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Comparison Between School Effectiveness Characteristics and Classroom Instruction Strategies in the United States and Nigeria

David A. Adewuyi*

Abstract: One incontrovertible, if unsettling, discovery in School Effectiveness Research (SER) is that an accumulation of evidence on the characteristics of effective instruction has not answered the perplexing question of why certain characteristics work in one school and not in others. One suggestion by many researchers to deal with this nagging problem is the contextualisation of SER such that local school and classroom cultures are considered in the design, implementation, and interpretation of studies. Studying the nuances of local cultures might illuminate the relationships between school level effectiveness characteristics and the classroom level instructional strategies employed by effective teachers to enhance students' academic achievement. This article discusses some Nigerian 'language examination-oriented instructional strategies' employed in effective language education classrooms. The strategies are compared and contrasted with Tikunoff's (1987) dimensions of effective instruction in the United States. Conceptual and policy assumptions that breed differences of approach in the two domains are highlighted; and implications of the strategies for school improvement programmes in the Third World are discussed.

Résumé: Une découverte indéniable mais troublante dans la Recherche sur l'efficacité de l'école (School Effectiveness Research, SER) est qu'une accumulation de preuves sur les caractéristiques d'un enseignement performant n'a pas répondu à la question complexe de savoir pourquoi certaines caractéristiques marchent pour une école et non pas pour d'autres. Plusieurs chercheurs suggèrent de traiter ce problème persistant à travers la contextualisation de la SER de telle sorte que les concepts d'école locale et de salle de classe soient considérés dans la conception, l'exécution et l'interprétation des études. Examiner les divers aspects des cultures locales pourrait éclairer les relations entre les caractéristiques du niveau d'efficacité de l'école et les stratégies liées au niveau de l'enseignement afin d'améliorer la performance académique des élèves. Dans cet article nous traitons des «stratégies de l'enseignement des langues axé sur les systèmes d'évaluation en vigueur». Les stratégies sont comparées et contrastent avec les paramètres d'un enseignement efficace aux États-Unis et développé par Tikunoff (1987). Des hypothèses conceptuelles et d'ordre politique qui engendrent des différences d'approches dans les deux domaines sont mises en évidence, et les incidences des stratégies pour l'amélioration des programmes dans le Tiers Monde ont été également discutées.

* Coordinator, NCATE & Middle Grades Education Program, College of Education, Albany State University. Albany, GA 31705

Introduction

School Effectiveness Research (SER) has, from the early 1970s, accumulated a lot of evidence on what characteristics are generally associated with effective schooling especially in the developed nations of North America and Europe. But the perplexing question remains: 'Why do certain characteristics work in one school and not in others?'. Many researchers (e.g. Fuller & Clarke, 1994; Stringfield & Teddlie, 1991; Reynolds et al., 1994; Lee & Bryk, 1986; Lee & Lockheed, 1990) have therefore called for the contextualisation of SER so that local school cultures are taken into account in the design, implementation, and interpretation of such studies. For instance, Fuller & Clarke (1994) argue that research programmes bounded by the western conception of pedagogical practice and by implicit social rules pertaining to authority and social participation might mask rather than illuminate how teachers and their tools in local school cultures operate to enhance school effectiveness and student achievement (p. 144).

Thus while effective school characteristics are uniform and can be recognised in schools generally, the instructional strategies employed by teachers to achieve effectiveness are varied and conditioned by local factors. In order to develop a unified theory of SER, therefore, local instructional strategies that 'work' in each domain to bring about student achievement should be contextually studied and documented. This article develops from such a contextual study. It attempts to describe and analyse what might be reasonably called 'language examination-oriented instructional strategies' that 'work' in Nigeria. To highlight their contextual similarities and differences, these strategies are compared and contrasted with similar strategies discussed by Tikunoff (1987) in some Californian classrooms in the United States. The purpose is to document the influence of local instructional strategies that enhance student achievement in English language classrooms. Contextual studies may speed up contribution to knowledge and enhance the construction of unified theory in SER while its practical application may make the results useful and meaningful to education policy makers.

Review of the Literature

State of knowledge

Since the early 1970s, and largely in response to findings by Coleman et al. (1966), and Jencks et al. (1972) in the United States, Plowden (1967) in Britain, and others elsewhere, suggesting that differences in student achievement are more strongly associated with family socio-economic status than school-based variables, an enormous research attention has been directed at investigating and dispelling this sceptical and pessimistic claim. This body of research has resulted in the identification of effective schools and the characteristics that make them effective (e.g. Edmonds, 1979; Rutter *et al.*, 1979; Weber, 1971; Purkey & Smith, 1983; Brookover *et al.*, 1973). This research also yields what has become the 5-factor model of effective schools characteristics, which include the following:

- Strong leadership, particularly instructional, by the principal
- High expectations of student achievement
- Emphasis on basic skills
- A safe and orderly environment, and
- Frequent evaluation of pupils' progress.

Critics of School Effectiveness Research have noted many limitations which can briefly be summarised thus: 1). A narrow definition of school effectiveness; 2). Different methods that identify different schools as effective; 3). Conceptual problems related to the choice of an effective measure; 4). Instability of measures; 5). Failure to control adequately for student background characteristics; 6). Problems in causal ordering; 7). Problems of generalising from results; and 8). Vague plans for school improvement (See Adewuyi 1998:47-51 for a full discussion).

Despite early and ongoing criticism (e.g. Reynolds *et al*, 1994; Downer 1991; Reynolds & Teddlie 1998), SER has evolved over the last two decades, 'flourishing and even turning into a national movement' in the United States (August & Hakuta 1997). Indeed, since the early 1990s, there have been improvements in the conceptualisation and identification of effective schools. For instance, more refined models of SER which are multi-level, multi-factor, and context-specific (e.g. Scheerens &

Creemers 1989) are being used instead of the earlier unidimensional models (e.g. Wynne, 1981). There has also been a significant change in the way effective schools are identified. August & Hakuta (1997), for instance, identify effective schools design, nominated schools design, prospective case studies, and quasi-experimental studies as various methodologies employed in SER in the 1990s. They argue that effective schools research is more of a hybrid, relying on both student outcomes and nomination. The nominated schools designs do not report data on student outcomes and are therefore inconclusive. Prospective case studies lack comparison groups, so that changes in student outcomes may be due to extraneous factors. And while quasi-experimental studies that focus on an entire programme provide the strongest basis for claims about programme or school effects, they make claims only about the programme or school effect overall. Therefore, SER still suffers from lack of empirical evidence to make causal claims about the effects of specific components of effectiveness characteristics. Conclusions about the effect of individual factors can only be tentative and speculative.

In spite of these limitations of SER, 'theory and common sense... do support many of the findings', as stated by Purkey & Smith (1983:427). Furthermore, there has been a measure of consistency in the research findings that encouraged Coyle & Witcher (1992) to announce that 'the characteristics of effective schools can now be summarized' (p. 390). Most importantly, current research in SER has taken the identified lapses in the first generation SER studies seriously by paying attention to them in the design, implementation, and interpretation of results. These are applicable to the present study.

The Present Study

Research question and choice of setting

Most SER has been carried out in developed countries of North America and Europe (e.g. Rutter *et al.*, 1979; Edmonds, 1979; Weber, 1971; Brookover *et al.*, 1973; Mortimore *et al.*, 1988). Many of the studies are also concerned with factors that are more easily measured through large scale surveys and correlation studies in elementary schools and are sponsored by multi-national corporations and government agencies (see for example, Block 1983).

In response to the numerous calls for the contextualisation of SER, the present author embarked upon an ethnographic study of six Nigerian secondary schools in the winter session of 1996. The decision to study school effectiveness in Nigerian secondary schools was influenced by many factors. The overriding interest was my patriotic concern for the plight of students with poor performance in the terminal senior secondary school English language examinations. Without a pass in the language at the credit level, there is no chance for further studies. Other factors were easy accessibility, convenience, practicality, and future professional opportunities. I was born and raised in Nigeria where I had received elementary, secondary, and tertiary education and where I had taught and assessed English language at all levels for several years.

Because of the exploratory nature of the study and in order to give a clear direction to the study, some research questions were developed. The two questions explored in this article are: What are the instructional strategies that achieve student achievement in English language classrooms in Nigeria? How are these strategies different from those that 'work' in the United States English language classrooms? It was assumed from the review of literature that local conditions would shape effective instructional strategies to achieve student academic achievement in different domains. These local conditions have to be documented and made available to educational stakeholders in Nigeria and the United States.

Selection of schools for the study

In December 1995, I approached the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) in Lagos, Nigeria, the agency that conducts and keeps records of the West African Senior Secondary Examinations in five West African countries of Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Gambia. I requested and paid for a 5-year (1990-1994) set of English language results for all the secondary schools in Oyo state (now Oyo and Osun states). At the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, the information gathered on the over 600 secondary schools was processed using the statistical package for the social sciences (SPSS) program. Only 262 schools had complete 5-year results and they formed the target population for the study. The reason why only 262 schools had complete results was that

many of the schools established during the civilian administration of 1979-1983 were either merged together or closed down by the succeeding military administration.

With SPSS program, I set the threshold of a 5-year average of 60 percent or above for a school to qualify as 'effective'. (see Adewuyi, 1998 for full discussion). Six schools (Table 1) were purposefully selected to reflect different demographics of urbanisation (rural, sub-urban, and urban); gender differentiation (co-educational, boys only, girls only); and different school systems (private, and public). Within the public school system, federal government schools and state government schools are also included. The following were the major characteristics of the six purposefully chosen schools:

- School A: Private, urban co-ed..
- School B: Public, urban, girls only.
- School C: Public, rural, co-ed.
- School D: Public, sub-urban, girls only
- School E: Public, urban, boys only
- School F: Public, sub-urban, co-ed.

Conceptual framework

The field study that lasted six months (October 1996 - March 1997) was aimed at describing, analysing, and explaining the internal and external school effectiveness factors that might contribute to student achievement of English language in a Third World country. In addition to the research questions that guided the study, a contextual, multi-level, and multi-factor conceptual framework was developed from Scheerens & Creemer's (1989) model of school effectiveness. The conceptual framework clarifies the major operational and conceptual concepts used in the study. At the school level, such characteristics as availability of school facilities/supplies, educational leadership, a conducive school climate and goal-oriented programmes continue to assert a positive influence on student achievement. At the classroom level, teacher quality, instructional strategies, as well as the opportunity to learn are consistently mentioned in the literature as contributing to effective teaching and learning.

Depending on the educational structure of a particular society, other levels above the school, for instance, the district, state, and

national, can be discerned and they can influence educational outcomes. For instance, active parental involvement, and positive home-school-community relations have been shown to positively influence effective schooling and student achievement.

Above all, the student background characteristics, such as intellectual capacity, motivation, and home environment must be taken into consideration in the description and analysis of school effectiveness. The student background characteristics, it must be emphasised, explain the major part of the variance in student achievement and they cannot be easily influenced by education – at least not in the short run (Reynolds *et al.*, 1994:15). In order to facilitate the interpretation of other more malleable characteristics, student background characteristics are mainly used as control factors in models of effectiveness. All of these characteristics (school level, classroom level, and individual student level) appear to be constrained by the particular context in which they are measured. The conceptual framework takes cognisance of all these factors.

In essence, the conceptual framework consists of contextual internal and external school effectiveness components. The internal factors consist of school level inputs; general instructional strategies for all students in all classrooms; and specific language classroom instructional strategies for ESL students. External factors include student background variables; federal, state, and district environmental variables; and educational policy that drives the schools' administration. The student outcome is measured by the results of a standardised, large scale, criterion-referenced examination of English language capacity conducted by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC).

Contextual Definitions

School Effectiveness in Nigeria

Assessing school effectiveness has been very problematic in SER. In this article, a school is believed to be effective if its internal administrative and instructional activities, as well as the governmental political and bureaucratic practices, result in the attainment of at least a pass grade in English language at the senior school certificate examinations by most students of the school. In other words, what counts as effectiveness is the will of the school authority to create and maintain facilitating conditions under which inputs are attracted and

used in order that the majority of the students pass the English language at the end of their secondary education.

Implied in the above definition is that an effective school will have three essential components: 1) *necessary inputs* of curriculum that are adequate in scope and sequence, necessary instructional materials, adequate time for learning, and effective teaching practices by qualified teachers; 2) *facilitating conditions* such as community involvement, school-based professionalism, and flexibility; and 3) *the will to act* by the school authority, the government, and communities to create effective schools (See Lockheed & Levin, 1993). One basic assumption in this definition is that internal school and classroom factors as well as external societal and governmental political policies and school demographics would shape an effective school.

Whereas the condition for the award of a certificate at the end of secondary education in Nigeria is 'to obtain a pass grade in at least five of the eight or nine subjects offered' (WAEC, 1994, p. 7), no candidate will be offered a certificate if s/he obtains the F9 (Fail) grade in English language. It is the *one* subject that determines secondary education certification. Therefore, success or failure in the subject is determinant of candidates' further educational pursuits and their subsequent performance in the labour market. A comprehensive treatment of the socio-political antecedents of English language becoming the official language of Nigeria is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice to say here that achievement of at least a pass grade in English language on high stakes examinations such as West African School Certificate Examinations (WASCE) is taken as a measure of school effectiveness in Nigeria. Indeed, the reliance on this single subject as an index of school effectiveness and standard of education more generally is common in the Third World, especially in Africa where the former colonial languages have been adopted as official languages for political reasons. The political survival of such countries is hinged on those 'unifying' languages since the indigenous languages in the former colonies are either not yet committed to writing, or, even if they are, the adoption of any one of the indigenous languages may not be acceptable to other linguistic groups whose languages are not considered suitable for adoption. The adopted colonial, now the official and 'neutral', language, is used nationally not only in education, but also in government business,

commerce and industry, as well as for internal and international communication.

While schools certainly have other purposes and goals as well, for instance, moral development, a school that does not adequately prepare its students to pass the English language at the school certificate level is not regarded as effective, even if all the students are considered saints morally! It is acknowledged that the school certificate result does not tell the whole story; it nevertheless remains the most reliable outcome measure of school effectiveness in Nigeria. This is why, to a very great extent, the whole educational system in Nigeria is examination-oriented. While parents assume other schooling outcomes, by far the most important to them and their children is the attainment of a pass grade, first in English language, and then in any other four subjects for secondary school certification.

English language certification in Nigeria

The WAEC's assessment and award of grades to students at the senior school certificate examinations in English language is adopted as the measure of English language achievement in this study. At the time of the study, for secondary school certification, a candidate must obtain at least a pass grade in English. There were nine possible grades: A1, A2, A3 (excellent); C4, C5, C6 (credit); P7, P8 (pass); and F9 (fail). In assessing English language achievement in Nigerian secondary schools, the percentage of students who have at least a pass grade in each school is calculated. Since WASCE is a criterion-referenced examination, grades are awarded on the basis of some predefined criterion of what constitutes a correct answer, but there are no predetermined quotas for the number of students who may receive passes. Therefore, it is very easy to determine an effective school, for example, based on the percentage of students who have passed the English language with at least a pass grade.

Research has shown that student achievement on standardised tests generally predicts achievement for succeeding years (e.g. Squires *et al.*, 1983). Standardised tests also provide a measure of educational effectiveness in the public's eye. In the Nigerian situation, for example, mass failures in WASCE have led to public outcries and demands for more educational accountability in the country on several occasions (see Dada, 1987, for example). Also, schools that achieve above expectation

on standardised tests also tend to succeed in other important areas, such as school attendance and a low incidence of anti-social behaviours. Thus, there is a suggestion that areas that correlate with standardised test performance provide clues to more effective schools. These are some of the reasons why results from WAEC are used as the outcome measure in the present study.

Research design/methodology/procedures

Ethnographic methods of participant observation, interviews, questionnaires, camera and video camera recordings, and documentary analyses were used to collect data for the study. Analyses of data involved constructing descriptive portraits (Lightfoot 1983) of each of the six studied schools using data from various sources in such a way that the reader may have the feeling of what it is like to be in the schools. Rather than looking for tests of significance or causal relationships, the purpose of the project is descriptive as well as exploratory. Since only a few schools were studied, it is impossible to make any strong causal relationship claims among the various school and classroom level factors that might account for student achievement in the schools.

Data collection and analysis

Having identified the schools I wished to study, I wrote to the principals of the schools detailing the purpose of my study and inviting them to participate. On Monday October 7, 1996, I started visiting the six schools that allowed me to carry out my study of their schools. I traveled to all the schools in the first week, announcing my arrival in Nigeria from Canada and worked out visiting schedules with the schools. In each school, I sought permission to observe a final year (senior secondary 3) English language classroom and work with the English language teacher(s). The teachers assisted me in administering students' and parental consent forms.

As an ethnographic researcher, my roles were actually many as I interacted with students to obtain data, established social relationships, and moved from role sets appropriate in one school to different role sets for other schools. One lesson usually lasted 40 minutes and I used many instruments to collect data. I used participant observation method inside the classrooms. The field notebook was used for narrative

records, a continuous record of the situations, events and a chronological description of my observations and interactions with students, teachers, parents and administrators in each school.

I created field journals from the notebooks. Personal reflections regarding events in the setting and interactions with participants were recorded. Hunches, significant thoughts, and tentative questions that emerged were noted; many of which were pursued further at a later date. Formal and informal interviews based on my reflections were conducted. Students, teachers, parents, and school administrators were interviewed.

I designed questionnaires and used them where possible, especially where I could not interview informants. Included in such questionnaires were items to further pursue emerging themes from observations and interviews which needed further probing, for instance, the relevance of classroom instructional strategy to student achievement. A video camera was used to capture events both inside the school environment, inside the classrooms, and outside the schools. Since the study was interested in external factors that might affect effectiveness in the participating schools, ecological events with effectiveness implications that might be missed by observations and interviews were recorded for further analysis. The video camera also served as an honest eye to the contextual events and situations in Nigeria when shown to examiners during the defense of the doctoral study in Canada.

Written documents that were obtained from WAEC, the Ministry of Education in Ibadan, Nigeria, and from individual schools were studied and analysed together with other data to obtain triangulation of results.

In analysing data, the constant and continuous review of data from various sources (observation, interview, questionnaire, video recording, and document) was carried out. Data from each school were reviewed to recognise 'sensitizers' (Blumer 1954): 'concepts that give the user a general sense of reference and guidelines for approaching empirical instances' (p. 7). While some ideas and theories from the review of literature were brought to the study, others emerged from the research process, especially during the simultaneous collection and analysis of data in the field. The study, in attempting to establish the trustworthiness of data collection and analysis, followed the Lincoln & Guba (1985)

criteria of 'credibility', 'transferability', 'dependability', and 'confirmability' which are the naturalists' equivalent to the conventional terms 'internal validity', 'external validity', 'reliability', and 'objectivity' respectively.

Prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation were employed to enhance the credibility of findings and interpretations. Results emerged from a thick description (Miles & Huberman, 1984) of the settings in terms of time and context. Critical feedbacks from peers in the Ph.D. program both at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Canada, during final data analysis and the writing process were sought to strengthen the dependability of results. As part of the informal audit, a language educator familiar with both qualitative data analysis and high school effectiveness literature examined the final products produced during data analysis.

Results from the Present Study

The findings from the present study together with another reading of the literature give support to the following conclusions:

Internal Factors

- Strong, supportive and action-driven principals characterise effective schools.
- Teachers in effective schools are more satisfied with their jobs.
- Effective schools maintain positive relationship with the communities in which they are located.
- Effective schools create and maintain a positive school climate and culture conducive to meaningful teaching and learning activities.
- Effective schools have clear and goal-oriented programmes.
- Teachers in effective schools develop and use instructional strategies to enhance students' achievement.

External factors

- Public secondary schools located in urban areas are more effective than those located in the rural areas.
- Private secondary schools are more effective than public secondary schools.
- Federal government secondary schools are more effective than state government schools.

- Both the quantity and quality of the teaching staff determine school effectiveness.
- Class size affects school effectiveness: the bigger the size, the less effective.
- School effectiveness is strongly associated with the family socio-economic status of the students.

Discussion of Findings

It will be observed that the above findings in the main give credence to earlier SER results. The next question then is: What should language educators do with these results? A way to deal with this important question is to find a link between the school level effectiveness characteristics and the classroom level instructional strategies that breed effectiveness. In fact, many language educators and researchers (e.g. Reynolds & Teddlie, 1998; Reynolds, Hopkins, & Stoll, 1993) have advocated the integration of school indicators, school effectiveness, and school improvement research in spite of the three fields' 'artificial' different intellectual history and development. Joining the three related fields will be a way to reap a fruitful harvest from research efforts from the three disciplines such that the identification of more effective/typical/less effective schools based on multiple indicators will be much enhanced. It is in response to this call that the identified school effectiveness characteristics listed in the last section above will be linked with the instructional strategies that seem to produce them. By this linkage, what actually enhances effectiveness in language education classrooms in developed and developing worlds can be illuminated, and the knowledge gained on 'what works' in each domain may be recommended to classrooms that are similar. This may lead to effective classroom practices, and hence school improvement programmes, which are based on research findings.

School Effectiveness Characteristics and Classroom Instructional Strategies in the United States

Most of the identified school effectiveness characteristics listed in the preceding section above are the ones that appear to significantly contribute to student achievement in both the developed and Third Worlds. In the United States, Tikunoff (e.g. 1987) has demonstrated that there is a link between school effectiveness characteristics and

classroom instructional strategies employed by effective teachers to achieve those effectiveness characteristics. Tikunoff conducted the Significant Bilingual Instructional Features (SBIF) descriptive study in California in 1983 (Tikunoff, 1983). The study sought to identify, describe, and verify instructional features that appear to be successful in producing positive classroom experiences and learning outcomes for limited English proficient (LEP) students. The project involved the study of 58 classrooms and 232 students, grade K-12, at six diverse sites representing a variety of ethnolinguistic and multilinguistic groups. A variety of qualitative and quantitative procedures were used to collect data on instructional organisation, time allocation, teacher characteristics, classroom language use, students' academic learning time, and student participating styles (see Tikunoff, 1983).

Tikunoff identified two different but related sets of instructional strategies that are employed by teachers in effective schools to enhance achievement for all students in general on one hand, and for Limited English Proficient (LEP) students, on the other. The investigation indicated that there is a basic difference between: 1) classroom level instructional strategies that apply to *all* students in *all* classrooms throughout the school, and 2) language classroom instructional strategies that apply *only* to LEP students in *only* language education classrooms. Correspondingly, there are two sets of instructional strategies employed at the nominated classrooms. First, classrooms that seek to develop basic skills proficiency for *all* students are characterised by: 1) congruence among instructional intent, how instruction is organised and delivered, and what the expected results will be in terms of student performance; and 2) consistent and effective use of active teaching behaviours (Tikunoff 1987:100). Second, for *specifically* LEP students' academic achievement, 'three mediational strategies were found effective': 1) use of the students' native language and English for instruction, 2) integration of English language development with basic skills development, and 3) use of information from the students' home culture.

It can be speculated that the above learning objectives and the corresponding instructional strategies to achieve them are shaped by the governmental social policy in the United States. First, instructional strategies are developed for LEP students to enhance their English language oral proficiency (Tikunoff 1987:101). The development of their oral proficiency is to enable them engage in instructional tasks

successfully. In other words, for the LEP students, whether they are born in the United States or are newly arrived from other countries, the ultimate aim of their education is to integrate them into the larger society. It is this social and political assumption, backed by law (Tikunoff 1987:100), that informs making 'the instructional contexts of schools throughout the United States similar' (p. 105). The implication of this observation is that rather than from governmental policy or from lack of government willingness to act, inequality of school effectiveness, if any, would emanate from other sources, like individual student socio-economic status, ineffective leadership of schools, and the like.

United States and Nigerian English Language Classrooms Compared

Classroom observation in the present study provides an opportunity to witness both sets of instructional strategies as used in Nigerian classrooms. In terms of the general strategies 1 and 2 above, teachers in effective classrooms in Nigeria employ strategies similar to what obtains in Californian classrooms to achieve basic skills proficiency for all students. For instance, interview and observation data show evidence of 'congruence among clarity of intent, organization and delivery of instruction, and student outcomes in effective instruction'. Both teachers and students in effective language classrooms are very clear about the intent of secondary school education in Nigeria. First and foremost, the Nigerian schooling system is examination-oriented. Students have to pass examinations at the end of their primary education in order to move to the secondary schools. Furthermore, secondary school students have to pass in at least five subjects, including English language, before they can gain admission to tertiary institutions. They also know that the prescribed examinations have to be passed in the higher colleges of education and the universities before terminal degrees are awarded. As already explained, a secondary school is effective to the extent to which the majority of its students can pass the large-scale standardised examinations organized by WAEC.

The WAEC syllabus contains the examination content derived from the curricular content of each subject. It is from the syllabus that examination questions are set. So, one evidence of clarity of intent is

familiarity with the WAEC syllabus both by teachers and students. One English language teacher in an effective school stated:

> We follow the scheme of work [syllabus] religiously. At the beginning of each year, we all give our students what WAEC says we should teach; and we follow them religiously. So, if a parent wants to know what the child is doing in school and they want to compare with the scheme of work; it is always there. So, we don't just teach anyhow, we follow what WAEC asks us to teach.

A student group interview in the same school yields the following response from a student to the question: How familiar are you with the WAEC syllabus with regard to English language learning and examination objectives?

> Our English teacher always educates us about the syllabus, the marking scheme, the marking schemes and how, what is expected of us in our summaries, how to write our summaries, how to make sentences. And in our oral English, most of the time, they [the teachers] pronounce the right words, and those of us that have problems in pronunciation, we have oral English classes separately. Then extra classes in our final year.

It is evident from the above vignettes that the teachers are not only aware of what is at stake and what it takes to prepare for examinations in effective schools, they also emphasise the same to the students. There is a corresponding organisation and delivery of effective classroom instruction in the effective schools. Interview and observation data show that the teachers have very high expectations of the students' outcome and they take responsibility for the outcomes. Effective organisation and delivery of instruction is enhanced by the schools' administrative and academic practices that include constant monitoring of the teachers' instructional activities and students' academic progress. Teachers' morale is high and they are motivated because their salaries are paid on time and they are encouraged to upgrade their academic and professional skills from time to time through in-service training at the local universities. This motivation is lacking in the less effective schools that were studied.

In sum therefore, there are successful teachers in Californian classrooms employ many similarities between the instructional strategies and those used by their Nigerian counterparts in achieving basic skills proficiency for all their students. Data from effective schools in Nigeria

show evidence of active teaching behaviors among the teaching staff, and there is visible evidence of congruence of intent, how instruction is packaged and delivered, and what the students' learning outcomes should be.

With regard to the instructional strategies outlined above however, there appears to be not much similarity between Tikunoff's 'mediational strategies' that are effective in United States and the 'language examination-oriented instructional strategies' employed by effective language classroom teachers in Nigeria. From the observational data, English language teachers only use the English language for instructional purposes in English language lessons unlike in California where both English and student native language are used. I do not have any evidence that the students' native language is used for instruction in English lessons. However, in other subjects, there are instances of when teachers in content areas have to explain unfamiliar and difficult concepts in Yoruba (the students' native language).

As an illustration, in one of the schools, I was in a Physics class one morning waiting for the next lesson, which was to be an English language lesson. The Physics teacher observed that the students appeared not to understand what a 'fulcrum' was when she used the textbook explanation in English language. She checked with the class and her suspicion was confirmed. She then changed to the Yoruba language to refer the students to a very popular kids play called 'olomokuya' in Yoruba. It is a play in which a long and strong pole is put on a Y-forked thick stick planted in the ground. Two children sit at the opposite ends of the pole while they throw themselves up and down in the air in succession. She explains that the point at which the pole crosses the Y-forked stick is a fulcrum. There is some evidence that the students can relate to the illustration as they instantly indicate that they now understand what a fulcrum is.

The reasons for English language teachers not using student native language for instructional purposes inside the English language classroom can be speculated about. As already highlighted, WAEC's expectations in English language examinations emphasise the four linguistic skills and 'writing' is the most important. So, whereas the United States' intensive instruction to LEP students is geared towards oral proficiency (Tikunoff 1987:101), English language instruction in

Nigeria is mainly geared towards the acquisition of appropriate writing skills needed to pass English language examinations. Again, by the time the students get to the final year in the secondary school at which they write WASCE, they are expected to have been competent enough in the language to participate effectively in classroom instructional activities. And since most students are relatively homogenous in their English language proficiency, it may be that there is no need for the use of the students' native language to complement the English language.

In fact in my experience, it is an index of school effectiveness in Nigeria for English teachers in effective schools to be experts in ESL who use only English for instructional purposes and that the English teachers like to model English competence in their teaching. In addition, in schools where students and staff come from different linguistic and ethnic backgrounds (for example, federal government colleges), using any language other than the official language, the medium of instruction, in the language classrooms will defeat the purpose for which such schools are established. Federal government colleges in Nigeria are established to achieve the much-needed unity among different ethnic and linguistic groups that inhabit the schools. The obvious 'unifying' language is therefore the official language - English. Moreover, in situations where there are some expatriate staff and students as in one school in the study, it will not be appropriate or even possible to use any language other than the English language in the classrooms for instructional activities.

In Nigerian language education classrooms, I obtained no evidence of an effort to integrate English language development with instruction in the content areas as it is done in the United States although this practice has long been recommended by linguists (for example, Mohan, 1986). To remind the reader, secondary education generally, and English education in particular, is examination-oriented in Nigeria. That is, what is more important for students, their teachers and parents is for students to pass examinations in the subjects they register in. So, rather than serving as a service course to other content areas, what really concerns the teachers and the students in the effective schools is for the majority of students to pass English at WASCE. Moreover, unlike Tikunoff's Californian classrooms in the United States where it is possible for some English teachers to also teach other subjects, the Nigerian secondary schools, especially the effective ones, are divided

into academic departments and the usual practice is that each subject is taught by experts in the subjects. In essence therefore, Nigerian English language teachers neither do not see themselves, nor feel any need to provide, linguistic service to other content areas; they rather concentrate on English language skills development needed to pass the WASCE.

Finally, I did not observe teachers using information from students' native culture to enhance instruction. In Californian classrooms, immigrant students learn English to function in the Californian, or more appropriately, in American society, whereas the Nigerian student learns English for use in the Nigerian setting. The situational difference may account for why it is not necessary to invoke students' native culture as an instructional strategy in Nigerian language classrooms. Since the studied schools are relatively homogenous in respect of students' and teachers' cultural background, cultural information may not be needed or used by teachers to enhance students' academic achievement. Not only that, I did not observe any perceived discourse-discontinuity between the students and teachers as a result of differences in cultural and linguistic backgrounds (mismatch hypothesis), a situation widely reported in the United States (e.g. Ogbu 1978; Trueba 1988; Hamp-Lyons 1991). It may therefore not be necessary in Nigeria to adopt the instructional strategy of using students' cultural information to enhance academic achievement of English language. Even in schools where there are some expatriate staff and students, it appears that they have been well entrenched into the Nigerian society at the time of data collection, and since the students are being prepared for an examination to be taken in Nigeria, language teachers need not reference students' native cultural information to enhance their language achievement.

Language Examination-Oriented Instructional Strategies in Nigerian English Language Classrooms

The fact that the Nigerian educational system is examination-oriented has implications for the type of instructional strategies adopted by teachers in successful language classrooms. There appear to be a set of instructional strategies that can reasonably be called 'language examination-oriented instructional strategies'. One strategy I observed in one effective school is a creative way of dealing with WAEC's examination requirements. One such requirement is the range of

topics to be covered in preparing for English language examinations. In the school under discussion, the English teacher divided the class into groups of four students, each group having essay topics to work on collaboratively after the school hours. In the class, the group leaders read the completed essay of their groups. The whole class, moderated by the teacher, jointly assessed the essays on the criteria set by WAEC. Thus the immediate feedback that involves the whole class is expected to benefit every student. This strategy has many advantages. First, the students will be able to cover a wide variety of topics that may be examined by WAEC in actual examinations, thereby increasing the opportunity to learn (OTL) which concerns the actual curricular content covered during a school year.

Secondly and more importantly for an examination-oriented schooling system, students are made aware of the technicalities involved in the assessment of their written work by WAEC. They are therefore familiar with tasks to be faced later in actual examinations. Since 'familiar tasks tend to be low-risk tasks' (Tikunoff 1987:108), the tendency for the students to perform well in actual examinations is greatly enhanced. Third, group work engenders collaboration whereby weak students benefit from their more brilliant peers. This strategy may not be successful in American language classrooms where the bulk of academic achievement is assessed on reading and maths achievement tests that are examined through the objective rather than the written mode.

Another useful language examination-oriented strategy observed in effective language classrooms in Nigeria is the use of past WASCE questions to prepare students for actual examinations. From experience, WAEC often uses past examination questions maybe with minor changes in details. If students are well prepared using past questions as a guide, the belief is that they will perform well in actual examinations and this has, according to students' responses to interview questions, proved to be effective. Again, this strategy may not be appropriate for the American LEP students whose primary aim in language education is oral proficiency in the language rather than passing a high stake examination in the subject.

Another strategy I observed in effective schools in Nigeria is the setting up of extra mural lessons in those schools to complement

classroom teaching after the school hours. Ideally, extra mural lessons are set up with the co-operation of the schools' Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) such that issues such as cost per subject, the caliber of teachers to be involved, and preparing the students for the after-school lessons are amicably worked out and agreed upon by both teachers and parents. The involvement of parents in setting up the extra mural lessons not only gives it legitimacy; it also ensures patronage. The reality of lack of equity of educational opportunity in Nigeria as it is provided by law in the United States for example, is one factor in the establishment of extra mural lessons in the effective schools. Incidentally, effective schools attract mostly socially advantaged students whose parents can afford the cost of extra mural lessons. Extra mural lesson teachers are promptly paid on hourly basis, an additional income aside their normal salaries. The teachers work harder than they normally do in the classrooms and one-to-one attention to student academic needs is the vogue. Whereas extra mural lessons are provided in a variety of subjects, by far the most important subject in which almost all students register is the English language. The complementary role extra mural lessons play in students' academic achievement of English in Nigeria becomes very obvious when the enthusiasm with which parents and students interviewed endorse the scheme is taken into consideration. In the United States, intensive instruction in English should be provided to all LEP students by law and it is not based on the wealth of parents. So, while the United States' educational system tends to be egalitarian, the Nigerian system is elitist and this philosophical difference in the educational policy in the two domains has implications for school effectiveness and school improvement programs.

Conclusion

It will be apparent from this discussion of situational/contextual differences between instructional strategies that prove effective in developed United States and developing Nigeria that there is a considerable potential for new and important understandings if SER is contextualised in its design, implementation, and interpretation as it is done in this study. For instance, it is evident that while effective schools in the United States and Nigeria use similar general instructional strategies to enhance students' basic skills proficiency, there are differences in the specific instructional strategies used in

language classrooms to achieve students' academic achievement in the two domains. Whereas the mediational strategies of a) using both English and student native language for instructional purposes; b) integrating English language development with instruction in the content areas; and c) using information from students' native cultures to enhance instruction have been found to be effective in the United States' language education classrooms, these strategies appear not to be used in Nigeria. Rather, other strategies conducive to the classroom environment appear to be more appropriate.

What are the implications of all this for an examination-oriented and elitist educational system? As already indicated, the Nigerian educational system will be more effective to the extent to which the greatest number of students pass the English language examinations at the end of the secondary school year. It is then appropriate to apply 'what works' in the effective schools, perhaps with necessary local modifications, to the less effective schools in order to achieve school improvement, which is the ultimate aim of SER.

First, language teachers should be aware of WAEC requirements with regard to the examination syllabus, the marking scheme, and the technicalities of the marking exercise. From my experience, effective schools have in their library holdings copies of the WAEC syllabus. The language teachers should consult these texts and the teachers should as well introduce their students to what WAEC expects of them in order to obtain at least a pass grade in the examinations. With regard to the marking rubrics, language teachers should be encouraged to apply for marking jobs with WAEC. Indeed, the federal and state governments can liaise with WAEC and work out an arrangement to ensure that the greatest number of language teachers are given the opportunity of participating in the marking experience throughout the country. Once a teacher experiences marking in a year, s/he will have participated in two marking exercises in June and December. Another set of teachers should be given the opportunity in the following year, and so on until most of the teachers are exposed to the marking exercise and the technicalities involved in answering questions successfully at the WASCE.

Second, since the students' native language is not used in language classrooms in Nigeria, then competent language teachers, especially native speakers of the language, may be employed in order to offset the

visible language teacher shortfall in most secondary schools in the country. The government should also embark on a massive recruitment and training of language teachers in order to increase opportunity to learn (OTL) of the students.

Third and closely related to the second suggestion above, since Nigerian language teachers do not use students' cultural information to enhance language achievement, it is no wonder that expatriate teachers in federal government colleges are effective. This practice can be extended to the state colleges.

Fourth, there is no doubt that extra mural lessons raise English language achievement in Nigerian secondary schools. The state and federal governments should find ways of integrating this important scheme into the schooling system. Perhaps the parents can be approached to contribute a little sum to give to volunteer teachers as incentives. The key factor here is the importance of preparing well for the examination so that students have a better chance of passing the most important subject on the curriculum. Since the English language serves a gate-keeping achievement for students' further education and job prospects, all hands must be on deck by all school participants to attain increments of school improvement by ensuring more opportunities for students' success at the high stake examinations.

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