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CREATING INCLUSIVE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM THROUGH NEW MEDIA AND CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

It is high time the exclusivity characterising the traditional classroom was bridged in contemporary time. This study aims at showing how inclusivity can be created using new media and critical discourse analysis in English Language (EL) classroom. The study deploys systematic review, qualitative approach, and content and thematic analyses, and relies on secondary data, observation and introspection. It draws insights from Fairclough's CDA theory of Speakers' Objects of Discourse, which sheds light on exclusivity and inclusivity as practices created and made manifest in speakers' words and linguistic structures as a result of their internalized views and practices in social settings. The critical descriptive analysis demonstrates that [redacted] through new media platforms for English Language Teaching (ELT) purposes, and by x-raying structural imbalance through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an inclusive classroom can be created in ELT. The study concludes that a unified classroom, where there is no imbalance between learners and the teacher, and male and female students, can be created sustainably by EL teachers through new media and CDA, upon

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which students become poised to upholding inclusivity in gender and other identities within and outside the EL classroom. The study recommends classroom inclusivity, and the use of new media and CDA by EL teachers for ELT.

Introduction

The exclusivity characterizing the traditional classroom ought to be bridged and replaced with inclusivity in the contemporary classroom. As Nwode and Osuchukwu (2024) rightly note, "the school reserves the critical role of getting rid of society's exclusivities brought to place by the Classics" (p. 1). Teachers play crucial role in child formation. On teachers' invaluable role in education, English language teachers inclusive, Aminu (1987) has informed that teachers contribute not only a vital input to education, but also to the production process and the determination of the output of the system. In other words, teachers are the major players in the production process, whose overwhelming role determines the whole output of the education system and the society at large.

In fact, Owolabi et al. (2013) are of the opinion that teachers touch and shape destinies. They are prime agents of socialization, trainers and nation builders. Similarly, Ajayi (1997) states that teachers are the ones to make it possible for a child to be grounded in their mother-tongue, acquire one or more Nigerian languages, plus English and one or more foreign languages. They are the ones to ensure a proper foundation of scientific education for the child. As such, it is impossible to think of education without the contributions of teachers. This reality applies to the invaluable contributions of Nigerian EL teachers to the education of children in Nigeria and to the Nigerian education sector in particular and the society as a whole.

Given the noted roles, it is imperative for English Language (EL) teachers to deploy new media and CDA to impact positively on learners and make them realize the imperative of inclusivity and the implications of exclusivity in and outside the school setting. Therefore, the aim of this study is to show that inclusivity can be created in English Language (EL) classroom using new media and critical discourse analysis. One of its objectives is to examine situations of exclusivity in the traditional classroom. Its other specific objective is to explore new media and critical discourse analysis as mechanisms for classroom inclusivity.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in Fairclough's (1992) CDA theory of Speakers' Objects of Discourse (SOD). According to him, "…practices systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 42). In the context of this study, his CDA theory makes us understand that exclusivities in school systems and other contexts are practices conventionalized and instituted by society. Having made exclusivities to be practices, individuals, who have got attuned to them, have these practices as parts of what they speak and do. Further, Fairclough (1992) is of the view that truth is a contentious and problematic category that is dependent on certain formations of knowledge comprising specific categories and views of social reality, social relations and the self-claimed to be 'true'. That is, discursive formations or regimes of truth are enacted, embodied and internalized as practices, which manifest in discourses (Fairclough, 1992; Osuchukwu & Robert, 2024).

It follows that exclusivity practices are problematic categories. Identities, such as race, colour, gender, class or status, religion, power and politics, hegemonies, cultural dichotomies (popular versus unpopular cultures), etc., are avenues for exclusivities (Nwode et al., 2024a&b). This postulation reflects Fairclough's (1992) view that social distribution of power cuts across social divisions, relations, subjects and discourses in complex ways. Besides, Fairclough (1992) argues that power can also enable social life rather than being exclusively oppressive or perpetuating inequalities and structural imbalances, as in inequalities orchestrated and practiced in school systems and the larger society, which have bearings to systemic politics. The place of language in all these is captured by Fairclough and Wodak (1997). They are of the opinion that language (use) is characterized partially by the "linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures" (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997p. 271).

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) consider language as one of the elements of social semiotic practice. Leaning on that, this study avers that exclusivities, such as hegemonies in school systems and the discriminatory categorizations or categories in the classroom, are indications or cases of the said "linguistic character of social and cultural processes and structures" and the "social semiotic practices", which are better understood through the lens of CDA. Fairclough (1992) is critiqued for resting heavily on structuralism, being ontological and individual-based rather than society-based power considerations, and

overstretching social life in discourse context, leaving out other factors surrounding social life (Zotzmann, 2006; Holborow, 1999).

Regardless of the critiques against Fairclough's (1992) theorized postulations, this study takes side with Nwode et al. (2024b), Osuchukwu and Robert (2024) and Harvey (1996) that Fairclough's espoused views substantiate the explored thematic concerns. His views align with those of many other theorists of CDA and aptly analyze structural imbalances. Therefore, the EL teacher can draw insights from Fairclough's views to create inclusivity in the classroom and teach learners how to understand and analyze exclusivities and resist them for new world orders in school systems and other social systems in society. Inclusivity is one of the new world orders that have to be created.

New Media and Creating Inclusive English Language Classroom

English Language (EL) is the Lingua Franca (official language) of Nigeria. In view of the prominence and global usage of English Language, it is observed that EL is an essential factor for economic growth and stability (Brown, 2000). EL is used for group and interpersonal communication and transactions, teaching and learning, politics and public administration, and international relations and diplomacy, to mention but a few. Information and Communication Technology (ICT), a relatively new development in Nigerian educational system, plays a significant role in teacher education (Owolabi et al., 2013). The digital age is characterized by speedy and rapid decision-making (Brainbridge, 2002; Akabogu & Mbah, 2013). Human interaction has increased tremendously, while various human activities have got improved significantly.

In the modern day technology of imparting knowledge in teaching-learning process, EL teachers have to migrate from relying on analogue ways of teaching to the digital ways and from print materials to electronic materials. New media are digital means of teaching and learning that have increased information and knowledge production, impartation, appreciation and consumption across the globe. Integrating ICT in ELT would undoubtedly enable them to meaningfully extend their contributions to learners, education, language and linguistics, research and various other endeavours across the globe. As Omolewa (2009) observes, it must be cleared in our minds from the outset that the teacher is at the centre in the pursuit and attainment of educational and socialisation goals and vision. This is because it cannot be disputed that the teacher basically determines the relevance, quality and sustainability of education (Omolewa, 2009).

Sharing the standpoint of the above scholars and their like fellows, Owolabi et al. (2013) note thus: 'Indeed, the world has always been a teacher's world, whether this is appreciated or not.' English Language is very crucial to the Nigerian education system, because it is a language of textbooks and a medium of instruction across the three tiers of education (Ezeokoli, 2005; Aina et al. 2013). As a multilingual society, English is a medium of unification among different nationalities in Nigeria (Oluwole, 2008; Monday & Eze, 2012). Where English Language is a mother-tongue or a Lingua Franca, students acquire knowledge in other subject areas through it. Lack of proficiency in English causes poor performance at school and in the wilder world. The importance of English Language as a school subject derives mainly from its utilitarian value to the larger Nigerian society (Olanipekun et al., 2014).

Teaching and learning the English Language, as a second or foreign language in the 21st century, has economic and political benefits, among others (Brainbridge, 2002; Akabogu & Mbah, 2013). It is also considered a factor for adjudging one's literacy and intellectual disposition in contemporary time. Proficiency in English is required in various facets of life in the 21st century (Brainbridge, 2002; Akabogu & Mbah, 2013). As Taiwo (1993) has argued, by virtue of the political power of its native speakers, English has become the world's international language per excellence. To him, it is the world's predominant language of information, dissemination, diplomacy, trade, and so on. As Okoro (2010) notes, "in this age of information technology, it is no longer fashionable to rely on memory for transmission of relevant and reliable information" (p. 169). This assertion suggests that ELT has to be moved from the analogue system to the digital system by involving ICT in ELT in contemporary Nigeria.

Kuppuswamy and Narayan (2010) observe that many countries have gained open access to the internet due to rapid advances in information technology within the last thirty years. It follows that Nigeria, as a nation, has to duly key into the full migration from analogue operations to digital operations in all spheres, including ELT. It is essential to have proficiency in English Language and technical skills in ICT so as to adequately and suitably fit into the 21st century global society within and outside the school environment. Integrating ICT in English helps to solve a lot of problems in and outside the school environment. Djihed (2013) observes that even Arab Masters students perform poorly in General English, which compounds their reading comprehension difficulties. The cumbersome nature of the English Language is one factor behind the difficulties. English dialectal variances also

cause some difficulties for non-native speakers. Incompetence, poor knowledge or lack of mastery of the English Language by teachers leaves the students in worse difficulties.

The study by Ojo (2008) reveals that students perform poorly in school written compositions as a result of their poor knowledge of and performance in English Language and the falling standard of education. There is low proficiency in English language, which has resulted in under-achievement among Nigerian senior secondary school students and those at the higher institutions (Sofenwa, 1992). Sofenwa (1992) has attributed this poor performance in English Language to the wide disparity and confusion between the language of textbooks, the curriculum, the English language class and the Nigerian society outside the class. Abubakar (2005) has affirmed that the matter is serious, because of the effect English has on all the other subjects of the curriculum at the secondary school level as the only language of instruction. This study adds that EL is also the only language of instruction in tertiary institutions. EL teachers deserve ICT in teaching the English Language so as to equip students with language skills, including reading and writing skills. As Gotau and Robert (2015) note, ICT is an avenue for students to teach themselves beyond what they are taught at school by teachers.

The above expressed reality extends to teaching and learning of EL. Gotau and Robert (2015) also say that ICT is a viable mechanism of information economy, which contributes to addressing educational, communication, socio-economic, cultural, political, and development problems in both developed and developing nations (Gotau& Robert, 2015). It should be noted that the problems obtain more specifically in developing nations, with less or insignificant ratios recorded in developed hey stress that USA and Europe regard information as a factor of production that is next to the 'entrepreneur'. On their part, Besong and Robert (2016) observe that acquisition of information resources, inclusive of ICT, is still currently low in developing nations. Through the integration of ICT in ELT in Nigeria, EL teachers in Nigeria would learn from their contemporaries who are English native speakers. As such, educational policies have to be reviewed to accommodate significant integration of ICT into ELT (Akabogu & Mbah, 2013). Also, integrating ICT in EL implies exposing students to the knowledge of other subject areas.

The prospect of ICT lies in its importance. The importance of ICT cannot be over-emphasised. Its importance has been affirmed and reiterated by many scholars (Haruna, 2005; Ezeani&Ekere, 2009; Uwaifo, 2010; Bonsu et al., 2013; Mansell, 2014;

Besong & Robert, 2016; Robert et al., 2016; Robert, 2017). ICT encourages diversity and builds a foundation for continuous innovative learning. With its integration, diversity and group cohesion would be attained more significantly in ELT and other like spheres where the English Language professional render services other than teaching. The integration would also build a foundation for continuous innovative learning in ELT. This implies that with the integration, English teachers and professionals other than teachers would build a more reliable foundation for continuous innovative learning in English Language Studies and the associate spheres.

The foundation would impact greatly on students and other individuals in general. A lot of improvement would be attained with the integration of ICT in ELT. Building a better foundation for innovative learning is possible because wholesome new, advanced, modernised, digitalised and globalised practices, discoveries, inventions, etc. would be attained once ELT is migrated from analogue to digital tradition. It is imperative for ICT to be integrated in ELT in order to tap from its huge prospects. The need for integrating ICT in ELT lies in the dire necessity for having a more accurate and cost effective knowledge that would assist in the formulation of decisions in ELT, languages and linguistics, education and administration, public affairs and leadership, socio-economic growth, communication and media, and so on.

Also integrating ICT in ELT is imperative in that the setbacks faced in the manual system of teaching English Language would be ameliorated or would be barely experienced. Also, integrating ICT in ELT is imperative because mental and physical efforts in solving certain tasks would be ameliorated. Ameliorating these efforts means a lot and offers the English teacher a lot of opportunities. The integration of ICT in ELT would undoubtedly foster improved client services in ELT, language education, linguistics, teaching-learning, and various other spheres where the English Language professional renders professional services. In addition, integrating ICT in ELT would help reduce cost by eliminating inefficient practices in ELT.

The integration would impact positively on indigenous knowledge, languages, education and systems like oral literature and history. It would ensure efficiency in indigenous and non-indigenous practices. Robert et al. (2017) observe that ICT helps in developing, preserving and sustaining indigenous knowledge, culture, oral literature and history. The foregoing points underscore the huge benefits of ICT alongside those of the new media. There is no doubt that the use of new media

for teaching and learning is an indication of ICT integration into ELT. As digital innovations impacting on various spheres of life and disseminating information faster than the traditional media, this study argues that new media are viable means through which EL teachers can help to get rid of exclusivity in and outside the classroom.

New media are the sets of digital and multifaceted borderless communication media (Nwode, 2022). These include social media, websites, Google, Apple, Amazon, Netflix, blogs, emails, music and television streaming services, virtual reality, augmented reality, video sharing platforms, online newspapers, online forums, Wikis, podcasts, webinars, vlogs, internet telephony, web advertisements, and online education, among others (Nwode, 2022). Therefore, using new media for ELT to attain inclusivity involves using the aforementioned digital means of communication to teach and interact with students on various themes other than language studies. Among such themes are exclusivity and inclusivity, critical discourse analysis (CDA), effective communication, smooth intergroup relations, societal ills, issues of cultural practices, etc.

Creating Inclusive Classroom through Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary linguistic framework. It was championed by Theo van Leeuwen, Gunther Kress, Teun van Dijk, and Norman Fairclough, among others, in the 1990s (Wodak & Meyer, 2001). As Osuchukwu and Robert (2024) rightly note, since its emergence, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has been engaging with the analyzing the use of language in both the classroom and the society to perpetuate gender inequality, discrimination and ills. Again, CDA is a multifaceted approach to language use and studies, which criticizes production, propagation and maintenance of power imbalances across societies. According to Osuchukwu and Robert (2024), CDA analyzes and criticizes various structural imbalances and inequalities that are orchestrated, institutionalized and legitimized by the elite in power and politics. It should be noted that being power may not necessarily involve being in politics. For example, educational elite are not in politics but in power, authorities or personalities having influence and functions that involve the exercise of power at one point or the other.

CDA is applied in various disciplines to different problems (Osuchukwu & Robert, 2024; Amoussou & Allagbe, 2018; Koussouhon & Amoussou, 2016; Koussouhon & Dossoumou, 2015; Parham, 2013; Jahedi & Abudullah, 2012; Bayram, 2010; Bloor &

Bloor, 2007). CDA is applied in applied linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, feminism, culture and gender studies, communication and media studies, intergroup relations, peace and conflict resolution, sociology, philosophy, and so on (Osuchukwu & Robert, 2024). As a paper concerned with issues of exclusivity in the classroom, it situates in the fields of applied linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, intergroup relations, communication and media studies, and culture and gender studies. By situating in these fields, the study concerns itself with aspect of the thematic concerns of the fields. For instance, while its concern with language situates it in sociolinguistics, the pragmatics of language use takes it to the field of pragmatics, where CDA also situates.

The results of the study by Al Kayed et al. (2020) on the representation of gender in EFL textbooks in Jordan show gender differentiation in the examined textbooks. The books are found to exhibit sexist bias against women, typified by pictorial dispositions that show women as being socio-culturally and politically invisible, subservient to men, and only being capable of handling the menial roles gendered to them. CDA aids a better understanding of such misrepresentation and frowns at it. Thus, the EL teacher is left with the task of educating students on the implications of such misrepresentation and that of discouraging gender differentiation in pedagogic textual materials. The teacher also sends out the learners to do same by virtue of the critical skills imparted in them about gender and other forms of discrimination in textbooks and other information resources.

The study done by Wallace (2020) on gender and sustainable development reflects the thrust of the present study, as it emphasizes the need to put into practice the UN's policy on gender equity. The present study stresses the need to bridge gender gap in the EL classroom along with other forms of structural and institutional imbalances, discrimination and stereotypical divisions. These include the power hegemony of the teacher in the traditional classroom, which does not promote student involvement in teaching processes. The finding by Wallace's (2020) study that the current implementation of UN's policy on gender equity is low in urban areas in Sweden, including Stockholm, aptly applies or lends credence to the case of Nigerian urban and rural areas.

The implication is that if gender imbalances obtain in urban areas of Sweden, a developed nation, they obtain at a higher ratio in Nigeria, a developing nation. Therefore, like that of Wallace's (2020) study, this study calls for significant implementation of the UN's policy on gender equity in school setting and other settings in the society. Doing so means the demands of UN's policy on gender

equity, other statutory provisions on gender and class inequalities, CDA tenets, and social development goals. Similarly, the study by Ahmad and Shah (2019) relates to the present study. It shows that CDA aptly explains discriminatory gender differentiation between males and females in the classroom setting in Punjab, Pakistan. Their study reveals that female learners in Grade-5 books in Punjab are misrepresented by the writers. The findings align with those of Al Kayed et al. (2020).

It is quite clear Ahmad and Shah's (2019) study tallies with the present to a very high extent, as it looks at gender exclusivity in the classroom through the lens of CDA. Ahmad and Shah's (2019) study agrees with the position of the present study that bias representation of women in any context leads to gender discrimination and ills against them. That is what obtains in any classroom setting where misrepresentation of either females or males obtains. Thus, it becomes imperative to educate learners on how to view, handle and analyze such situations, and thereby go on to bridge the gender gaps and hegemonic relations in the school setting and the society at large. One means of doing is to expose them to the tenets of CDA and educate them on ideal or best practices and how to subvert the instituted inequalities in school and other societal systems.

Finally, another related study is that of Amoussou and Allagbe (2018), which engages with CDA, demonstrating that it is a framework for explaining, analyzing and understanding critical matters, such as those on exclusivity of various forms. Discriminations, hegemonies, prejudices, primordial sentiments, class and structural inequalities or imbalances, and what have you all constitute exclusivity. The opposite of it, inclusivity, is advocated by the present in and outside the classroom setting. Its specific contextual concern rests on the fact that the EL teachers should deploy CDA alongside the new media to expose learners to the ills and implications of exclusivity on one hand and the need for and prospects of inclusivity. The essence is that the EL teachers, as language experts, as capable of using language technically, tactically, strategically and pedagogically to make learners change their mentality about the age-long structural imbalances (exclusivities) portrayed and sustained as cultural practices and moral codes in school systems and other systems of society.

Upon having a changed mindset, the learners are bound to spread the message of inclusivity across their schools and societies, while consistently resisting all forms and cases of exclusivity. As such, new world orders and sporadic shifts from exclusivity to inclusivity are attained in society. Meanwhile, as the number one

users of the new media (Nwode, 2022), the learners also resort to using new media to spread the message, and pursue the attainment, of inclusivity across global society. This point highlights the essence of combining new media and CDA in ELT to pursue the realization of inclusivity and the dethronement of exclusivity in the traditional classroom. Therefore, the proposal of this study is novel, because it is problem-solving, innovation-driven, tech-savvy and practically obtainable in the classroom and even in other settings other than the classroom setting.

Conclusion

The study engages with new media, critical discourse analysis and the creation of inclusivity in the EL classroom. It has shown evidently from its descriptive analysis or analytic exposition that through new media platforms for English Language Teaching (ELT) purposes, and by x-raying structural imbalance through the lens of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in the classroom, an inclusive classroom can be created in ELT. The study concludes that a unified classroom, where there is no imbalance between learners and the teacher, and male and female students, can be created sustainably by EL teachers through new media and CDA, upon which students become poised to upholding various forms of inclusivity in and outside the EL classroom. It recommends classroom inclusivity, and the use of new media and CDA by EL teachers for ELT.

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