



ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER

Participatory Pedagogy: A Case Study of Learner's Participation in Content Development

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This was an experiment in participatory pedagogy, in which the researcher involved 24 Nigerian university students of French in determining the content of a 6 week Grammar Course in French. The objective of the study was to ensure content relevance in content development in order to guarantee and sustain learner's interest in Grammar learning tasks. The content development exercise comprised 3 phases, namely the collation of the raw data of students' interest inventory, conducting the needs analysis of the interest areas and breaking the interest areas into teachable modules. The teachable modules that evolved out of the process of co-construction formed the basis for the teaching that ensued. The modules which are presented in this paper, while a later paper evaluated the student performance at the end of the programme, make a case for the adoption of learner's participation in content development.

Keywords: Participatory Pedagogy, Curriculum, Content Development.

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Introduction

Teaching methodologies vary in focus. Therefore, the effective teacher is one who is constantly making adjustments in his methodologies. In past times, the teacher and the subject have been the focus of teacher/subject-central approach. Such an approach tended to sideline the learner and this had grave consequences for the learner. However, in recent times, research contributions from educational psychologists have brought about a gradual shift of emphasis from the teacher and the subject to the learner, thereby conferring much importance on the latter. By the same token, quite a lot has been written by experts in curriculum planning and implementation about the role of the classroom teacher, who, according to Mkpka (1987), is the curriculum interpreter.

The shift from a teacher-frontal approach to a learner-centred approach is not without implications for the classroom teacher. Such implications include a critical look at the issue of content relevance as it relates to the learner, particularly as it affects interest and satisfaction in the learning tasks. In this paper, the focus will be on content relevance, because it is posited that content relevance should be ensured in content development since this is a sure way of guaranteeing and sustaining learner's interest. In other words, this researcher is advocating content relevance thereby positing that this could be achieved by ensuring learner's interest in learning tasks through his involvement in content development. In concrete terms, therefore, participatory pedagogy shall be presented, first of all, from a purely philosophical perspective before proposing a practical application through a case study.

Philosophical Perspectives of Participatory Pedagogy

The present coinage of participatory pedagogy, a symbiotic relationship of participation and pedagogy, will assume meaning only after a brief overview of the two notions in isolation. It is intended, therefore, to provide some cursory remarks separately on pedagogy and on the place of participation when viewed with some educational concepts before regrouping them to suit the bidding of the paper.

Pedagogy is about associating philosophical analysis of educational concepts in the very act of teaching. This implies that the teacher-philosopher must, firstly, understand educational concepts. Secondly, he must be aware of certain criteria to which educational concepts must conform in order to be thus labelled. Thirdly, he must be guided in the job by such criteria. The educational concepts include education itself and its corollary concepts of teaching and learning. The paper shall, therefore, be looking at the three concepts and the criteria to which they must conform. A conscious attempt will be made to show the pertinence of participation when viewed with each of three concepts. It is pertinent, at this juncture, to consider the concept of education.

Many definitions have been advanced for the concept of education, Fafunwa (1974), Farrant (1980), Obanya (1974), and Igwe (1990). According to Ukeje, (quoted in Ughamadu, 1998), the term education can be used as a product, a process or a discipline. As a product, education means change in behaviour (a tool, a power). As a discipline, it is a body of organized knowledge that deals with such questions as: What should be taught? (Curriculum), why should it be taught? (Educational

philosophy), how should it be taught? (Methodology) and to whom should it be taught? (Learner).

As a process, it is often used without adequate justification of its varieties of meanings. More commonly the word education is used in a restricted sense to be coterminous with schooling. This is a tendentious view, which seeks to ascribe to the school of monopoly of educational activities when there are other agencies with educational functions. On the other hand, even when the word education is given a wider scope of meaning either by reference to the system of education or the concern of the Ministry of Education, we are only widening the scope of a descriptive perspective in which education refers to what goes on in formal institutions of learning and non-formal agencies and what a system is to implement. Such a descriptive perspective does not actually say what the activity of education is. That explains why Akinpelu (1985) is of the opinion that such an approach leaves us with an unresolved question as to the prescriptive or normative usage of the word.

From the prescriptive or normative point of view, though there may seem to be some underlying cultural specificities about the word education in different societies; nevertheless, one definition that may cut across boundaries is that given by Whitehead (1932) attesting to the fact that education as a dynamic process is “the transmission of what is worthwhile to those who are committed to it”. We shall come back to this operational definition of education as a process. Let us consider the criteria of education as a process.

Apart from Whitehead, and Dewey, in the later part of the twentieth century, the writings of many other philosophers like Peters (1967, 1973 and 1977), Peters and Hirst (1970), Scheffler (1965) have actually elucidated further the prescriptive of education as a process. In the writings of Peters, certain conditions must be met before a process or a group of processes can qualify as education. The conditions include desirability, purposefulness, cognitive perspective, and moral acceptability. Taking a look at these criteria will provide a clearer view of the issue of participation.

Desirability has to do with education being an initiation into worthwhile activities, implying a conscious effort to bring about a change in the state of mind of the recipient. The change which is sought or achieved must be for the better or toward what is desirable.

The change that is being brought about in the learner must be intentional, deliberate and directed towards a purpose. Education is a purposeful activity, which involves structuring the resources in the environment of the learner, or designing a curriculum or a programme to produce desired change. In this connection, education is a growth that is guided and directed, preferably by those who have the expertise to do it.

The learner must have some knowledge and understanding, some cognitive perspective of the activity. The knowledge or skill must be transmitted in a manner that is morally or otherwise acceptable. To be morally acceptable, it must involve the willing and voluntary participation of the learner; the learner should not be forced to learn, nor deceived to learn. Hence, indoctrinating and conditioning people falls short in this respect, because they seek to force people to learn or to believe

what is being presented to them. Also for the education to be effective and perhaps easy, the content should be presented in a way that fits the level of understanding of the learner.

All these criteria have been summarized and expressed in a short formula by Frankena (1973) when he said that education takes place when **X is fostering or seeking to foster in Y some disposition D by method M**, where, **X**=the society, the teacher, or whoever is educating, including oneself; **Y**=the learner who may be a child, a youth or an adult, or even oneself; **D**=disposition, beliefs, habits, knowledge, skills, attitudes and so on, considered desirable and really desirable for the learner to have both for himself and his society; **M**=methods that are satisfactory, that pay due regard to the interest, the willingness and the personal integrity of the learner, and that involve his active participation.

The implication of the foregoing still remains that participation is fundamental even when viewed from the criteria of education as a process. If we should attempt to expand the Frankena formula, a little further we might be adopting the following interpretation: **X**=teacher, **Y**=learner, **D**=content, **M**=participation. Let us now view the issue of participation from the teaching/learning perspective.

The term teaching can refer to the occupation or profession, the enterprise and the very act of teaching. For the purpose of this paper, special attention is given to the last of the three not because the other two are unimportant but because teaching act is the one that is pertinent to our situation as classroom curriculum interpreters. From that standpoint, one may need to borrow from what Akinpelu (1985) considers the criteria which distinguish teaching from what it is not and these include:

- a) A person who is consciously and deliberately doing the teaching;
- b) Another person or oneself who is being taught;
- c) Some content or material, information, knowledge and so on, that is being imparted;
- d) At least an intention on the part of the person doing the act that the recipient should learn, and
- e) The process of inducing the learning must be such as is morally acceptable, and must be pedagogically sound.

From the foregoing as far as the thesis on participation is concerned, one may posit that it is embedded in this arrangement considering that (a) and (b) are the human participating elements, (c) is the content, while (d) and (e) constitute the pedagogy of participation. We may now turn to the criteria of learning and see the pertinence of participation when viewed from this perspective.

Behaviour psychologists agree that learning is a change or modification in the behaviour of an organism as a result of experience or as a reaction to stimulation in the environment. For learning to take place in the context of education, the followings are some of the criteria:

1. It has to be done by human beings.
2. It involves some knowledge of facts or skills.
3. Whatever is learned, whether it is facts, information, skills, attitudes, must be new. In this regard, Paterson (1979) has the view that what is learned must involve extension of his mental awareness, though not necessarily, a change of

behaviour. In other words, he must have developed a wider perspective, a richer stock of knowledge or information, or a better way of doing the task, which he need not demonstrate for all to see here and now. He shall be able to do it as evidence that he has learned it, only if called upon to do so.

4. It is a conscious and deliberate activity of the learner. Learning can only be done by the individual; it cannot be shared with him, nor can it ever be done for him; all a teacher can do is to put the student in a position to learn, to stimulate him to wish to learn or to facilitate the process of learning.

The implication of the above criteria for participation is obvious. It is an urgent cry for the coinage of participatory pedagogy which may now be discussed.

Whitehead's operational definition of the process of education brings to the fore the human elements in education as a social activity which can best be represented by the triangular foci as depicted in figure 1 below:

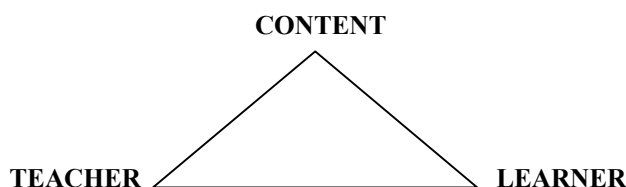


Figure 1: The Triangular Foci in Education

Furthermore, from the criteria of educational concepts thus far reviewed, participation seems to be a central all-pervading notion when viewed from the perspective of the criteria of the education process and teaching and learning activities. Focusing on participation is another way of actualizing the learner-centred philosophy that has been suggested by pre-twentieth century thinkers like Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel and nurtured by Dewey in the twentieth century pragmatic school of thought. No doubt that there are different ways in which learner's participation can be encouraged and adopted in curriculum-related matters. It may well be adopted in the construction of instructional material, but the interest here is on co-construction of content development.

Learner Participation in Content Development

The issue of what to teach is what is usually called the curriculum. It is not the intention of this paper to go into the definition of curriculum. Suffice it to say that Smith, Stanley & Shores (1957), Tyler (1949), Kelly (1987) and a host of others have written extensively on the concept of curriculum. Content, which is the focus of the researcher, is a curriculum-related issue, being one of the four components of curriculum overview as noted by Tyler (1949). The four elements or components of curriculum include goals and objectives, content or subject and subject matter, learning experiences, and evaluation.

Nicholls and Nicholls (1978) describe content as the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to be learned. Content can also be viewed as representing all the

subjects and subject matter which learners are being taught in schools. The subject matter of any subject can be viewed as what man has learned about that subject. According to Smith, Stanley & Shores (1957), subject matter is got from the vast stock of facts, ideas and values that man accumulated from his specialized endeavours. Content also refers to the body of knowledge or information that makes up learning material for a specific course or a given class or grade level. The body of information or knowledge may be comprised of facts, laws, explanations, principles, theories, events and generalisations. Content also incorporates both skills and processes. In this paper, content is being used to refer to the body of knowledge or information that makes up the learning material for a specific course or a given class or grade level. From that perspective, however, content in the classroom will be discussed with particular reference to content development.

On a general note, content development is the responsibility of experts of curriculum design and planning. At that level there are many sources from which content is derived including the needs of the society. That is not our major concern in this paper. What seems to be our focus is that of content development in the classroom setting involving the teacher and the learner. Where this is the case, certain criteria guiding the selection of content must be respected, particularly the question of content relevance.

Ughamadu (1998) lists a number of criteria for the selection of content and these include validity, significance, utility, learnability, interest and feasibility. Content validity refers to that which is capable of promoting the achievement of learning outcomes. Content significance refers to the potential of content or subject matter in leading learner to the mastery of the field of study. Content is significant if it is relevant in an organised field of knowledge and it represents the central ideas, concepts and principles in a field of study. The question of utility refers to the functional use of the content in and out of school. Learnability addresses the issue of appropriateness of content for the intended group of learners. Interest as a criterion in content selection is an important motivational force for, if learners' interests are not given attention in the selection of content, there would be loss of a strong motivational force to learn and the risk of no learning taking place. Feasibility takes into account a number of logistic problems one of which is whether the content is attainable within available time limit.

According to experts in curriculum planning and implementation, no criterion should be considered in isolation nor carried to the extreme. We are using relevance as an umbrella criterion as it implies giving consideration to all the criteria. In our situation where the learner's interest and satisfaction in learning tasks are of utmost importance, we give weight to the criteria of significance, utility, learnability, interest and feasibility as constituting that which is relevant for the learner. The learning material has to be relevant in the time frame, relevant to the achievement of our stated objectives, relevant because it suits the yearnings and aspirations of the particular learning group. This degree of relevance can only be achieved in a classroom situation by involving the learner in the choice of content, or what we prefer to call "co-construction of content". This will create the commitment which is one of the requisite dispositions of the learner towards the learning task.

One might be wondering how this co-construction of content is possible considering that the teacher and the learner are end users of a ready-made curriculum. However, it is likely that certain situations might require ad-hoc curricular decisions on the part of the teacher as it happened in our teaching experience at the French Village, Badagry. The detail of that experience is to be shared in the rest of the paper as a case study of learner's participation in content development.

A Case Study of Learner's Participation in Content Development

Background to the Study

This is the case study of a short grammar course for a particular group of students. The group consists of 24 graduates of the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, Sandwich French Programme. The students had already completed their course in the above-named university through the sandwich dispensation and their university required that they come to the Village for a language immersion programme.

However, this group could not be said to be the usual 3rd year students because, unlike the latter who normally spend a period of two semesters in the Village, this special group of students was billed to spend only a total of six weeks. Furthermore, even though the time and duration of their stay at the village coincided with an immersion programme for the first batch of National Certificate in Education (NCE) students for the year 2000, the students under focus could not be grouped together with the NCEs.

In the light of the above, therefore, it was decided at the departmental level to teach these students in their own separate group. It was decided that only a number of four courses was going to be taught to this set of students, namely, Grammar, Civilisation, Oral and Written Expressions and the onus of teaching them Grammar fell on this researcher.

Significance of the Study

Since the inception of the Village, this was the first time we had such a group of students. By the same token, there was no specific Grammar course for this profile of students except the Grammar course FLV 311 meant for our 300 level students, a course meant for 13 weeks of 3 hours a week. It was this same course that the researcher was asked to teach the students under focus.

From the pedagogical point of view, the researcher decided to cater for the special need of these students in Grammar. The researcher had the onerous task of "tailoring" the course to their needs and as a result, she resolved to apply the notion of "co-construction of content".

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to design a 6-week Grammar course whose content would be adapted to the needs of the graduates of OAU Sandwich French Programme.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives include:

- (1) To find out students' needs in Grammar through an interest inventory;
- (2) To analyse the needs in order to find out their interest areas, and
- (3) To break down the interest into teachable modules.

Different Phases in the Content Development

Phase1: Conducting an Interest Inventory

This was the phase that had to do with identification of their needs. The researcher had to get input from the students as regards their expectation from the Grammar course. To do this, it was necessary to solicit their interest inventory. In concrete terms, the students were asked to write down what exactly they wanted to gain from the course. An analysis of this inventory was conducted in the next phase in order to identify their areas of interest.

Phase 2: Preliminary Phase (Needs Analysis)

Having got the raw material in the form of interest inventory, we had to analyse it in order to ascertain their real needs. We had to do this in concert with the whole group. We adopted tallying and, in weighting, sentence structure and sentence-related items ranked very high, followed by the study of verbs.

Phase 3: Breaking the Interest into Teachable Modules

This consisted of breaking their interest areas into teachable modules to ensure progression and manageability. Because of the notion of "seeded items" and the idea of teaching language for usability instead of learning for the mere purpose of learning, we concentrated on sentences. The resultant teaching modules were, thus, basically, an analysis of different parts of sentence volume. In treating sentence volume the content area included simple and complex sentences, co-ordination and subordination as well as the different types of clauses. Below, is the content of the course designed for them which we captioned "*FLV 311 Adapted*":

I Parts of Speech

- *Identification/Recognition of the nature of parts of speech*
- *Identification of the function of parts of speech*

II Study of the nNoun (the Nominal Group)

- *Beefing up or expanding the noun*
- *Different positions (functions) of the nominal group in a sentence*
- *The noun group as a subject*
- *The noun group as a direct object*

III Study of the Verb Group

- *Simple sentences*
- *Compound sentences*

- *Subordination and co-ordination*
- *Analysing types of clauses*
- *Subordinate and main clauses*
- *Independent clauses*
- *Separation (transforming compound sentences to simple sentences and vice-versa)*

IV Verb Construction

- *Verb markers and properties*
- *The construction of verbs*
- *Constructing verbs with nouns*
- *Direct construction without prepositions*
- *Indirect construction with prepositions*
- *Constructing with clauses*
- *The notion of completing clauses*
- *Tenses and modes in completing clauses*
- *The problem of tense agreement*
- *Recapitulation*

Conclusion

The teacher, the learner and the content are the focal points of any meaningful classroom encounter. With the shift of emphasis from the erstwhile subject/teacher-centred teaching methodology to a more humane learner-centred approach, a good meeting point in the triangle is participatory pedagogy. One way of demonstrating this philosophy beyond mere lip service is an experience in the French Village in August 2000, where the researcher had to make ad-hoc curricular decisions regarding course content for a group of students from OAU Sandwich French Programme. In that experiment, the researcher tried the strategy of co-construction of content by allowing learner involvement in the choice of what constituted appropriate content for his learning needs and that is what has been shared throughout this paper. The paper dwelt largely on the pertinence of participation when viewed alongside the underlying criteria guiding the process of education and the teaching/learning activities.

However, in spite of what might be considered the merits of this paper, there are certain limitations. For instance, one of the burning questions that may have been raised by much of what was orchestrated in this paper about learner's participation in content development is that of evaluation. Answers to such questions formed the basis of Mbanefo (2006), which addressed the issue of performance and programme evaluation in relation to this experiment. In that paper, there was evidence to show that the experiment was successful, as reflected by the near bell-shaped curve depicting the performance of students in a test administered to them at the end of the programme.

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آموزش مشارکتی: مطالعه موردی روی فراگیران مشارکتی در توسعه محتوا

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مقاله حاضر تجربه ای از آموزش مشارکتی است که محقق ۲۴ دانشجوی رشته زبان فرانسه از دانشگاه نیجریه را برای بررسی محتوای درس دستور زبان فرانسوی ۶ هفته درگیر ساخت. هدف از این مطالعه اطمینان از ارتباط محتوا با توسعه محتوا، به منظور تضمین و جلب نظر فراگیران در حین فراگیری دستور زبان بود. تمرینات توسعه محتوا دارای ۳ بخش است: تلفیق داده های اولیه با فهرست مورد نظر فراگیران، انجام تجزیه-تحلیل و نیازسنجی حیطه مورد علاقه و تقسیم حیطه ها به بخش های قابل تدریس. موارد قابل تدریس با مشارکت فراگیران به دست آمدند و اساس پایه های اصلی تدریس شدند. بخش ها در این مقاله و ارزیابی کارآمدی این برنامه در مقاله بعدی که از فراگیران در پایان این دوره بدست آمده خواهد شد که می تواند به عنوان یک نمونه پژوهش در تولید محتوا مشارکتی مورد استفاده قرار گیرد.

واژگان کلیدی: آموزش مشارکتی، برنامه درسی، توسعه محتوا.

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