Revolutionizing Large Classes and Helping the Silently Excluded Learners through Language Inclusive Practices

Abstract

One of the challenges facing the actualization of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in many African countries and especially Nigeria is the daunting influence of lack of quality education which is occasioned by the problems of large classes and silently excluded learners in schools. The effects of these maladies had always been foregrounded in the poor academic performance of students, especially in the English language writing task of secondary school students in both internal and external examinations. The rippling effects are not easily erased from most undergraduate and postgraduate students' writing abilities. Therefore, there is a great need to revolutionize the language classrooms to accommodate the silently excluded or struggling learners in our large language classes. In this paper, the inclusive-pluralistic strategies of effective language teaching for educators were examined. Some of these strategies highlighted are class collaborations, grand/instructional conversations, quick-writes and quick-draws. The literature review was done and the gaps found gave room for the justification of this study. The applicability, examples and step-by-step procedures of these strategies for inclusive teaching and learning of the literacy skills of reading and writing resonated.The paper concluded with a call on teachers in secondary schools to use these strategies to eliminate the challenges of the silently excluded/struggling learners as well as assist them to teach writing effectively. It also suggested that teacher training institutions could introduce these strategies so that pre-service teachers can imbibe and utilize them when they eventually become practising teachers. Lastly, it recommended the strategies to textbook writers and curriculum planners.

Keywords: Sustainable Development Goals, Quality education, Inclusive-pluralistic strategies, Silently Excluded Learners and large classes.

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Comment [OC2]: Maybe rephrase this sentence, it is unclear

Comment [OC3]: The abstract started off well, but while the abstract is supposed to lay the context of the paper, it is not supposed to give away all the findings of the paper. In this case, a reader would not want to delve deeper into the paper as the Abstract has said everything! Abstracts should be such that they encourage the reader to read more.

1. Introduction

Writing is one of the productive language and communication skills that learners are required to do in classes daily. Students must write notes, make notes, write assignments and examinations and compose their own stories. Writing is a multi-tasking process that involves so many other processes: brainstorming, outlining, proofreading, logicality, clarity and purposefulness to mention a few. It is not fabulous to state that writing is one of the insurmountable language skills for many students and language teachers. The reasons are not farfetched. One, it is time-consuming to teach as well as mark the many errors of students in the writing class. So, in a single term, teachers do not allow students to write essays more than twice. Again, the contents of writing in the English language syllabus are wide and varied covering all sorts of writing ranging from articles, stories, and letters.

Comment [OC4]: Not sure why "fabulous" is used here. Always look up synonyms in these cases. It will help in writing better.

Learning to use the writing process is an essential tool for learners who need many opportunities to learn to use the writing process. Unfortunately, in many public schools, the problems of large classes and the silently excluded struggling learners are great contenders for the effective teaching of writing.

Observation and experience have shown that the widening gaps between the high achievers and underachievers who are sometimes referred to as struggling learners call for urgent attention. The purpose of this study is to explicate some inclusive and plural strategies that can make all learners participate effectively in language classes, nay, writing classes.

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1.1 Research Rationale

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Quality Education is regarded as the fourth Sustainable Development Goal of the seventeen goals of the General Assembly of the United States formulated in 2015 to be achieved in 2030. This fourth goal is to attain an inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all. Quality Education is the type of education that provides brain development and skills that prepare school children for the future and lifelong learning.

In many Nigerian secondary schools, classes range from forty to a hundred students with close to four to six arms of the same class. Olajide (2005) asserts that part of the proximate environment of any class is its size. If the class is large, the psychosocial pressure a learner experiences in it may differ from that he would in a smaller class. Tomlinson (1998) suggested that English Language teaching strategies should be aimed at encouraging the learner to make discoveries about the learning environment, although it is doubtful whether the very large class would allow total exploration of its environment by the teachers and his learners. Olateju (1998) cited in Olajide (2005) counselled against nurturing large ESL classrooms where learners are haphazardly organized and assessed. English Language class thrives when it offers the learners enough opportunities to use language creatively. Hence, there is a great need for the teachers of such large classes to creatively avail themselves of the inclusive strategies as propounded by Tomlinson

Comment [OC7]: (1998) to be added here – as the paragraph uses quite a few citations

Learners are often keen on how much they participate in a lesson, and they tend to be eager to know if their existing knowledge of the subject matter is of any relevance. However, in a large class, learners run the risk of not satisfying their curiosity, unless the teacher is very cautious and committed. If the teacher provides the right language experiences, but the learners have an inappropriate perception of the context in which language can be used, learner behaviours may not change desirably. Incidentally, unyielding language behaviour has implications for interdisciplinary learning. The implications of large classes for the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language were highlighted by Olajide (2005) to include but are not limited to the following:

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First, the largeness of class can destroy or facilitate instruction in English, depending on whether there is adequate cooperation between the teacher and his learners. On the other hand, if he manages his instruction very well, he would gain his learners' attention fully, and he would be able to take them through many aspects of the topic under focus.

Second, the larger a class becomes, the greater the risk of losing learners' participation. It becomes more difficult for the teacher to engage the interest and attention of learners in the topic of the lesson.

Third, large classes are taught by those who hardly know the appropriate methodology for teaching the subject. Appropriate methodologies are veritable tools that cannot be glossed over. Learners are of different intellectual, emotional, social and physical abilities and capabilities. The inclusive practices of the language teachers will go a long way to direct, misdirect or endanger the learning abilities of learning. This study, therefore, seeks to find answers to these questions: Are there some language inclusive plural strategies that learners can use to close the learning gaps between the struggling learners and high achieving ones in a writing classroom?

Table 1 :Classroom practices ratio among respondent

SCHOOLS	CLASS	M	F	TOTAL
Sampled School 1	JSS1	90	88	178
	JSS2	86	84	170
	JSS3	98	134	232
	SS1	102	118	220
	SS2	98	109	204
	SS3	113	84	197

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Sampled School 2	JSS1	200	150	350
	JSS2	200	200	400
	JSS3	200	100	300
	SS1	310	120	430
	SS2	100	150	250
	SS3	90	100	195
Sampled School 3	JSS1	150	120	270
	JSS2	100	120	220
	JSS3	150	142	292
	SS1	122	80	202
	SS2	100	100	200
	SS3	150	120	270

Source: Ekiti State Ministry of Education/ Field Trip

2. Literature Review

Olajide (2005) decried the large classes encountered in the General English Course of the Nigerian Colleges of Education where there can be as many as four hundred students. The Use of English programme for the universities also experiences fairly large classes. By implication, Olajide is baffled by these numbers which have drastically increased to an alarming rate where students sit on the window just to mark their presence.

It is germane to view some scholarly works on what researchers had done in the aspect of writing. Akinwamide (2015) examined the resultant import of brainstorming on content relevance and logical organizations of English as a Second Language Writers' Writing Tasks. The purpose was to find out the implications of adopting the pre-writing technique of 'Brainstorming' on Introduction, Body of essay and Conclusion in accounting for Content Relevance and Logical Organization of facts in students' essay work. The study employed the pre-test, post-test and control group quasi-experimental research design. The sample consisted of 80 Senior Secondary School final year students. One instrument was used to gather data. The West African Examination Council's (WAEC) English Language Essay Questions. The data generated were subjected to statistical analysis and the results of the analysis showed that there was no significant difference between the pre-test scores of both the control and the experimental group hence homogeneity was established at take-off. There was a significant difference in the post-test scores of the experimental and the control group. As evident from the aftermath of the statistical analysis, the adoption of the pre-writing technique of brainstorming had a significant effect on Content Relevance and Logical Organization of facts in essay writings. Therefore, the application of the brainstorming technique is invaluable to the writing skill development of second language writers. This study dealt with the place and promotion of brainstorming as a strategy but the implication on students' ability level was not examined, so there is the need to investigate further the implication on struggling learners and large classes.

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Oyinloye and Fasae (2015) examined the availability and effective utilization of ICT for effective teaching and learning of the English Language in secondary schools in Ekiti State. The research design was descriptive. The population for the study comprised all English Language teachers (571) and all students in the senior secondary schools in Ekiti State (34,004). Multistage random sampling technique was utilized in selecting the sample. In all, 216 students emerged as the sample size and all (20) English Language teachers in the selected schools were used as the sample. Two research instruments titled "Students' Assessment of the Need for Information and

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Communication Technology (ICT) in English Language (SANICTENG)" and "Teachers' Assessment of the Need for Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in English Language (TANICTENG)" were tested for both validity and reliability procedures and used for data collection. Reliability coefficients of 0.60 and 0.67 were obtained for the teachers' questionnaire and students' questionnaire respectively. The conclusion was drawn and recommendations were made among which are; that facilities and equipment necessary for effective teaching and learning should be provided in schools by various means – government, non-governmental organizations, Parents-Teachers Association, Old Students' Association and philanthropists.

To wrap, it could be deduced from these studies that the place and promotion of brainstorming as a strategy, ICT and its effective use were examined in relation to language classes but the implication on students' ability level was not examined, so there is the need to investigate further on the implication on struggling learners and large classes

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2.1 Theoretical Analysis

This study takes its root in the Social Interaction Theory which was propounded by Vygotsky (1978) and has its root in the constructivist ideas of learning. There are three types of constructivists: cognitive, radical and social. Cognitive constructivists emphasize the accurate mental construction of a coherent experiential reality while Social constructivists emphasize the construction of an agreed-upon, socially constructed reality.

Comment [OC11]: Great identification of theories! Good job! ☺

Vygotsky as a social constructivist perceives social interaction as an important way in which children learn knowledge available in their culture without needing to reinvent it. Parents, adults, caregivers, teachers and peers play important roles in the process of appropriation in caring for children. Teachers and adults give direction and instructions, comments and feedback to students which are not passively received by students because they also communicate with teachers by conveying their problems or their answers in an interactive manner. Children also use conversations in working with their peers in handling exercises, projects and problems. Through this, they exchange ideas and receive information, gaining understanding and developing knowledge.

Vygotsky, as a pro-constructivist theorist of the social type, views learning as inherently a social process activated through the zone of proximal development.

The following are the key points of Vygotsky's theory as enumerated in Meece (2002):

- Social interactions are critical; knowledge is constructed between two or more people.
- Self-regulation is developed through internalization (developing an internal representation) of actions and mental operations that occur in social interactions.
- Human development occurs through the cultural transmission of tools (language, symbols).
- Language is the most critical tool. Language develops from social speech to private speech, to covert (inner) speech.
- The zone of proximal development (ZPD) is the difference between what children can do by themselves and what they can do with assistance from others. Interactions with adults and peers in the ZPD promote cognitive development.

Assumptions of Social Cognitive Theory

- Constructivism highlights the interaction of persons and situations in the acquisition and refinement of skills and knowledge.
- People are active learners and they develop knowledge for themselves. Learners must discover the basic principles to understand the material well.
- Constructivism influences educational thinking about curriculum and instruction. It underlies emphasis on the integrated curriculum in which students study a topic from multiple perspectives.
- Teachers should not teach in the traditional sense of delivering instruction to a group of students. Rather, they should structure the situation such that learners become actively

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involved with the content through the manipulation of materials and social interaction. How the teacher structures the lesson allows students to understand the lessons.

Applications and Utilizations of Inclusive Practices in Writing

1. ***Class Collaborations or Collaborative Books***: This is an inclusive writing strategy where students work together to write a book or page of a book in a bid to ease the process of composition. Students contribute one page or work with a classmate to write a section of the book. They use the writing process as they draft, revise and edit their composition. One of the benefits of collaborative books is that students share the work of writing or creating a book so that the books are made much more quickly and easily than an individual book (Tompkins 2002, 2004,). Again, it is less time-consuming. Teachers can conference easily with students and help them to revise, and edit their writing. It enables the teacher to introduce the stages of the writing process without much ado. It can be used by students at all levels to retell a story, illustrate a poem or write a biography.

Students learning English are more likely to be successful when they write collaboratively than when they write individually or independently because they work with their mates and thus have less writing to do so it can be completed more quickly. The essentials of collaborative writing

- Topic selection is done in groups of four to five students
- Modelling of the writing process before students begin to write
- Prewriting techniques of brainstorming, outlining and drafts are encouraged among students in their groups and post writing skills of editing and feedback. The final copy of the essay is written after the due correction of mechanics.
- Completion of the book project/ essay is done with all the necessary preliminaries of a book and publishing is done and advertised in the class or school library

2. ***Instructional Conversations***: Very similar to the collaborative writing strategy is Instructional Conversations. They are like grand conversations except that they are about nonfiction topics, not about Literature. These conversations provide opportunities for students to talk about the main ideas they are learning in content-area units and enhance both students' conceptual learning and their linguistic abilities. Like grand conversations, these discussions are interesting and engaging, and students are active participants, building on classmates' ideas with their comments. Teachers are participants in the conversation, making comments much as the students do, but they also assume the teacher role to clarify misconceptions, asking questions, and providing instruction.

Goldenberg has identified these content and linguistic elements of an instructional conversation:

- ✓ The conversation focuses on a content-area topic.
- ✓ Students activate or build knowledge about the topic during the instructional conversation.
- ✓ Teachers provide information and directly teach concepts when necessary
- ✓ Teachers promote students' use of more complex vocabulary and language to express the ideas being discussed.
- ✓ Teachers encourage students to provide support for the ideas they present using information presented in content-area textbooks, text sets, and other unit-related resources in the classroom.
- ✓ Students participate actively in the instructional conversation and make comments that build upon and expand classmates' comments.
- ✓ The classroom is a community of learners where both students' and teachers' comments are respected and encouraged.

Step by Step Procedures:

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1. Choose a focus
2. Prepare for the instructional conversation
3. Begin the conversation
4. Expand the conversation
5. Write in learning logs

Application and Examples

Instructional conversations are useful for helping students grapple with important ideas they are learning in thematic units. For example, during a unit on immigration, a class of fifth graders interview their parents to find out if they are immigrants or descendants of immigrants, write summaries of their interviews, and share what they learned with their classmates. Next, students read a chapter in their social studies textbook about America being a land of immigrants. Then the teacher brings the class together to have an instructional conversation. The teacher begins by writing The United States is a nation of immigrants on the chalkboard, reads the statement aloud, and asks the students what they think the statement means. The children share what they have learned through reading the interviews conducted with their parents through reading the textbook chapter. As the children talk about immigrants, the teacher reviews the terms immigrants and descendants and reinforces the three main concepts from the textbook chapter through these statements and follow-up questions as exemplified.

3. Interactive Writing: In Interactive writing, students and the teacher create a text and "share the pen" as they write the text on chart paper. The text is composed by the group, and the teacher guides students as they write the text word-by-word on chart paper. Students take turns writing known letters and familiar words, adding punctuation marks, and marking spaces between words. All students participate in creating and writing the text on chart paper, and they also write the text on small whiteboards. After writing, students read and reread the text using shared reading and independent reading.

Interactive writing is used to show students how writing works using their knowledge of sound-symbol correspondences and spelling patterns.

Applications and Example

Interactive writing can be used as part of literature focus units, in social studies and science thematic units, and for many other purposes, too. Some uses are:

- ✓ Write predictions before reading
- ✓ Write responses after reading
- ✓ Write letters and other messages
- ✓ Make lists
- ✓ Write daily news
- ✓ Rewrite a familiar story
- ✓ Write information or facts
- ✓ Write recipes
- ✓ Make K-W-L charts, clusters, data charts, and other diagrams
- ✓ Create innovations, or new versions of a familiar text
- ✓ Write class poems
- ✓ Write words on a word wall
- ✓ Make poems

When students begin interactive writing in kindergarten, they write letters to represent the beginning sounds in words and write familiar words such as the, a, and is. The first letters that students write are often the letters in their names, particularly the first letter. As students learn more about sound-symbol correspondences and spelling patterns, they do more of the writing as they work in small groups. Each student in the group uses a particular colour pen and takes turns

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writing letters, letter clusters, and words. They also get used to using the white correction tape and use it to correct poorly formed letters and misspelt words. Students also sign their names in colour on the page so that the teacher can track which student wrote which words. A black-and-white copy of a small group's interactive active writing about snails.

4. Quick writes and Quickdraws: Students use quick writing as they write in response to literature and for other types of impromptu writing. Students develop ideas, reflect on what they know about a topic, ramble on paper, and make connections among ideas. Quickdraws are variations of quick writes in which students draw instead of write. Young children often do quick draws in which they draw pictures and add labels. Some students do a mixture of writing and drawing. In the quick write, the child wrote, "If you lie, you will get in trouble and you will hurt your friends."

Quick writing was originally called free writing and was popularized by Peter Elbow (1973) as a way to help students focus on exploring and developing ideas. Elbow's emphasis was on content rather than mechanics. Even by second or third grade, students have learned that many teachers emphasize correct spelling and careful handwriting more than the content of a composition.

Elbow explains that focusing on mechanics makes writing "dead" because it does not allow students' natural voices to come through.

Application and Examples

Students do quick writes and quickdraws for a variety of purposes in literature-based reading classrooms, including:

- ✓ As an entry for reading logs
- ✓ To define or explain a word on the word wall
- ✓ On the theme of the story
- ✓ About a favourite character
- ✓ Comparing book and film versions of a story
- ✓ About a favourite book during an author study
- ✓ About the characteristics of a literacy genre
- ✓ About the project, the student is creating

Students also do similar quick writes and quickdraws during these studies. These show a sixth grader's quick writing during a unit on Egypt. This quick write was written after a discussion comparing ancient and modern Egypt. As the class compared ancient and modern Egypt, the teacher made a Venn diagram on chart paper. Then students each made their own Venn diagram and referred to it as they wrote their quick writes. The purpose of this quick write was to reinforce what students are learning, not to write a composition-contrast essay.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The essence of writing this paper was to address the inclusive and pluralistic strategies for improving language in large classes and boosting the learning abilities of struggling learners. It is very germane to conclude with a call on teachers in secondary schools to use these strategies to eliminate the challenge of the struggling learners as well as assist them to teach writing effectively. It also suggested that teacher training institutions could introduce these strategies so that pre-service teachers can imbibe and utilize them when they eventually become practising teachers. It also recommended the strategies to textbook writers and curriculum planners

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