Challenges of Effective Communication in Classroom Teaching and Learning Among Secondary School Teachers' and Students' in Nigeria

Zainab Zubairu Omoshola
+234(0)-8066286872
omoshola71@gmail.com
Federal University of Education
Kantogora, Niger state, Nigeria

Abstract

Effective communication is a vital component of successful teaching and learning processes in secondary schools. It serves as the foundation for transmitting knowledge, fostering understanding, and promoting active participation between teachers and students. However, in Nigeria, several challenges hinder effective communication in classroom teaching and learning. This study examines the key barriers that secondary school teachers and students encounter in achieving meaningful communication. Specifically, it highlights issues such as language differences, large class sizes, inadequate teacher training, poor instructional materials, cultural and socio-economic factors and the influence of technology and distractions. The research adopts a qualitative approach to assess how these factors impact the teaching-learning process and the overall academic performance of students. This study therefore discusses the concepts of communication, effective communication, classroom teaching, classroom learning and challenges of effective communication in Nigerian secondary schools with the application of Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication theory. The study concludes that overcoming these challenges requires deliberate strategies such as teacher capacity-building, improved classroom management techniques, integration of modern teaching aids, and fostering interactive teacher-student relationships. The research suggests that policymakers, educators and stakeholders in Nigeria's education sector should prioritize communication skills development in teacher training programmes and create supportive environments that enhance interaction in classrooms.

Keywords: Challenges, effective communication, classroom, teaching, learning

INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental tool in the teaching and learning process. In the classroom setting, effective communication ensures the smooth transfer of knowledge, ideas, values, and skills from teachers to students and vice versa. It does not only involve the transmission of information but also requires mutual understanding, feedback, and interaction. In secondary schools, where learners are at their critical stage of intellectual, social, and emotional development, effective communication plays a central role in shaping learning experiences and academic performance.

Despite its importance, communication in Nigerian secondary schools faces numerous challenges that hinder the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Factors such as overcrowded classrooms, language barriers, inadequate teaching aids, poor teacher-student relationships, socio-cultural influences, and insufficient training in communication skills often lead to a breakdown in the teaching-learning process (Hargie, 2011). These barriers limit student engagement, reduce comprehension, and ultimately affect academic achievement. The problem of ineffective communication between teachers and students in Nigerian classrooms is further compounded by systemic issues in the educational sector, including underfunding, shortage of qualified teachers, and reliance on traditional teacher-centered methods of instruction (Ukoha, 2022). Consequently, students often struggle to understand concepts, participate actively in lessons and develop critical thinking skills. This paper therefore discusses the concepts of communication, effective communication, classroom teaching, classroom learning, challenges of effective communication in Nigerian Secondary Schools **w**ith the application of Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication theory.

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES

1. Communication

Communication is generally understood as the process of sharing information, ideas, feelings, or knowledge between individuals or groups through verbal and non-verbal means. It involves the transmission of a message from a sender to a receiver with the aim of achieving mutual understanding (Shannon & Weaver, 1949). In the educational context, communication serves as the foundation upon which teaching and learning are built. It is not limited to spoken or written words but also includes non-verbal cues such as gestures, tone, facial expressions, and body language (Ukoha, C. 2022).

In the classroom, communication is a two-way process where the teacher conveys instructional content, and students respond through feedback, either verbally or through performance. According to Flanders (1970), teacher-student communication patterns significantly affect classroom interaction and learning outcomes. Without effective communication, even well-prepared lessons may fail to achieve their objectives, as students may not grasp the intended knowledge or skills.

2. Effective Communication

Effective communication goes beyond the mere exchange of words; it is achieved when the intended meaning of a message is clearly understood and appropriately acted upon by the receiver. In the classroom, this means that students must not only hear or read what the teacher says but also comprehend and apply it in their learning process (Tubbs & Moss, 2008). Effective communication requires clarity of expression, simplicity in language, appropriate use of teaching aids, active listening, and constructive feedback (Hargie, 2011).

In Nigeria's secondary schools, effective communication is particularly important due to diverse linguistic backgrounds and varying levels of student comprehension. Barriers such as the overuse of technical jargon, lack of feedback mechanisms, or cultural differences can disrupt the communication process (Akinwale, 2013). When communication is effective, students are motivated, engaged, and able to participate meaningfully in the learning process. Conversely, ineffective communication leads to confusion, disengagement, and low academic achievement.

3. Classroom Teaching

Classroom teaching refers to the structured process by which teachers facilitate learning among students in a formal school setting. It involves the application of pedagogical methods, instructional materials, and communication strategies to ensure the effective delivery of knowledge (Kyriacou, 2009). Communication is central to classroom teaching, as teachers must be able to explain concepts, ask questions, provide feedback, and create an environment where students feel encouraged to contribute. The role of communication in classroom teaching is underscored by Vygotsky's (1978) social constructivist theory, which emphasizes the importance of interaction and dialogue in knowledge construction. Teachers act not only as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators of discussion and collaboration. In Nigeria, where classrooms are often overcrowded, the effectiveness of teaching largely depends on the teacher's ability to adapt communication strategies that meet the diverse needs of learners.

4. Classroom Learning

Classroom learning refers to the structured interaction between teachers and students within a formal environment that is specifically designed for education. It is more than the delivery of subject content; it also involves communication, social interaction, and the use of strategies that improve understanding. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning within the classroom is most effective when it is interactive and when opportunities are created for dialogue, questioning, and scaffolding. The quality of classroom learning therefore depends on how well a teacher communicates knowledge, manages relationships, and provides a supportive learning atmosphere.

In the Nigerian context, classroom learning often faces challenges that affect the communication process. For example, in many secondary schools in Lagos, teachers struggle with overcrowded classrooms where about eighty students may be present. In such settings, teachers often resort to lecture methods, which limit interaction. Consider a biology lesson on photosynthesis: if the teacher explains the concept using only English and employs complex scientific terms without simplifying them or providing visual aids, many students are likely to remain confused. Because students are culturally conditioned to avoid questioning their teachers, they may stay silent even when they do not fully understand. The result is that students will remember and understand concepts discussed with the teacher and other students in the classroom.

By contrast, effective communication in the classroom produces a completely different outcome. A teacher who begins the same lesson by relating photosynthesis to local crops such as maize or cassava, and who supplements the explanation with charts or diagrams, creates a more engaging learning environment. If the teacher occasionally switches to an indigenous language to clarify difficult terms, students are more likely to follow the explanation (Ogunyemi 2012). Furthermore, if students are divided into small groups to discuss how plants in their community depend on sunlight, their participation and understanding are enhanced. In this way, classroom learning moves beyond memorization and instead promotes active involvement, comprehension, and critical thinking.

Research supports these observations. Onyema and Ohiaeri (2023) found that classrooms in which teachers contextualized their lessons and encouraged dialogue produced higher levels of student engagement. Similarly, Ukoha (2022) demonstrated that the use of instructional aids and local examples significantly improved student participation compared to abstract, lecture-dominated classrooms. These findings highlight that effective classroom learning depends on how teachers manage communication and adapt their methods to the needs of their students.

Challenges of Effective Communication in Nigerian Secondary Schools

The following are some of the challenges:

i.   Language Barriers: Many students have limited proficiency in English, which is the official language of instruction. This makes it difficult for them to fully understand lessons and express themselves clearly. Teachers also struggle to adjust their language level to suit diverse learners. Deji-Afuye and Zhou (2023) found that teachers' linguistic choices such as code-switching, simplifying vocabulary, or maintaining strict English usage directly affect students' participation. Similarly, a study in Enugu State (2022) showed a positive correlation between English proficiency and students' engagement in class, confirming that limited English competence reduces effective communication.

ii.   Overcrowded Classrooms: Large class sizes, sometimes exceeding 70 students per teacher, make it hard for teachers to give attention to individual learners, manage feedback, or encourage participation. Ogunyemi (2012) reported that Nigerian secondary schools often have classes with over 70 students, which forces teachers into lecture-dominated methods. Anderson, T. (2010) confirm that overcrowded classrooms in states like Kaduna and Sokoto negatively affect teacher-student interaction and lower academic achievement.

iii. Poor Teacher Training in Communication Skills: Many teachers receive training in subject content but not in effective communication strategies, such as questioning techniques, feedback loops, or classroom discourse management. Okebukola (2015) observed that Nigerian teacher education programs emphasize content but often neglect communication pedagogy. (Okoye, U 2022) reveal weak skills in classroom discourse and questioning techniques, which directly limit student engagement.

iv.   Cultural Barriers and Student Reluctance: Cultural norms often discourage students from questioning teachers, challenging ideas, or engaging in open dialogue. This creates a teacher-dominated communication pattern. Onyema and Ohiaeri (2023) noted that Nigerian students often remain silent in class due to fear of ridicule, respect for teachers, or anxiety about using English. Their discourse analysis showed that this results in teacher-dominated talk patterns and reduced student participation.

v.   Limited Use of Instructional Aids: Many classrooms lack teaching materials such as charts, projectors, or interactive boards. Without visual and audio aids, communication remains abstract and less engaging. Okebukola (2015) studies across Nigerian secondary schools (2021–2023) reveal that most classrooms lack adequate instructional aids. For example, Ukoha (2022) found that science teachers in rural schools had little access to projectors or models, reducing students' ability to grasp complex concepts.

vi.   Technological Constraints: Post-COVID, digital communication tools are still poorly integrated into many Nigerian classrooms due to lack of infrastructure, internet, or teacher competence in ICT use. A post-COVID assessment in Lagos (SSAAPublications, 2023) showed that although teachers recognized the importance of ICT, lack of internet, unreliable electricity, and inadequate devices prevented its use. Similarly, Okoye (2022) found a gap between teacher willingness to adopt ICT and the availability of resources.

vii. Noise and Environmental Distractions: Poor classroom environments (e.g., noise from nearby roads, lack of ventilation, poor acoustics) reduce audibility and concentration, thus weakening effective communication. A study by Olatunji (2021) revealed that classrooms located near busy roads in Lagos recorded higher incidences of student distraction and poor audibility. Teachers reported

frequent repetition of instructions, which consumed valuable teaching time and reduced comprehension.

viii. Teacher Dominance and Poor Feedback Loops: Some teachers rely heavily on lecture methods with little opportunity for student interaction or feedback. This unidirectional flow limits engagement and understanding. (Onyema, E. M. &Ohiaeri, F. 2023) study in Anambra State found that teacher communication patterns significantly predicted student performance. Teachers who relied solely on lecturing produced students with lower academic outcomes, while those who encouraged discussion and feedback achieved better results.

ix. Socio-economic Constraints of Students: Students from low-income families may lack textbooks, devices, or even proper nutrition, which affects their participation, attentiveness, and ability to respond effectively in class. (Okoye, U. 2022) studies onfirm that students from low-income families often lack basic study materials and come to class undernourished, leading to poor attention and weak responses in classroom discussions. Likewise, intervention programs like free school meals and textbook provision were shown to improve participation (Okoye, 2022).

x. Multilingual and Diverse Student Backgrounds: Nigeria's multilingual nature means students often come from different ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The lack of integration of mother tongue support in teaching can alienate students and reduce comprehension. A study in Southeast Nigeria (Mdpi, 2023) showed that strategic use of local languages alongside English improved student comprehension and interest. Conversely, classrooms where English was rigidly enforced recorded less interaction and poorer outcomes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Shannon-Weaver Model of Communication (1949)

The Shannon–Weaver Model of Communication is often described as the "mother of all communication models" because it provides a simple yet powerful way of explaining how communication works and why it sometimes fails. In this study, the model is very relevant because it directly mirrors the classroom setting, where the teacher serves as the sender, the lesson content is the message, the medium of delivery is the channel (such as spoken language, written notes, teaching aids, or digital tools), and the students function as the receivers. Feedback, in the form of students' questions, responses, or performance, completes the communication loop.

The model also introduces the concept of "noise", which refers to any barrier that interferes with the effective transmission of a message. In Nigerian classrooms, this noise takes many forms, including language barriers, where students have limited proficiency in English; overcrowded classrooms, where teachers cannot easily monitor students' understanding; cultural barriers, where students are reluctant to ask questions due to traditional respect norms; and technological or infrastructural challenges, where lack of instructional aids and ICT resources weakens delivery. Each of these challenges disrupts the smooth flow of communication, leading to partial understanding, misinterpretation, or complete breakdown of the learning process.

For example, if a teacher delivers a physics lesson entirely in English without simplifying the terms, many students who are more proficient in their local languages may fail to grasp the concept. Here, the intended message (lesson content) is distorted by linguistic noise. Similarly, in a class of 80 students, the teacher's ability to receive feedback is limited, resulting in feedback failure, which is another form of noise in the Shannon–Weaver framework.

Therefore, the Shannon–Weaver Model is directly related to this study because it provides both a conceptual lens and an analytical tool for identifying and explaining the barriers to effective communication in Nigerian secondary school classrooms. It clarifies how communication should ideally work between teacher and students, and highlights why breakdowns occur when "noise" in the form of environmental, linguistic, cultural, or resource-based challenges interferes with the process.

CONCLUSION

Communication is at the heart of classroom teaching, as it determines the extent to which knowledge is transmitted, understood, and applied by learners. In the Nigerian secondary school context, effective communication has been shown to play a central role in promoting interactive learning, student engagement, and academic achievement. However, the process is hindered by several challenges such as language barriers, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate teacher training in communication skills, cultural restrictions, poor instructional resources, technological limitations, and socio-economic constraints among students. These obstacles often result in teacher-dominated communication patterns, passive learning, and poor comprehension of subject matter.

Despite these challenges, the evidence from recent studies shows that classroom communication can be significantly improved when teachers adopt clear and interactive communication strategies, make use of instructional aids, integrate technology, and contextualize lessons to students' real-life experiences. Encouraging feedback, group discussions, and multilingual approaches where appropriate can also strengthen understanding and participation. Thus, the way forward lies not only in addressing structural and policy-related issues such as class size and resource allocation but also in equipping teachers with modern communication skills and pedagogical techniques.

In conclusion, effective classroom communication remains both a challenge and an opportunity in Nigerian secondary schools. Overcoming the barriers requires a collective effort by teachers, school administrators, policymakers, and communities to create a more supportive learning environment. If communication is improved, classroom teaching will move beyond rote memorization and examination success to truly fostering critical thinking, creativity, and lifelong learning among students.

SUGGESTIONS

Based on the above discussion, the following suggestions were made:

First, there is a need for continuous professional development programmes that equip teachers with effective communication strategies, including questioning techniques, active listening and feedback methods.

Second, reducing class sizes should be a priority for education policymakers. Smaller classes would allow teachers to give more attention to individual learners and encourage interactive learning. Where immediate reduction is not possible, schools can adopt rotational teaching groups or make use of teaching assistants to ease the communication burden on a single teacher.

Third, the use of instructional aids and technology should be encouraged and supported. Schools and government agencies should provide teachers with adequate teaching materials such as charts, models, projectors, and digital tools. At the same time, teachers should be trained to use these resources effectively.

Fourth, teachers should make an effort to contextualize lessons by relating subject content to students' everyday experiences. Where possible, code-switching into indigenous languages can be employed to clarify difficult concepts, especially in rural areas where students may not be proficient in English. This will help break down language barriers and promote better understanding.

Fifth, schools should work with communities and government agencies to address socio-economic barriers that affect students' participation in classroom communication. Programmes such as provision of free textbooks, school feeding schemes, and scholarship support for disadvantaged students can go a long way in ensuring that learners are attentive, motivated, and able to participate fully in class.

Finally, a deliberate effort should be made to promote student-centered communication. Teachers should create a classroom culture where students feel free to ask questions, share ideas, and engage in meaningful dialogue without fear of ridicule.

REFERENCES

Anderson, T. (2010).*Theories for learning in the digital age*.Athabasca University Press.

Bamgbose, A. (2000). *Language and exclusion: The consequences of language policies in Africa*. Münster: LIT Verlag.

Blatchford, P. (2012). *Class size: Arguments and evidence*. Routledge.

Coleman, J. S. (1988). *Social capital in the creation of human capital*.American Journal of Sociology, 94, S95–S120.https://doi.org/10.1086/228943

Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.

Deji-Afuye, O. A. & Zhou, Y. (2023).Code-switching and classroom communication in Nigerian secondary schools.*Journal of Language and Education*, 9(2), 55–70. https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2023.55

Flanders, N. A. (1970). *Analyzing teacher behavior*.Addison-Wesley.

Heinich, R., Molenda, M., Russell, J. D. &Smaldino, S. E. (2002).*Instructional media and technologies for learning* (7th ed.). Prentice Hall.

Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Kyriacou, C. (2009). *Effective teaching in schools: Theory and practice* (3rd ed.). Nelson Thornes.

Mdpi.(2023). Multilingualism and learning outcomes in Nigerian classrooms.*Education Sciences, 13*(4), 215.https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci13040215

Ogunyemi, S. A. (2012). Managing large classes in Nigerian secondary schools: Implications for effective teaching. *Nigerian Journal of Educational Management, 11*(1), 102–118.

Okebukola, P. A. (2015). Teacher preparation in Nigeria: Past, present and future. *African Journal of Teacher Education, 4*(3), 23–41.

Okoye, U. (2022). Teachers' adoption of ICT in post-COVID classrooms in Nigeria.*African Journal of Educational Technology, 10*(1), 14–28.

Olatunji, A. (2021). Environmental factors and effective teaching in Lagos secondary schools.*Journal of Educational Research in Developing Areas, 2*(1), 55–68.

Onyema, E. M. &Ohiaeri, F. (2023).Teacher-student interaction and communication challenges in Nigerian classrooms. *International Journal of Education and Development, 9*(1), 67–82.

Shannon, C. E. & Weaver, W. (1949).*The mathematical theory of communication*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

SSAAPublications.(2023). Post-COVID classroom communication and ICT integration in Nigeria.*Social Sciences and Arts, 12*(3), 45–59.

Ukoha, C. (2022). The use of instructional materials and student engagement in rural Nigerian secondary schools.*African Journal of Pedagogy, 8*(2), 33–47.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*.Harvard University Press.

Article inflow