

TEACHERS' DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND PATTERN OF INTERACTION IN ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

Teachers are central to the teaching and learning processes that go on in the classrooms. The teacher is such an important factor in any classroom activity because it is the way he/she directs the classroom activities that will produce the expected learning outcomes in the learner. It is against this backdrop that this study examined some teachers' demographic variables and how they impact on their classroom interaction patterns. The descriptive design of the survey type was employed. The population for the study comprised all English language teachers in Ado- Ekiti. Four teachers were purposively selected as the sample and data were collected through classroom lesson observations. The recorded lessons were transcribed using Hillman's 1997 new coding system to categorise them into seven categories called pedagogical moves. These coding were later subjected to statistical analyses. Results obtained showed that none of the demographic variables of gender, qualification and years of experience had any significant relationship with the teachers' patterns of interaction. It is recommended among other things that teachers should be given appropriate opportunity for professional development and that the teacher education curriculum should be upgraded to accommodate training in classroom interaction models.

Keywords: Teachers' demographic variables, Classroom interaction, Patterns of classroom interaction, English as Second Language Classroom (ESL).

INTRODUCTION

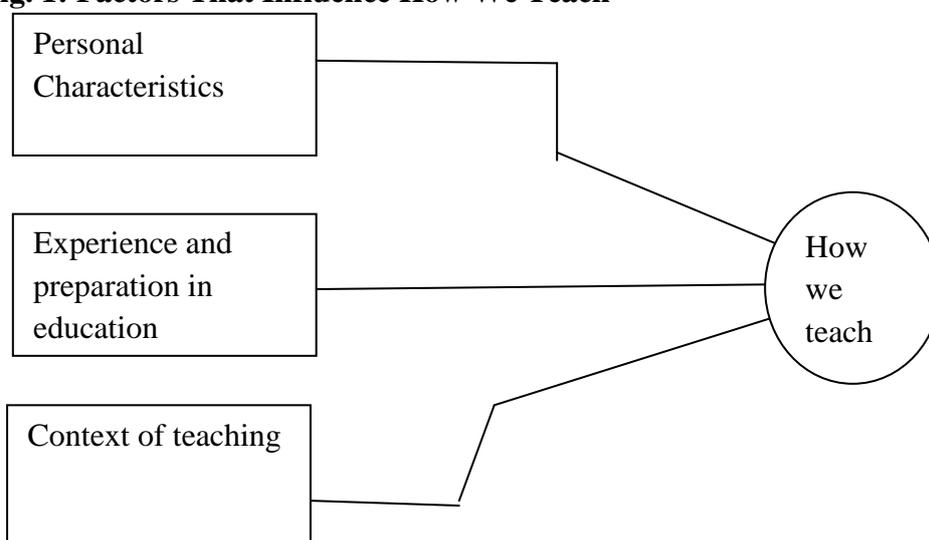
Interaction is a common part of the socialization process of any group. The classroom is not an exception. Taking a look at the classroom as an entity, one would discover that it has its peculiar characteristics which include the verbal actions (language use) that are distinguishable from verbal actions in an administrative office, an hospital, a banking hall and other corporate organisations (Dada, 2005). The key term in the conduct of classroom lessons is interaction, which should be in form of multi-way and multi-media exchanges between teachers and learners as well as among learners (Obanya 2002). Interaction mediated by talk and writing form the basis of many subjects' curricula (Goodlad, 2004). The growing literature on classroom interaction also suggests the importance of interaction in the teaching-learning process. A lot of researches have attempted to provide detailed descriptions of types of classroom discourse/interaction and also to identify its nature (Dada, 2005). Notably among them are the works of Bellack, Kliebard, Hyman, and Smith 1966; Flanders, 1969; Hillman 1997; Okusaga, 2004; Kolawole, 2004; Dada, 2005, and Oluwagbohunmi, 2010.

Eriba and Achor, (2010) refer to classroom interaction as a technique consisting of objectives and systematic observation of the classroom events for the study of the teachers' classroom behaviour and the process of interaction going on inside the classroom while, Audu and Achor (2003) explain that interaction in the classroom entails an active encounter of the teacher and the taught through verbal, gestural and resource instrumentality to bring about effective communication in a teaching learning process.

Classroom interaction analysis is the process of studying classroom interaction patterns by examining the various elements of the instructional system and their reciprocal inter-play or relationships (Ogbu, 2010). A major aspect of the teacher's work is instruction presentation. Arend (2012) posits that the instructional aspects of teaching refer to methods and processes teachers employ as they provide day-by-day instruction to students.

The teacher is such an important factor in any classroom activity because it is the way he/she directs the classroom activities that will produce the expected learning outcomes in the learner. The teacher is primarily responsible for controlling the nature of classroom experiences. This is what leads to the concept of teacher effectiveness. Certain factors are also believed to influence the way a teacher teaches. According to Cruickshank, Jenkins and Metcel (2003), factors that influence the way a teacher teaches include personal characteristics, experience and preparation in education and the context in which the teacher teaches. This is illustrated in the following figure:

Fig. 1: Factors That Influence How We Teach



Adopted from Cruickshank et al 2003.

This study falls under what they call personal characteristics and experience and preparation in education which include, the teacher's gender, his/her years of experience, his/her personalities and his/her beliefs. Experience and preparation in education include, how we were taught, how we prefer to be taught, how we prefer to teach, our subject matter background and our teaching preparation. All of these are factors that are believed to impact on the way a teacher teaches. There have been studies attempting to investigate influence of gender on the way a teacher teaches (Elstend and Turmo, 2009; Heather, Ozkan and Serkan, 2012, Johnson, 2000). Kimmel (2000) comments that studies consistently find that male and female instructors/teachers are perceived differently in ways that are consistent with stereotypically gendered expectations of communication and interaction patterns. Chudgar and Sankar (2008) in their study on the relationship between teachers gender and students achievement report that male and female teachers differ in terms of their classroom management practices and their belief in students' learning ability. They also found that being in a female teacher's classroom is advantageous for language but a teacher's gender has no effect on Mathematics learning. Thomas, Amy and Amanda (2007) report that, based on data from faculty members that participated in the faculty survey of students engagements, gender differences existed in the percentage of class time spent on various activities (a

measure of teaching style) but that the gap between man and woman in lecturing and active classroom practices can vary by factors including disciplinary area and class size. However, it is a common idea that interaction is an integral part of any language classroom practice. This is because language itself is used to facilitate interaction between and among people and this forms one of the objectives of language teaching in schools. This interaction is mostly done through the 'teacher Initiates' 'students Respond' and 'teacher Feedback, (IRF) model. This implies that the role of the teacher is very vital in classroom interaction and this has prompted many researchers into studying how teachers and students interact in the classroom (Dada, 2005; Okusaga, 2004; Kolawole, 2004, Oluwagbohunmi, 2010). The form of teacher's initiation will go a long way to influence the kind of activities/interaction that will go on in the classroom. It is therefore possible that gendered perception of instructor might be related to difference in teaching styles. Literature seems to agree that female teachers tend to use teaching techniques that are more interactive.

Another teacher variable that is considered in this study is teachers' qualification. This refers to the kind of professional education for teaching that the teacher had received. That is, the extent and quality of the professional preparation a teacher receives will influence both the quality and style of his/her teaching (Cruickshank et al, 2003). Darling-Hammond (1998) defines a qualified teacher as one who was fully certified and held the equivalent of a major in the field being taught while Kosgai, Mise, Odera and Ayugi (2013) comment that in many countries, teacher qualifications that are considered to be related to student learning have become desirable targets of teacher education reform. The reason for this might not be far from the fact that it is believed among experts that teachers' qualification affects the way he/she teaches and invariably student performance. Alexander and Fuller (2005) are of the opinion that all things being equal, highly qualified teachers produce greater student achievement than comparatively less qualified teachers. Previous research reports on the influence of teachers' qualification have been contradictory. Maundu (1986) finds that teachers who had graduated from Kenya Science Teachers College were more practically oriented than those who had degrees from public universities. Cruickshank et al (2003) comment that student teachers and graduates of colleges of education are often distinguishable as a result of the teacher preparation they have received. It is therefore essential to investigate the influence of teachers' qualification on his/her pattern of classroom interaction.

The third variable of this study is teachers' years of experience. This refers to the actual number of years a teacher has put into classroom teaching not necessarily the number of years after graduation. Experienced teachers have a richer background of experience to draw from and can contribute insight and ideas to the course of teaching and learning (Kosgei, Mise, Odera and Ayugi, 2013). On the other hand some experts are of the opinion that, over time, most teachers develop instructional routines, learn what to expect from students and settle into teaching patterns with confidence and with a sense to having arrived (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). This attitude might be inimical to professional development and there also seem to be very limited opportunities for teachers to undergo effective professional development. Feiman-Nemser further comments that professional development opportunities are usually sporadic and disconnected, rarely tied to classroom work and lacking any follow up. Also, traditional approaches to staff development and continuing professional education do not fit with the learning requirements of ambitious reforms and standards. It seems that professional development is only an expectation rather than the norm especially in this part of the world where the promotion of teachers is based merely on years of experience and not on serious assessment. The issue of whether a teacher's years of

experience has influence on his/her pattern of classroom interaction has not been fully explored in research. Most studies on it have been focused on its influence on Students' Academic Achievement (Tella, 2008; Sanders and Rivers, 1996 and Wenghinsky 2000).

However, there is a broad agreement across countries that the most effective way to learn to teach is to observe good practice and to have experiences in teaching under a skilled supervision. Experts posit that teachers can develop from novice to expert teachers. Berliner (2001) puts forward five stages of this development as (1) Novice (student teachers and many first year teachers), (2) Advanced beginner (second and third year teachers), (3) Competent (third and fourth year teachers), (4) proficient (a modest number of teachers progress to this stage and (5) Expert (A small number of teachers proceed to this stage); while Arends (2012) comments that novice teachers go through rather predictable stages in the process of becoming accomplished. Some aspects of teaching can be learned in college classrooms and by reading while many others can be learned only through experience and doing.

Teachers play a very central role in language teaching especially in a second language situation like we have in Nigeria. According to Akbari and Allver (2010) there has been a substantial theoretical and practical shift of emphasis, mostly in mainstream education, towards acknowledging that teachers are among the principal components of any pedagogical programme. As important as the teacher-factor is, there seem to be paucity of research in the area of teacher related variables especially as they affect the classroom interaction patterns of the teacher. Even though interaction is very crucial in the teaching – learning process, Adeyemo (2005) asserts that teacher characteristics influenced teaching and learning in the classrooms. The teacher provides the vital connection among the components of the teaching and learning process (i.e. the content, the environment and the learners)

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teachers play a very central role in language teaching especially in a second language situation like we have in Nigeria. The teacher organises and connects the vital components of the teaching and learning process, which are, the content, the environment and the learners. As important as the teacher factor is, there seem to be paucity of study in the area of teacher-related variables especially as they influence classroom interaction patterns. In order to partially fill this gap therefore, the study assessed the influence of three teacher demographic variables of sex, qualification and years of experience on their classroom interaction patterns.

HYPOTHESES

1. There is no significant relationship between pattern of interaction and teachers' qualification in ESL classrooms.
2. There is no significant relationship between pattern of interaction and teachers' years of experience in ESL classrooms.
3. There is no significant difference between teachers' gender and their pattern of interaction in ESL classrooms.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the descriptive research of the survey type because of the nature of the study. The population consisted of all English as second language (ESL) Teachers in public secondary schools in Ado Ekiti Metropolis. Four schools were randomly selected. One

teacher was also selected from each of the selected schools based on their consent. Each of the selected teachers had one lesson recorded for the purpose of the study.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected through classroom observation and recording of classroom lessons of the selected ESL teachers. The recorded lessons were later transcribed and coded using Hillman's (1997) model of interaction analysis called "The New Coding System". Hillman's (1997) model is a refinement of Bellack et al (1966) model of categorisation. He amended the coding system following Weber's (1985) steps. He condensed several categories, created several more, and revised the overall structure of the four categories created by Bellack et al (1966) called pedagogical moves. He came up with the following categories of pedagogical moves:

- Organising:** (This is used when setting the context for subsequent behaviour.)
- Lecturing:** (This is when the teacher is talking without dialogue.)
- Humanising:** (This is used to create humour in order to create rapport.)
- Eliciting:** (This includes all questions, commands and requisitions.)
- Responding:** (This is a reciprocal relationship to a previous move.)
- Idling:** (This include, place holders and silence fillers.)
- Not clear:** (This include all not categories that are not coded due to missing or unintelligible categories/words.)

The transcribed coded data were subjected to statistical analysis using chi-square statistics and the results are as presented below:

RESULTS

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between patterns of interaction and teachers' qualification in ESL classrooms.

Table 1: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis of Pattern of Interaction and Teachers' Qualifications.

Category	NCE		B.A(Ed.)				df	X^2_{cal}	X^2_{table}
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Lecturing	26	14.4	43	16.9	69	15.9			
Organising	6	3.3	9	3.5	15	3.5			
Humanising	4	2.2	15	5.9	19	4.4	5	5.055	
Eliciting	70	38.9	92	36.2	162	37.3			
Responding	74	41.1	94	37.0	168	38.7			
Idling	-	-	1	0.4	1	0.2			
Total	180	100.0	254	100.0	434	100.0			

$P > 0.05$

The result in Table 1 shows that X^2 calculated (5.055) is less than X^2 tabulated (11.071) at 0.05 level of significance. This implies that there is no significant relationship between interaction pattern and teachers' qualifications in ESL classrooms.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between pattern of interaction and teachers' years of experience in ESL classrooms.

Table 2: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis of Pattern of Interaction and Teachers' Years of Experience in ESL Classrooms.

Category	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	df	X^2_{cal}	X^2_{table}
Lecturing	26	14.4	37	17.5	6	14.3	69	15.9			
Organising	6	3.3	8	3.8	1	2.4	15	3.5			
Humanising	4	2.2	14	6.6	1	2.4	19	4.4	10	7.640	18.307
Eliciting	70	38.9	75	35.4	17	40.5	162	37.3			
Responding	74	41.1	77	36.3	17	40.5	168	38.7			
Idling	-	-	1	0.5	-	-	1	0.2			
Total	180	100.0	212	100.0	42	100.0	434	100.0			

$P > 0.05$

Table 2 reveals that the relationship between pedagogical moves and teachers' years of experience is not statistically significant at 0.05 level ($X^2 = 7.640$, $P > 0.05$). The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between teachers' gender and their patterns of interaction in ESL classrooms.

Table 3: Chi-square (X^2) Analysis of Teachers' Interaction Pattern by Gender.

Category	Female		Male		Total		Df	X^2_{cal}	X^2_{table}
	N	%	N	%	N	%			
Lecturing	52	15.9	17	16.0	69	15.9			
Organising	11	3.4	4	3.8	15	3.5			
Humanising	18	5.5	1	0.9	19	4.4	5	4.338	11.071
Eliciting	121	36.9	41	38.7	162	37.3			
Responding	125	38.1	43	40.6	168	38.7			
Idling	1	0.3	-	-	1	0.2			
Total	328	100.0	106	100.0	434	100.0			

$P > 0.05$

Table 3 reveals that there is no significant difference between the interaction pattern of male and female teachers ($X^2 = 4.338$, $P > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is upheld.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Findings from the study reveal that none of the demographic variables had any significant relationship with teachers' pattern of interaction in ESL classrooms. That is, there was no significant relationship between teachers' qualifications and their pattern of interaction in ESL classrooms. This seem to be in agreement with the findings of Maundu (1986), who found that teachers who had graduated from Kenya Science Teachers College were more practically oriented than those who had degrees from public universities. That is, teachers of

lower qualifications were found to be better in a way. While the finding negates the submission of Cruickshank et al, (2003) that the extent and quality of the professional preparation a teacher receives will influence both the quality and style of his/her teaching. The reason for this might be that the two qualifications considered in this study (NCE and B.Ed.) seem to have much similar programme in terms of their curriculum content. The major difference seems to be in terms of the number of years spent (NCE- 3years and B.Ed.-4years). On teachers' years of experience, it was found that years of experience did not significantly influence teachers' pattern of interaction. This result seems to be contrary to expectation. Ideally, one would expect the more experienced teacher to have better classroom interaction. The reason for this also might not be far from the submission of some experts that most teachers over time settle down to routine practices with little or no development. There seem to be very little opportunities for professional development (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Also, most teachers seem to teach the way they were taught as students and so there is a pattern that is already established and everybody follows that pattern. Teachers do not make efforts to develop competence on their own. The result on teachers' gender also shows that teachers' gender did not influence their pattern of interaction in the class. This is contrary to the submission of Chudgar and Sankar (2008) that male and female teachers differ in terms of their classroom management practices. This might be as a result of what Kimmel (2000) reports, that studies consistently find that male and female instructors/teachers are perceived differently in ways that are consistent with stereotypically gendered expectations of communication and interaction patterns. Perception sometimes might not reflect reality as a result of some form of bias that influence perception. Another reason for this might be that male and female teachers were equally exposed to the same form of training during their teacher preparation programmes and that might inform how they teach.

CONCLUSION

This study assessed the influence of certain teacher demographic variables (qualification, years of experience and gender) on their classroom interaction patterns and it was discovered that none of them was found to have any significant relationship with teachers' classroom interaction patterns. It is therefore concluded that teachers' demographic variables of qualification, years of experience and gender do not influence their pattern of interaction in the classroom. Male and male teachers do not differ in their interaction patterns. Experienced and inexperienced teachers do not differ in their classroom interaction patterns and teachers' qualification does not make a difference in their classroom interaction patterns.

It is therefore recommended that the concept of classroom interaction patterns and analysis should be inculcated into the teacher education curriculum. This is because by the findings of this study the teachers' classroom interaction patterns are not interactive enough. Their classes are mono-directional and teachers' talks dominate the classes. Teachers should also be given opportunity for proper professional development so that with years of experience they can grow on the job like in many other professions.

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