



An Exploratory Investigation of the Pedagogic Value of Form-Based English Language Instruction in Selected Secondary Schools in Sokoto State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This research project investigates the pedagogic value of Form-Based Language Instruction (FBLI) on the performance of secondary school students in English language in Sokoto State, Nigeria. FBLI is an innovative approach to second language teaching and learning, designed based on activities, strategies, and techniques that recent research in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has shown to be effective in helping learners acquire a second language. The objectives of the study are to: (1) determine the effectiveness of FBLI in improving students' performance in English; (2) examine the effectiveness of FBLI compared to conventional teaching methods; and (3) analyse the impact of FBLI on teaching and learning English at the secondary school level. The research employed descriptive and covariance analysis methods. Findings indicate that FBLI significantly improves students' performance, as evidenced by higher post-test scores compared to pre-test scores. The study concludes that FBLI is an effective pedagogical tool for teaching English as a second language and recommends its adoption in secondary schools in Sokoto State.

Keywords: Form, Language instruction, Pre-test, Post-test, Scores.

Introduction

The teaching and learning of English as a second language in Nigeria, particularly in Sokoto State, have been plagued by persistent challenges, including poor student performance and inadequate teaching methodologies. Many teachers and students who have been exposed to Form-Based Language Instruction (FBLI) attest to its efficacy in second language acquisition. Previous pilot studies and experiments conducted by the researchers have demonstrated the relative effectiveness of FBLI in improving learners' performance in English compared to conventional methods. However, a large-scale study is needed to validate these findings and determine the broader applicability of FBLI.

FBLI, also known as Form-Focused Instruction (FFI), emphasises the explicit teaching of grammatical forms, focusing on accuracy and usage. This approach, often attributed to Michael Swan, aims to raise learners' awareness of grammatical forms and their usage in context. FBLI differs from meaning-based or task-based language teaching, which prioritises communication over grammatical accuracy. The study seeks to examine the application of FBLI in the teaching and learning of English in Sokoto State, with the goal of equipping teachers with innovative skills to enhance their instructional practices.

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Determine whether FBLI is effective in improving secondary school students' performance in English.
2. Examine whether FBLI directed at specific aspects of English results in mastery of those aspects.
3. Analyse the effectiveness of FBLI compared to conventional teaching methods.
4. Assess the impact of FBLI on teaching and learning English at the secondary school level in Sokoto State.

The study is guided by three research questions:

1. Is FBLI effective in improving secondary school students' performance in English?

2. Does FBLI directed at specific aspects of English result in mastery of those aspects?
3. How effective is FBLI compared to conventional teaching methods in Sokoto State?
4. The research employs descriptive and analytical methods, including Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA), to compare pre-test and post-test scores of students exposed to FBLI and conventional methods.

Review of Related Literature

Most studies on English language teaching and learning in Nigeria (e.g., Bala, 2011; Maradun, 2016) have focused on identifying and describing students' errors in spoken and written English. However, little effort has been made to develop innovative teaching approaches within the Nigerian context. Chukueggu (2014) notes that while studies on alternative methods of improving second language teaching exist in American, European, and Asian countries, such studies are scarce in Africa, particularly in Nigeria. This gap underscores the need for research on innovative teaching approaches like FBLI.

FBLI, initiated by Michael Long, directs learners' attention to specific linguistic forms within communicative activities. It differs from task-based language teaching, which prioritises meaning over form. Ellis (2001) defines FBLI as any instructional activity intended to induce learners to pay attention to linguistic forms. Talebi et al. (2015) found that FBLI significantly improved students' grammar recognition compared to task-based methods.

Data Presentation and Analysis

The study involved 600 students from six secondary schools in Sokoto State. Each school had 100 students divided into groups (A-E). Pre-tests were conducted using conventional task-based methods, while post-tests were administered after implementing FBLI. The following tables show the pre-test and post-test scores for each school.

Table 1: Pre-test and Post-test Scores for School A

Group	Pre-test Score (out of 20)	Post-test Score (out of 20)
A	4	11
B	3	12
C	3	11
D	2	13
E	3	10

Table 2: Pre-test and Post-test Scores for School B

Group	Pre-test Score (out of 20)	Post-test Score (out of 20)
A	6	13
B	4	11
C	4	14
D	2	11
E	3	12

Table 3: Pre-test and Post-test Scores for School C

Group	Pre-test Score (out of 20)	Post-test Score (out of 20)
A	4	10
B	3	11
C	6	9
D	5	11
E	4	13

Table 4: Pre-test and Post-test Scores for School D

Group	Pre-test Score (out of 20)	Post-test Score (out of 20)
A	6	14
B	7	12
C	4	13
D	3	11
E	5	11

Table 5: Pre-test and Post-test Scores for School E

Group	Pre-test Score (out of 20)	Post-test Score (out of 20)
A	5	12
B	4	10
C	6	12
D	5	11
E	5	12

Table 6: Pre-test and Post-test Scores for School F

Group	Pre-test Score (out of 20)	Post-test Score (out of 20)
A	7	13
B	6	11
C	5	12
D	4	11
E	5	14

Discussion of Findings

The results indicate a significant improvement in students' performance after exposure to FBLI. In School A, pre-test scores ranged from 2-4 out of 20, while post-test scores ranged from 10-13. Similar improvements were observed in Schools B-F, with post-test scores consistently higher than pre-test scores. For example, in School B, pre-test scores ranged from 2-6, while post-test scores ranged from 11-14. These findings demonstrate the effectiveness of FBLI in improving students' mastery of English, particularly in reading comprehension.

The study's findings align with Ellis (2015), who argues that FBLI is effective in enabling learners to acquire language through linguistic forms. Valeo (2013) also found that form-focused instruction significantly improved learners' content knowledge. This study further supports the notion that FBLI enhances learners' understanding of grammatical structures, leading to improved accuracy in language production.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates the effectiveness of FBLI in improving secondary school students' performance in English in Sokoto State. FBLI should be encouraged as a viable alternative to conventional teaching methods, particularly in teaching reading comprehension and related language skills. Future research should explore the application of FBLI in other areas of language study, such as phonology and grammar.

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