square is 12.698 with 1 degree of freedom and a *P* value [ Assymp. Sig.(2-sided) ] of .000. The *P* value of .000 is less than the chosen alpha level of significance of .05 therefore the null hypothesis that there is no significant association between the types of Secondary school and response on games used for teaching English language is rejected. In other words, preponderance of statistical evidence exist that the way in which

secondary school (either government owned or private) is distributed into categories does not significantly change at different levels of response on the use of games for teaching English language from which representative samples were drawn for investigation.

Table 1. Games Available for English Teaching in Selected Secondary Schools

S/N	KIND OF GAMES	NAMES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL				
		G.G.S.S. Rumuokwuta	FGC, PH	G.G.S.S. Abulloma	Bereton College	Ojims College
1	Word Games	No	No	No	No	No
2	Pronunciation Games	No	No	No	No	Yes
3	Reading Games	Yes	No	Yes	No	No
4	Spelling Games	No	Yes	No	No	No
5	Computer Games	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No

Note: **YES** means available, **NO** means, not available.

Table 2. SPSS Output for Chi-Square Analysis

Test	Value	Difference	Assymp sig.(2-sided)
Chi-square	12.698	1	.000

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The results of this current study revealed that majority of the respondents agreed that there were limited games available for the teaching of English language. Apart from Ojims College, computer game was available in all the secondary schools under study. This is consistent with the findings of Williams (1990:10) who identifies some constraints to language teaching. He posited that English teaching strategies that are practicable in countries like the United Kingdom and Australia may not work in second and foreign language contexts. Techniques required by certain methods may be impossible to use due to non-availability of the necessary gadgetry materials. This relates to Nigeria which is made up of over 250 different indigenous languages may have problems in teaching English language without appropriate instructional materials as regards games for teaching the language. Williams (1990:10) stated that technical gadgetry is not the be all and end all of teaching methods. It is just that a lack of it is part of the reality that most teachers of English as a second language have to accept.

The effectiveness in teaching English language in Port Harcourt seems experiencing similar challenges since the response to the use of games for English teaching show no significant association ( $p = .000$ ). Meanwhile Lee (1979:2), Crystal (2010:52) and Anukam (1999:36) identified the need to effectively use games as they enhance the teaching of English language. The result of the study however shows that these games are only available and used by teachers in some schools. Language teaching games are never available nor provided in most schools. This is sadly not in the best interest of our educational system.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

The study investigated the use of games in the teaching of English language in junior secondary classes. The result indicated that language games for the teaching of English language are generally not available. They are provided only in some schools while teachers are left with the alternative of improvising these games for their teaching bearing in mind those factors which influence the use of games.

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

The following are recommended in the light of the findings of this study.

1. Government and private stakeholders should generally make available language teaching games for the teaching of English language in view of the importance of the language in our society.
2. Seminars and workshops should be organized regularly by the government on the use of games in teaching English language.
3. English language teachers should make use of games in the teaching of the subject.

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