Improving Teaching and Learning Arabic through Constructivist Paradigm: The Perspective of Some Gbagyi and Nupe Speaking Communities in Niger State, Nigeria.

Dr. Kabiru Yusuf
(Principal Researcher)
And:
Yahaya Aliyu Babangida
Usman Aliyu Fulani
(Co-Researchers)
Department Of Arabic,
School Of Languages.
Niger State College Of Education, Minna.

Abstract:
Arabic language is considered as one of the international languages with large number of native and non-native speakers, who use the language in religious, educational, diplomatic, social, economic and business purposes. In Nigeria, Arabic was deeply rooted and widely spread in schools and among Muslims even before the arrival of western education. Presently Arabic is still widely spread and used for various purposes and is being learned and studied across various educational institutions. However, in most of the times, conventional teaching approach is used during teaching-learning process which provides students fewer opportunities to master various language skills and have a good command of the language. In order to deal with this kind of situation, new innovative strategies are being used, among these strategies is constructivist approach which advocates student centered approach, discovery, enquiry and problem solving learning, where students learn through themselves, applying their experience and being guided by their teacher. This paper aims at developing an insight into the paradigm shift from traditional to new strategy i.e constructivism. To achieve this purpose an attempt has been made to highlight some problems and challenges in using the traditional approach in teaching and learning Arabic, this is followed by discussing the concept of constructivism and its domains. Two strategies under constructivism were used in the classrooms to help in achieving the purpose of this work. The strategies were Rodger Bybee 5^E constructive learning model: Engagement, Exploration, Explanation, Elaboration and Evaluation. The second strategy was the Herkeness discussion method. These two strategies yielded positive results and helped immensely in improving the students communication skills and literary appreciation. The paper recommends among other things, the acceptance and adoption of modern teaching strategies that are students centered such as constructivism in our educational institutions.
Keywords: Teaching, Learning, Constructivist Paradigm.

I. Introduction

Language is considered as one of the most essential social phenomena in human existence. It plays an important role in communication, acquisition of knowledge, learning about cultures religious and gaining different skills necessary for work and living in local international communities.

Arabic language is one of the world leading languages with a large number of native and non-native speakers world wide. It is a language of communication, religions, diplomacy, economy, knowledge acquisition and so many other purposes.

In Nigeria, Arabic language is widely used for different purpose since the advent of Islam and Arabic language to the country. Despite the acceptance and use of the language, there are so many issues and challenges facing its teaching and learning. Among those challenges is the lack of using appropriate teaching methodologies in teaching or learning the language.

The method of teaching Arabic language in Nigerian communities as well as educational institutions is more of less traditional; characterized by frequent use of grammar translation method. This method as described by David (1990) is centered on the translation of words and sentences from one language to another. It is also

tailored towards studying grammatical aspects of a language instead of effective communication and expression in the language: Applying this method in teaching leads to the dominance of teacher in language classroom with little or no role played by the students. In many instances students attention is mostly geared to towards rote memorization of Arabic grammatical rules, to this, Malik (1998) said that: "Arabic language grammar is given more attention in primary and secondary schools without taking good care of the communicative aspect of the language. other in-effective method of teaching Arabic language in some Nigerian schools as observed and described by an Iraqi educationist; Mr. Salim Hakim, is that, the teacher reads the Arabic alphabets one after the order calling each letter by its name, e.g Alif, Ba, Ta, etc. this is followed by saying: Baa, bii, buu, using Arabic vowels with each letter. This method, he said, is not suitable in modern language classroom (Malik, 1998).

Keeping in view the importance of language in every aspect of life, there is urgent need that Arabic language in Nigerian schools is taught through new and effective approaches of teaching so as to make students active learners and competent speakers of the language.

There are some deficiencies as stated above in the teaching methodology of Arabic language applied by many educational institutions in Nigeria, leading to a clear weaknesses in students communicative competence both orally and in writing, for example, through the use of questionnaires and oral interviews conducted by researchers in this work, it was discovered that lecture method is often used in Arabic language classroom where teacher mostly dominates classroom proceedings giving the students little or no room to participate actively. In some other cases, grammar-translation method is applied in teaching the language, here more emphasis is laid on the aspect of Arabic grammar and translating words and sentences using English or native languages of Nupe or Gbagyi. Emphasis is also laid on memorization of grammatical rules or contents of the lesson. It was also discovered that Arabic teachers hardly communicate with students in Arabic outside the classrooms, students also hardly communicate in Arabic between themselves, they instead use their native languages; the reason behind this as admitted by some respondents is that students may have some fears or shy away from speaking Arabic due to incompetence, lack of confidence or lack of encouragement by their teachers. There was also dearth of relevant and adequate Arabic text book as well as audio-visual aids. It was also discovered that students face some difficulties in pronouncing some Arabic letters such as: أ ض ع ح خ ث ص etc. Debates and quizzes in Arabic language were not usually organized for students, there was also non-existence of other extramural activities such as Arabic language club in schools.

Having discovered the above mentioned problems, researchers in this work tried to apply a modern teaching strategy to bring about possible solutions to some of the problems. In this regard, this study tries to answer the following question: "what is the effect of using the constructivist teaching method in teaching Arabic language to some selected students from Gbagyi and Nupe speaking communities in Niger State.

Concept of Constructivism

Constructivism is a theory of knowledge known as (epistemology) that argues that humans generate knowledge and meaning from interaction between their experience and their reflexes or behaviour patterns. Piaget called these systems of knowledge schemata. (wikipedia).

The learning theory of constructivism evolved from the extensive study of Piaget (1896-1980) and the Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). Their study of development provided the foundation for the psychological theory of constructivism. (Hemant & poonam, 2016).

Constructivism is a learning strategy in which students construct their knowledge themselves through interaction with each other on the basis of previous experiences. It is a student centered rather than teacher centered in which teacher acts as a facilitator (Hemant & Poonam, 2016). Mikepascoe, (2018) also emphasized that constructivist learning process is based on the belief that learning occurs as learners are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge construction as opposed to passively receiving information. He also stressed that in constructivist teaching and learning process there is great focus and emphasis on social and communication skills as well as collaboration and exchange of Ideas. He further stated that some activities encouraged in constructivist classrooms are Experimentation, Research projects, Films, Field trips, Class discussions, Drama e.t.c (Mike Pascoe, 2018)

Constructivist teaching is based on constructivist learning theory. It is based on the belief that learning occurs as learners are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge construction as opposed to passively receiving information. Constructivist teaching fosters critical thinking and creates motivated and independent learners (K.santhoshi and M. Ravi, 2004). To buttress this fact, Richardson, (1997) and schunk (2004) opined that, individuals are assumed to construct their own meanings and understandings. Process is believed to involve interplay between existing knowledge, beliefs, new knowledge and experiences. Maclellan and Soden (2004) also added that learners are intellectually generative individuals with capacity to pose questions, solve problems and construct theories and knowledge rather than empty vessels waiting to be filled. It can be deduced from the above submissions that constructivists believe that knowledge is not a thing that can be

simply imparted by the teacher to students, rather knowledge is constructed by learners based on their experience, guidance from teacher and active mental activities.

DOMAINS OF CONSTRUCTIVISM.

Constructivist has two main domains which are subdivide to other aspects of constructivism: Firstly there is cognitive constructivism from which we have Radical constructivism, secondly there is social constructivism out of which we get cultural constructivism and critical constructivism (Muna, 2017).

COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM

Cognitive Constructivism is based on the belief that knowledge is actively constructed by learner, not passively received from the environment (Muna, 2017). The theory argues that people produce knowledge and form meaning based upon their experience. The key components of this theory are: schemas, Assimilation, Accommodation and Equilibration (Hemant & poonam, 2016). This type of constructivism is found in piaget's work.

SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM.

Social constructivism is a theory of knowledge that examines the knowledge and understanding of the world that are developed jointly by individuals. The theory assumes that understanding, significance and meaning are developed in coordination with other human beings. (Raya & Hanieh, 2015) Individuals learn through social interaction, activities and cultural tools. It holds that knowledge is found in social environment and individuals internalizes it through working together and though interactions (Hemant & poonam, 2016) This theory was developed by Soriet psychologist Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). It emphasizes the collaborative nature of learning, that social interaction plays a fundamental role in the process of cognitive development. He argues: "Every function in child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level, and later, on the individual level: first, between people (inter-psychological) and then inside the child (intra-psychological)" (Hemant & Ponam, 2016).

If could be understood from the above submissions that cognitive constructivism believes that an individual learner constructs knowledge by himself based upon his experience while the social constructivism is of the view that knowledge is jointly developed by individuals through social interactions and activities.

II. Application Of Constructivist Teaching Strategy In Arabic Language Classroom:
i. Constructivist Approach in Tacking Language and Communication Skills

There are many teaching methods that fall under constructivist teaching strategy, one of such methods is constructive learning model of Rodger Bybee. The model comprises five stages that start with latter (E) Engagement, exploration, Explanation, Elaboration, and Evaluation. This method is found to be very effective in promoting basic communication skills (Heimant & Poonam, 2016). Students engage in active learning in cooperative groups which allows them to acquire knowledge and build meaning themselves (Samia, 2018) the model assists learners to build their knowledge and concepts connecting it with previous experiences in five stages that enhance the learners' ability to recall information and logically connect it to other pieces of information, develop high order thinking skills and solve problems. (Samia, 2018). This method is often associated with pedagogic approaches that promote "Active learning" or "Learning by doing" (Santhashi & Ravi, 2014).

Researchers in this work have attempted to study the effect of the five Es model on achieving the current study goals. To do this students have been selected from the study community (Gbagyi and Nupe) and have been gathered in a democratic classroom setting and learning activities went based on the five Es method as follows:

1. ENGAGE

Here one of the researchers (who acted as a teacher) made an attempt to activate prior knowledge of the students by engaging them in problems which have connection with their previous knowledge. He asked them to come up with words (nouns or verbs) which they see or use in the school. In their attempt to give answer to the question the students had enough time to think and interact with each other and they eventually came up with the following responses.

كتاب (book)	طالب (student)	مدرّس (teacher)	كرسيّ (chair)
ولد (boy)	بنت (girl)	فصل (classroom)	وظيفة (work)
فهم (he understands)	حفظ (he memorizes)	نجح (he succeeds)	
وصل (he reaches)	لعب (he plays)	نسي (he forgets)	

The teacher wrote their responses on the board and led them to the second phase of the five Es which is:

2. EXPLORE

An opportunity here was given to the student to extend the knowledge of the first phase, in this regard, the teacher asked them to give the synonyms of the mentioned words in the first phase. He allowed them to think freely, work together and interact in Arabic language in their attempt to come up with the synonyms of the words. The following responses were obtained:

	Word	Synonym		Word	synonym
1.	كتاب (Book)	ورق صحف تأليف	4.	كرسيّ (Chair)	مجلس مقعد
2.	طالب (Student)	تلميذ متعلّم دارس باحث	5.	ولد (Boy)	طفل صبي غلام شاب
3.	مدرّس (Teacher)	معلّم أستاذ مؤدّب	6.	بنت (Girl)	صبيّة فتاة شابة
7.	فصل (Classroom)	غرفة حجرة قاعة	11.	نجح (He succeeds)	فاز ظفر أفلح أحرز
8.	وظيفة (Work)	مهنة حرفة صنعة	12.	وصل (He reaches)	بلغ أدرك
9.	فهم (He Understands)	أدرك انتبه استنبط	13.	لعب (He plays)	عبث دعب مزح تلهّى
10.	حفظ (He memorizes)	جمع أوعى	14.	نسي (He forgets)	ترك تغافل أهمل

3. **Explain:** This is the third phase of five Es. Here the teacher asked the student to explain the uses of some of the articles mentioned in phase two and to make sentences with some of the words. He engaged them in a discussion in Arabic language and listened critically to their explanations. Some of their responses were:

1 - كرسيّ:   يستعمل الكرسيّ للجلوس عليه

Chair is used for sitting.

2 - كتاب: يستعمل الكتاب للقراءة أو الكتابة

Book is used for reading or writing.

3 - فهم: فهم الطالب الدرس

The student understood the lesson.

4 - نجم: نجح التلاميذ في الامتحان

Students have passed the examination.

4. **Elaborate:** In this forth phase of the five Es, the teacher encouraged the students to apply and extend their understanding into new contexts, to achieve this, he asked them to think of deeper meaning of some words or articles and their uses and try to distinguish between them. One of the questions asked was: Distinguish between a book and a teacher. Students were allowed to think and interact with one another in Arabic language after which they provided some responses out of which were:

الكتاب مكوّن ورقي يحتوي على معلومات ومعارف مفيدة

Book is a paper component containing useful information and knowledge.

أما المدرّس فهو إنسان ذو علم ومعرفة يرشد ويعلّم التلاميذ

As for the teacher, he is a man of knowledge who guides and teaches students.

5. **Evaluate:** This is the final phase of the five Es. Here in the process of lesson to the end of it, the teacher attempted to determine if the student have attained understanding of concepts and contents of the lesson. This was achieved by asking open ended questions and through interaction. Some of the questions asked were:

1.   بيّن أسماء الأشياء ومترا دفاتها الموجودة في الفصل

1.   Give the names and synonyms of the objects available in the classroom

2.   ما هو الفارق بين الولد والبنت.

2.   What is the difference between a boy and a girl.

<div dir="rtl">

3. ما هو الكتاب؟ بين منا فعه.

</div>

3.   What is a book? Mention its uses.

<div dir="rtl">

4. ما هي وجوه المشابهة والمخالفة بين المدرس والتلميذ

</div>

4.   What are the similarities and dissimilarities between teacher and student.

In providing answers to the above mentioned questions students were allowed to interact with each other and give their responses in Arabic language, which they did to their best and those responses gave concrete evidence of their progress, achievements and attainment of the objectives of the lesson.

ii.   **Constructivist approach in tackling the aspect of literary appreciation in an Arabic language classroom**.

Researchers in this work also made another attempt in trying out another method of teaching under constructivism learning and strategies, their aim was to tackle the aspect of literary appreciation using an Arabic novel titled "فتاة أرغنغ" "Fatatu Argungu" (Argungu lady) written by Ibrahim Al-imam Abdullahi (2016). The method applied on this aspect is called "The Herkness Discussion Method. It involves students seated in a circle, motivating and controlling their own discussion. The teacher acts as little as possible, he might begin, shift or even direct a discussion. The students act as a team cooperatively and make the discussion work, they all share in the responsibility and the goals. Some of the goals are: to illuminate the subject, to unravel its mysteries, to interpret, share and learn from other point of view, to piece together the puzzle using everyone's contribution (Wikipedia).

About the Novel "Fatatu Argungu" (Argungu Lady).

     The story in the novel is on a young lady named Mariya who was born and bred by non-Muslim parents. Mariya Pursued her education up to university level, but a long the way she developed interest in Islam she learnt about Islam and this changed her faith she did not have the courage to tell her parents about her new faith. She decide to get married to a Muslim, she firstly got married to someone who was not very strong in his faith and for this reason they got divorced and she later married a young Muslim from Argungu royal lineage through whom she learnt deeply about Islam and they were blessed with children and got fortune.

Some Experpts From The Novel:

<div dir="rtl">

"وفي أحد الأيام ذهبت ماريا إلى مكتبة المدرسة العامة في "أرغنغ" ...... فإذا صاحبتنا بأمس الحاجة إلى مزيد من الحقائق الدينية، وقدّر الله أن تتعرف مجرد دخولها المكتبة على شكرى ...... ومن خلال المحاورة بينهما أخبرتها بأن زوجها يمنعها من الحجاب، فراحت صاحبتها شكرى تجمع لها الأدلة من الكتاب والسنة لتقنعها بوجوب الحجاب، وأنه لا طاعة لمخلوق في معصية الخالق ..... فبهذا عادت ما ريا إلى المنزل عازمة على منا قشة زوجها في موضوع الحجاب ففعلت......" (Ibrahim 2016).

</div>

Meaning:

     "One day, Maria went to the public school library in Argungu, when she entered, she felt that she desperately needed to know more religious facts, she was fortunate to have met with Shukra in the library….Through the conversation between them, she told her that her husband forbade her from hijab (veil). There and then, her friend Shukra gave her a lot of evidence from the Qur'an and Sunna to convince her of the necessity of wearing the veil, and that there is no obedience to any creature in disobedience to the creator…with this, Maria returned home, intent on discussing her husband on the subject of the veil, and she did…."

Teaching Procedure and Learning Activities.

Students were given some pages of the novel to go home and read in a week. In the classroom students were seated in a semicircle while the teacher stood in their middle and started the discussion by telling them the objectives of the lesson (discussion) and how they will all go about it. Some of the objectives were as follow:
1.   To orally introduce and discuss briefly the title of the novel.
2.   To discuss the contents of the story specifically the ones on the pages they were given to read.
3.   To discuss the characters, scenes, situations that was being portrayed.
4.   To mention and discuss some lessons and morals in the story.

Evaluation Based On Constructivist Principles.

Having discussed the novel based on the above mentioned objectives student were evaluated using the following constructivist principles and the results obtained were as follow:

EVALUATION GUIDE:

4-A	3-B	2.5-C+	2-C	1-C-
Exceeding learning objectives expectations	Fully meeting learning objectives expectations	Meeting learning objective expectation	Minimally meeting learning objectives expectations	Not yet meeting learning objectives expectation

EVOLUATION:

Criteria	4 Excellent	3 Very good	2.5 Good	2 Average	1 Poor
Clear proof of understanding the title and the theme of the study.		√			
Evidence of effective discussion of the contents and story line on the pages given to the students.		√			
Discussing characters based on their physical, sociological and psychological forms and appearances.			√		
Discussing scenes and situations in detail			√		
Mentioning and discussing lessons and morals in the story.		√			

Based on the above evaluation√, it is clearly shown that objectives of the lesson have been achieved effectively using the Herkness Discussion Method under constructivist learning strategy.

The score in the first criterion is 3(B) Very good; which proved that the students have fully met learning objective expectations by understanding the theme and title of the story.

In the second criterion the score is also 3(B) very good; showing that students have also fully met learning expectations by discussing effectively the contents and story line on the pages given to them.

The score in the third criterion is 2.5 (c+) Good; this clearly shows that the students have met learning objective expectations, having successfully discussed the characters based on their physical, sociological and psychological forms and appearances.

On discussing the scenes and situations in detail, students have scored 2.5 (c+) Good; hence they also met the learning objective expectations.

Students on the fifth criterion, have successfully mentioned and discussed the lessons and morals in the story, thereby scoring 3(B) very good; which proves that they have fully met the learning objective expectations.

III. Conclusion.

A focus on student centered method may be the most important contribution of constructivism. Phillips (2002) observed: "it seems possible for a person who accepts constructivism as a philosophy to adopt a variety of educational practices or for a teacher who uses constructivist classroom practices, to justify doing so in a variety of ways some of which might not philosophically be constructivist at all". This research work has tried to explain constructivism and its roles in improving the teaching and learning Arabic language in some Nupe and Gbagyi speaking communities in Niger state. Efforts were made to discover some of the main problems of teaching and learning Arabic language in some schools in the selected area of study; traditional ways of teaching and lack of effective practice and communication in Arabic as well as dearth of relevant books and modern teaching aids have been the major challenges of teaching and learning Arabic in the communities. Constructivist teaching strategy which concerns more about the learner in the teaching process was adopted in order to tackle some of those challenges and the result was positive and highly encouraging.

IV. Recommendations

In light of the study findings, the researchers recommend the following:

⇒ Teachers of Arabic language should try as much as possible to minimize the use of Traditional teaching methods and embrace modern strategies such as the constructivist approach of teaching and learning because this has become an indispensable tool for finding the best way for both students to learn effectively and teacher to teach efficiently.

⇒ Teachers and students of Arabic language should spare no opportunities of communicating with one another in and out side the classroom, at home and any other place without fear or shyness, this will help in improving their fluency and boost their confidence in communication and interaction.

⇒ Relevant Arabic textbooks and audio- usual aids should be adequately provided in schools as this will go a long way in improving teaching and learning.

⇒ Schools and Arabic language teachers should organize debates and quizzes for students. there is also the need to form Arabic language clubs where activities such as drama, speech delivery, essay writing and other similar activities could be carried out.

⇒ The curricula designers and reviewers should consider incorporating the principle of constructivist theory into Arabic language cuericula.

⇒ Training and re-training Arabic language teachers in the modern learning strategies such as the constructivism with the aim of making use of them in the field of Arabic language teaching.

⇒   Educational institutions should train their student teachers the use of constructivist model in planning and teaching lessons and encourage such student teachers to apply such methods during their practical training so as to enhance teaching and learning process and outcome.

⇒   Teachers of different subject areas should embrace the use of constructivist teaching models and methods so as to transform students' engagement in subject matters from rote memorization and comprehension to more meaningful evaluation, analysis and practical application of knowledge.

References:

[1].   David, w. (1990). *English language teaching, an integrated approach,* 1st ed. Ibadan: spectrum House
[2].   Hemant & poonam (2016). *Constructivist Approach for Teaching English: making sense of paradigm shift from The Traditional Approach*. International journal of sciences and Research. vol. 5 no 10, 2016 www. ijsr. net
[3].   Ibrahim A.A (2016). *Fatatu Argungu*. Ilorin Kwara state Nigeria.
[4].   Maclellan E, and Soden R. (2004) *The importance of Epistemic congnition in student centered learning*: Instructional science, vol.32 p 253-268.
[5].   Malik, S.H.A. (1998). *Presentation and dissemination of Arabic and Islamic cultural heritage: A challenge to the muslim youth*. proceedings of the 8th muslim youth world conference. Riyadh: khalij printing press.
[6].   Mikepascoe, (2018). *Constructivist teaching methods*. Retrieved October 20, 2018 from wikipedia http: // en.wikipedia .org/w/indexphp? title –constructivist teaching methods & actionhistory.
[7].   Muna A. (2017). *Principle of constructivism in foreign language Teaching*. journal of literature and Art studies, vol. 7. No.1 pg 101.
[8].   Phillips, D.C. (2000). *Constructivism in education: opinions and second opinions on controversial issues*. Chicago: Ninety –Ninth yearbook of the National society for the study of education. Part
[9].   Richardson v. (1997). *Constructivist Teaching And Teachers Education: Theory and Practice*. In constructivist Teacher education: Building a world of new understandings. p.3-14 Bristol, pa: Falmer press
[10].   Roya, J.A. & Hanieh, D.A. (2015). *Review of constructivism and social constructivism*. Jounal of social sciences, literature and language. Vol.1, no 1, p9 13.
[11].   Samia M.M.A. (2018). *The Effect of using the constructivist learning model on the second cycle of Basic Education pupils, Acquisition of some grammatical concepts and their attitudes towards using the model.* A masters thesis submitted to Fayoum university, faculty of education, Department of curricula & methodology.
[12].   Santhosm k. and Rav. M.B. (2014). *Relevance of constructivist Approach in teaching and learning*. Scholarly Research journal for interdisciplinary studies. vol.2 No 10 www.srjis.com
[13].   Schunk, D.H. (2004). *Leaning theories: an educational perspective*. 4th ed. Upper saddle River, N.J Pearson prentice Hall.
[14].   Wikipedia. *Constructivist learning theory*.