

THE ROLE OF ESL PEDAGOGY IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION OF NIGERIA

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Abstract: Relying on secondary data and logical reasoning, this paper explored the role of ESL (English as a Second Language) pedagogy as a viable tool for conflict management in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. Effective communication could be actualized through the use of language in proper linguistic, social and cultural contexts to foster dialogue, tolerance, and peaceful co-existence. The need of ESL teachers to pedagogically impact ESL learners in a second language community like the Niger Delta region cannot be over stressed. Thus, the four language skills (writing, speaking, reading and listening) have to be strategically taught so as to boost the language potentials of learners in the region. It is a firm belief of this paper that effective language use can translate to effective communication that could foster conflict management. Thus, ESL writing skill, such as essays could be used to effectively engage government and oil companies to address some of the perennial problems in the region, instead of resorting to militancy and perhaps kidnapping to be heard. Similarly, effective ESL speaking skill may be all that is needed to raise effective speakers to speak to authorities about their challenges. Moreover, effective ESL skills could

foster intra and inter community conflict management since effective language use generally enhances social bonds and cohesion. It is therefore recommended that ESL teachers should recalibrate their pedagogical approaches to effectively stimulate the four language skills to pave way for effective language use among ESL learners in the Niger Delta region and government should make ESL education accessible and affordable to school-aged populations among others.

Keywords: ESL Pedagogy, Conflict Management, ESL Teachers, ESL Learners, Niger Delta

Introduction

The Niger Delta is a group of people that spread across nine states - Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, and Rivers with different geographical, language, and cultural differences (Okolo, Ibe & Uche, 2024). This oil region is often affected by diverse conflicts resulting in perpetual trouble within the group. Peace has become a scarce commodity and most sought after as friction, conflict and chaos continue to have a firm grip on humanity. There are four factors that could be responsible for conflicts: competition for inadequate resources, contradicting value system, psychological needs of groups and individuals, and manipulation of information (Albert, 2001). Conflicts are often sustained as a result of improper management. Remarkable development cannot take place in a society that is torn apart by conflict, necessitating the need to promote peace, justice and development (Okogbule & Brown, 2023). There are many ways of managing conflicts, but managing conflicting through effective communication seems not to have been given adequate scholarship attention.

Effective communication is actualized through the use of language in the proper contexts - linguistic, social, cultural, etc. When these contexts come to play, communicative competence is said to be actualized in language use. Mart (2018) described communicative competence as a term that suggests the implicit knowledge of language; the ability to understand and also effectively use the language for the purpose of communication. This knowledge relates to the grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and the like, as well as social and cultural knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately.

In this technological era, digital knowledge is also inclusive in no small measure. One of the goals of every ESL teacher is to produce learners who would employ language as a tool for solving problems and engendering peaceful co-existence in society. Francis (2022) asserted that teachers are to nurture learners to develop attitude of reconciliation and respect for diversity and embrace a culture of peace. Students need to be pedagogically guided to utilize appropriate language to foster peaceful communication (McVeigh, 2023). Language can be described as utterances that have the potential to produce far reaching results and consequences, deny or restore people's freedom, and change an existing state of affairs. Spencer-Oatey (2008) noted two functions of language- "management of social relations and transfer of information." Effective communication can foster dialogue and tolerance which could in turn translate to effective conflict management tool.

Conflict is one of the most common words in use all over the world and has received varied definitions by scholars. According to Pembi, Luka and Daniel (2023) conflict overtime has been variously considered. Coser (1956) defined it as the struggle that does not only target values, societal status and scarce resources, but has the goal of neutralising, maiming or dislodging groups that are perceived as opponents. Kriesberg (1988) said that conflict exists when two or more groups manifest the belief that they have incompatible objectives. Albert (2001) and Nwolise (2004) saw conflict as a positive phenomenon, an agent of change through which social values, security, justice and opportunities are actualized. The definitions of conflict above have diverse schools of thought they belong. There are the traditional, human relations, interactionist, and integrationist perspectives (Mills & Mene, 2020). The traditional perspective views all conflicts as bad and should be avoided at all costs (Robbins, 2005); the human relations perspective holds it as a natural occurrence which cannot be avoided in any group, and that it will always exist. The interactionist in a supportive tone, opined that for a group to function properly, disagreement must be part of the recipe; therefore, disagreements or conflicts are important for a group to function properly, (Mills & Mene, 2020). The integrationist school of thought argued that disputes should not simply be viewed as good or bad but as something that is important for a society to function well (De-Reuver& Van-Woerkom, 2010). Considering these views, except the traditionalists' view on conflict, there may be the push to condemn rather than appreciate their proponents.

However, we take from them that they are all considering the potentialities and benefits of the concept rather than the dangers.

Adedoyin (2015) enumerated some possible causes of conflict which include: injustice, values and cultural diversities, psychological needs, resources and information management. Pembri et al. (2023) asserted that to effectively manage conflict, it is necessary to create an environment that empowers human resources to think creatively and encourages them to express their ideas and opinions without fear; because conflict, when properly managed, provides an opportunity for growth, ultimately strengthening the bond between human resources, organizations, and society. Furthermore, to manage conflict is essentially a function of the strategies adopted by the parties involved or an interested external force. An outbreak of conflict is inevitable having in mind that people are of diverse backgrounds, cultures, education, etc. However, it is essential to resolve it to foster peaceful co-existence. Language, especially English language which is the language of national unity in Nigeria, can be one of the viable instruments for conflict resolution.

English is spoken by about 1.75 billion people worldwide (Okiche & Njoku, 2018). In a country like Nigeria with an estimate of one hundred and fifty to about four hundred (Bamgbose, 1991), a language that can serve as a lingua franca is necessary for effective communication or social interactions. Among the Niger Delta region like any other part of Nigeria, English remains the most commonly used language because of the multilingual nature of the region. This has made the language a major unifying tool. According to Adegbite (2004), English language has assumed the position of a national language in Nigeria. Jowitt (1991) added that English language ethno-politically speaking is neutral since it has no linguistic attachment to any language in Nigeria. Thus, effective use of the language can enhance peaceful co-existence and even peaceful protests.

ESL means English as a Second Language and refers to the process of non-native English speakers learning English for communication and integration into an English-speaking environment. ESL pedagogy aims at helping non-native English language to gain mastery of the language by deploying specific approaches to help learners to speak, read, write, and listen in English language. The Niger Delta like other parts of Nigeria is second language speech community as English language is

used as a second language within the region. This means to use this language effectively to foster peace, the language has to be effectively taught and learnt. According to DeMatos (2005, p. 2), language is “the complex cognitive or mental system of symbols shared by all humans everywhere and used for communicating intra and interpersonally through spoken, written or sign languages.” Language is important for promoting social cohesion, peace, tolerance, respect and understanding among different populations as a result increasing global conflicts (Balume, 2024). According to Obiegbu (2015) effective communication is characterized by active listening, clear expression, and a sincere desire for conflict resolution, leading to relationship and trust building among individuals and groups.

Educators have a crucial role to play in providing stimulating ESL learning experiences that can create access to peace enhancing skills; thereby empowering young minds and making them to adapt to environmentally friendly habits. Specifically, ESL teachers have great tools in their hands and can play a critical role in shaping learners’ perceptions about the importance of dialogue, tolerance and conflict resolution skills to bring about lasting peace within the Niger Delta region of the country. English language teachers could create interactive learning atmosphere to enhance the development of the four language skills- writing, speaking, reading and listening. Acquiring the expressive skills (writing and speaking) may help individuals to productively use English language; and by acquiring the receptive skills (reading and listening) could help them to constructively gather information that could lead to better understanding of individual differences inherent in human existence, fostering a positive and proactive perception of the society. Thus, effective ESL pedagogical strategies could enhance learning in general and promote communicative competences in general. Considering the points rose so far, the aim of this paper is to explore the potentials of ESL pedagogy as a tool for the propagation of dialogue, tolerance and conflict management skills in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. In other words, this paper is an exposition of the potential of effective language use as mechanism for conflict resolution and peacebuilding in the region under focus.

Review on ESL Skills

ESL skills are necessary language skills to increase communicative competence among English-language users to enhance social cohesion. The 21st century English language teachers should have a well-planned class, in order to provide learning experiences that focus on practical learning and promote students' language competences. Digital integration into language education in recent years has continued to escalate (Li & Lan, 2022). It is noted that digital inclusion in teaching and learning processes have been found to be effective in enhancing learning performance (Puggioni, et. al., 2020). With digital tools language skills could be acquired through self-regulated learning (Han et al., 2024). In this case, learners can manage their ESL learning process and independently modify it where necessary.

Writing Skills

Writing is an expressive skill that is needed for effective language use. However, Bui, Nguyen and Viet (2023) in a study reported that participants have the lowest proficiency in it. This means these participants were inefficient in expressing themselves effectively in English language. Writing pedagogy is an important tool of language learning and assessment as according to Venera-Mihaela and Gabrie (2019) pedagogical essay can build self-reflective thinking. Writing involves proper planning and practice for individuals to be effective (Sinaga et al., 2022). The methods adopted in ESL writing class could determine learning outcomes. For instance, Aderonke and Safi (2023) investigated the effects of Model teaching methods on students' attitude and academic performance in essay writing among secondary school students in Ekiti State. The result revealed a significant difference in the performance of students in essay writing in the experimental group when compared with the control group. Bakri (2023) also found in a study that rhetorical strategies are critical in essay writing as the approach helped students to become competent writers. This approach can help English language users to learn communicative skills that can help them to persuade, inform and engage an audience.

Edtech could improve ESL writing skills. In a study conducted by Alam et al. (2024), they explored the morphological, syntactic, and orthographical aspects of

ESL involved 30 participants using Facebook on mobile and a control group of 30 with a traditional teaching approach. The results revealed that Facebook could be a more effective teaching method for enhancing writing skills than traditional teaching techniques. Similarly, Nurie (2017) found in a study that computerized feedback facilitated language learning and improved the quality of writing, confidence and motivation.

Speaking Skills

Speaking skill is another expressive skill like writing skill. It is a skill that has to be developed through ESL language pedagogy. It is unfortunate this skill is often not taught by ESL teachers. This assertion is collaborated by Onen (2016) who confirmed in a study that about 20 percent of student participants had never been taught using debate due to some hurdles. Interestingly, the students and teachers who were respondents in the study admitted that debate is an effective pedagogical strategy for enhancing class participation, oral communication, research, and critical thinking skills. Abid el Majidi, de Graaff, and Janssen (2021) posited that secondary school students' second language (L2) speaking skills in a study suffer deficiencies which are detrimental to the global emphasis on oral communication skills. Hz and Pulungan (2024) in a study aimed to investigate the utilization of the "Dancing to Debate" method in speaking class from students' perspectives confirmed that a significant percentage of students reported that the method enhanced their confidence in speaking English language. The feedback from these students indicated that the strategy was pedagogically successful.

Abid el Majidi et al. (2021) in a study investigated the effect of a debate intervention on English L2 speaking competence of Dutch secondary school students. The results indicated that the intervention group produced fluent, accurate, coherent and lexically more sophisticated language compared to the control group. Similarly, Argyropoulou (2021) in a study indicated the importance of learner-centred structured debate approach for the development of students' critical, analytical, and communicational skills. In another development, Rusli (2012) observed that 83.9% of teachers in a study confirmed that debate stimulated learners' thinking more than textbook readings and lectures. From this review on

speaking, it is evident that previous studies noted the importance of ESL speaking skill as a tool for effective communicative competence.

Reading Skills

Reading is a receptive skill necessary for receiving information by ESL learners. It is a potent communicative skill because weak reading competence can impair understanding and poor sense of judgment. According to Alam (2024), reading skills are most important for developing students' communicative competence. It is expedient that ESL pedagogy should focus on the need to systematically teach reading comprehension to enhance effective communication (Nurie, 2017). Al-Hawamdeh (2025) in a study investigated challenges of reading comprehension and found that pedagogical strategies can foster communicative competence. Panyasai (2023) aimed to enhance the reading comprehension skills of learners by incorporating content-creation and found a statistically significant improvement in students' reading-comprehension competences after using the method. This suggests that reading skills can be acquired if the right method is used by teachers.

Listening Skills

The second receptive skill is the listening skill. Studies have found listening to be an important component of language competence (Yan, 2023). Gallagher et al. (2017) perceived listening beyond receiving and comprehending meanings to include how sound propagates affects, generates atmospheres, shapes environments and enacts power. This means effective listening skill entails paying attention to the tone of the speaker to maximally understand the full message being passed across. According to Djabborova (2020), listening as a receptive skill is the way to understand and feels how the conversation is progressing. This makes listening a critical language skill for ESL learners. Digital pedagogy has also been found to improve listening competence. For instance, Merzifonluoglu (2023) in a study revealed a statistically significant difference in learners' pretest and post-test listening scores after VoScreen digital intervention. Studies have also noted that tools like podcasts and mobile apps can reasonably improve listening

comprehension by providing engaging learning environments (Eragamreddy, 2024). Olutola, Iliyas and Abdulsalam (2017) observed significant effect of discussion teaching method among students.

ESL as a Tool for Peace Management in the Niger Delta Region

The review on the four language skills has revealed to us the importance of effective communication in human interactions. Language can be a tool to build trust, resolve conflicts and promote peaceful resolution (Ezechukwu, 2024). Communication has a great impact on social cohesion and harmony with the potential to bridge divides and foster unity (Rotimi & Adewale, 2024). Teachers need to effectively teach these skills to help young people, especially those in schools within the Niger Delta region to enhance communicative competence, leading to effective dialogue and tolerance. English language can act as a viable tool for sustainable development in Nigeria (Ugoji, 2017). Peace building in a community could be enhanced through language use, choice of words, tone of voice and body language (Wong, 2019). Language as a tool for communication can create emotional and social connection between aggrieved parties. ESL teachers within the region under consideration in this paper have to plan on how to make their English classes more pedagogically strategic to enhance communicative competence among learners.

On writing skill, Bui et al. (2023) in a study noted lack of writing proficiency among participants. This situation should be avoided among ESL teachers in the Niger Delta region. Venera-Mihaela et al. (2019) observed that pedagogical essay could build self-reflective thinking. This means that ESL teachers should engage learners with strategic essay pedagogy to improve their critical thinking skills. In addition, conflict resolution and tolerance should feature in the essay topics given to students to write on. By so doing, ESL teachers would interface learners with real life situation to bolster their social skills on dialogue, tolerance and conflict management. Also, Bakri (2023) observed the potency of rhetorical approach in essay writing which could help ESL learners to effectively engage in persuasive and informative writing. This writing strategy can help, especially agitative youths in the Niger Delta to persuasively and informatively engage stakeholders like the government and oil companies about their plights in the region, instead of resorting to militancy and kidnapping to be heard. To strengthen the writing skills of

learners, inter-school essay competition on conflict management should feature prominently in the curricula plan of the region. The topics for essay writing should be guided by the objectives of peace building, tolerance, and conflict management themes. Essay writing being a timeless and versatile form of expression could help individuals to communicate ideas, explore creativity, and connect with others. ESL teachers in the could in collaboration with the ministry of education can introduce essay collections on the theme of peace and conflict resolution for students to make their contributions for publication. This can encourage students to participate on the subject matter more deeply. For instance, classic collections like George Orwell's "Essays" and James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" and Zadie Smith's "Changing My Mind" have left a lasting impact on readers, offering profound insights into the social and political issues, and creating room for personal reflections (WLG Blog Team, 2025).

Speaking is an expressive skill that has to be effectively taught by ESL teachers in the Niger Delta region also. Onen (2016) noted that debate which is a form of speaking skill is an effective pedagogical strategy for oral communication skills. ESL teachers in the Niger Delta region have to engage learners with speaking tasks like debates to help them to develop appropriate speaking skills that could help to boost their interactive competence. Deficient speaking skills are detrimental to oral communication (Abid el Majidi et al., 2021). ESL teachers in the region need to engage learners with debate topics with local contents relevant to the peculiarities of the region. Inter-school debate competitions that can promote conflict management should feature in the extracurricular activities of schools in the regions. Debate leads to understanding of diverse viewpoints, encourages empathy and open-mindedness, develops interest and understanding of social issues, promotes advocacy and supports participation in a healthier democracy (Baines, Medina & Healy, 2023). Powerful speeches or rhetorics can appeal to emotions, and present logical arguments, invoke extraordinary acts, shift paradigms, and leave a lasting legacy of peace in a place that is in chaos. For instance, John F. Kennedy's Inaugural Address, delivered on January 20, 1961, heralded a defining moment in American history. His call to "ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country," made a profound impact on his hearers as a result of his rhetoric emphasis on unity, collective action, and the embrace of global responsibility Koh

(2024). Similarly, Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, delivered on August 28, 1963 made tremendous impacts on his hearers because of his powerful use of imagery and profound emotional appeal Koh (2024). Mandela speech on reconciliation is also very inspiring when he said: "We were expected to destroy one another and ourselves collectively in the worst racial conflagration. Instead, we as a people chose the path of negotiation, compromise and peaceful settlement. Instead of hatred and revenge we chose reconciliation and nation-building" UNO (2018).

However, to achieve inspiring speech, language users have to be effectively equipped with the right skills to be able to communicate strategically. ESL teachers in the region should also incorporate drama into the speaking pedagogical strategies. Drama pieces emphasizing the need of dialogue, tolerance and peaceful co-existence can go a long way to facilitate conflict management awareness, especially among youths in the region. Furthermore, an effective drama piece could stir appropriate social and empathetic skills that are necessary for social cohesion in the region. Effective ESL speaking skill could enhance peaceful protests that are non-violent, but are issue-based verbal engagements with stakeholders. Presentation strategy can also be used, as doing so would build students' confidence, fluency, and knowledge of English (Lia Agustina, 2019). Inter-school spelling competitions with focus on key words related to peace and conflict resolution among young learners could equally help in propagating peace through ESL pedagogy.

Reading as receptive skill requires special pedagogical approaches like the other language skills to be fully developed. ESL teachers in the Niger Delta region need to incorporate peace and conflict resolution contents into their reading skill pedagogical processes. Alam (2024) posited that reading skills are the most important for developing students' communicative competence. This means that ESL teachers in Niger Delta region should pay special attention to reading because it is a skill that helps learners to receive information. Poor reading skill is precursor to poor understanding of content and by extension lead to wrong responses and reactions. Reading comprehension passages should be carefully chosen by the ESL teachers to embrace conflict resolution contents to promote tolerance and peaceful coexistence. Recitation competitions should be encouraged to help students to combine both expressive and receptive skills. For instance, ESL teachers can ask

students to write poems or short stories on tolerance and ask them to recite them in the class before other learners. By so doing, writing, reading, listening and speaking skills are being developed simultaneously. Reading skills can also be developed when teachers allow learners to read in turns in the class. Reading skill can enhance peace and tolerance because it is a skill that helps the ESL learner to understand what he or she reads and be able to take informed decision that can guide subsequent actions and behaviours.

Listening skill is a receptive skill like reading. It helps ESL learners to receive information which shape their perception about conflict resolution. Listening is not just receiving and comprehending contents but it includes non-verbal cues of the speaker (Gallagher et al., 2017). Digital pedagogy has also been found to improve listening competence. ESL language teachers need to provide adequate and strategic conflict resolution listening materials for learners to listen to. Digital tools like podcast, radios and phone apps can be used to develop appropriate listening skill. ESL teachers in the Niger Delta region can provide speeches on peace and conflict resolution by great people for ESL learners to listen to. Such speeches could help them to build empathetic skills and create room for dialogue and tolerance.

Conclusion

The paper has looked at how ESL pedagogy can facilitate conflict resolution. Although, the emphasis of this contribution is applicable more to the in-school population, the impact of effective ESL pedagogy can help in no small measure in the region. This is because English language plays a critical linguistic role in Nigeria. It is hoped in this modest contribution that a well-structured ESL pedagogy will impact effective language use to foster peace and constructive engagements with stakeholders to bring about lasting peace to a region that is continually threatened by conflicts.

Recommendations

As a result of the preceding discussion, it is recommended as follows:

- i. ESL teachers should recalibrate their pedagogical approaches to effectively stimulate the four language skills- writing, speaking, reading and leading- to

- pave way for effective language use among ESL learners in the Niger Delta region.
- ii. Peace and conflict resolution should feature prominently in ESL pedagogical approaches to make ESL learning experiences more community-relevant.
 - iii. Government should make ESL education accessible and affordable to reduce the number of out-of-school individuals among school-aged populations to increase access to effective ESL learning contents.
 - iv. Training and retraining of ESL teachers should be prioritized to keep them updated with modern approaches to ESL pedagogies.
 - v. ESL teachers should embrace technologies in their language teaching approaches to make their classes more engaging and interactive.
 - vi. Peace and conflict should be promoted through inter-school essay and debate competitions.

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