MCLAUGHLIN'S ATTENTION PROCESSING MODEL IN TEACHING READING SKILL AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

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Abstract
This paper highlights McLaughlin's attention processing model in teaching reading skill and its implication for language pedagogy. The model places high emphasis on attention as a condition for effective learning to take place. Many related works on the model were reviewed. This paper using descriptive approach identifies the following as major implications of the attention processing model a learner requires awareness of what to learn in order to arouse his interest, relating present knowledge to past experience, constant practice, use of adequate visual instructional materials, among others, in order to improve the learning standard of the learners in McLaughlin's attention processing model in the teaching of reading skill. This study recommends that for a language teacher to carry the students along, he has to be a master of the content, methods and strategies as well as skills of teaching in the language learning process. The English language teachers should therefore provide conducive learning environment which recognizes the importance of attention and interest of the learners in the teaching and learning of reading skills in schools.

Introduction

Language learning is viewed as the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill. To learn a language is to learn a skill because various aspects of the task must be practiced and integrated into fluent performance (automaticity). Language learning is an important aspect in knowing the communicative function it performs in the society. This is because language is a system that is primarily associated with social interaction with members of speech communities in any given social contexts (Oluikpe and Oluikpe, 2014). In the school system, the main task of the teacher is to influence the learner through various teaching activities in order to acquire a change in behavior. The teacher has to do this to ensure that the learner is helped to achieve his learning objectives.

Language learning requires active involvement of the teacher and the learner in the teaching and learning process. The formal goal of teaching a language is to help the learner to learn how to read, understand and be able to write. The emphasis here is in teaching the learner to be fluent in reading with clear understanding.

In the bid to find effective ways of teaching language, scholars in language education have developed different models to ensure effective language teaching. It becomes imperative to sensitize teachers and learners on the various models of teaching, and their implications in achieving effective language

teaching and learning. It is against this background that this paper highlights McLaughlin's *Attention Processing Model*. The essence is to highlight the key components of the model and to show how it would enable language teachers to use or apply the model in enhancing teaching and learning in schools.

The *Attention Processing Model* can be said to be an offshoot of "information processing model" that explains how information is processed by the memory of individuals. The main basis or the central point of attention processing model by McLaughlin(1983) is that attention is very significant in information processing. This means that the degree of attention of the learners towards any information to some extent determines how they will process such information. This will also relate to how the individual learners will finally understand the processed information.

Language teaching is a complex skill.many scholars have come up with different theories aimed at explaining the process especially with regards to learning a second language (L2). For instance, Chomsky, Piaget among other psychologists in the 1950s developed cognitive learning theories. However, in terms of language learning, it was Chomsky that integrated cognitive learning theory. The theory maintains that, language learning relates to the working of the memory. According to the theorist, language learning especially L2 is seen now in which the memory plays a crucial role.

The memory is very significant in information processing. It is here that all the input learners acquire are stored and may be made available for information processing when the need arises. According to Gass and Selinker (2008) the memory is divided into two parts. short-term memory and long-term memory. The scholars state that the short-term memory stores information for a short while, while information storage is permanent in the long-term memory.

Information processing can be "controlled" or "automatic". Information processing is said to be controlled if the processing capacity is limited or short-lived. As the information is being mastered, its processing is said to be automatic. Processing of information by learners is as a product of the learners' attention to it. The frequency of repetition of the information by the learners makes the information permanent in their memory. VanPatten and Wong (2004) explain information processing as how individuals perceive, understand and remember the information they gain from the world around them.

Information processing has also been classified into three stages. Iroegbu, Nkwocha and Onyemerekeya (2003) identify the three stages of information processing in the memory as follows: the sensory memory, the short-term memory and the long-term memory. The study emphasizes on the significance of attention at the sensory stage of information processing, observing that when the information is not given adequate attention or well organized, such information will be forgotten. On the other hand, when the information is recognized and well attended to, the information will be transferred to the short-term memory. Thus, learners gain attention for any information that is made available to them before it is registered in the short-term memory for processing and then transferred for further processing in the long-term memory. It is in the long-term memory that such information becomes automatic and permanent; it can be recalled any time with minimal effort.

One important aspect of information processing is attention. Robinson (2005) defines attention as "the concentration of mental power upon an object". This implies one having special thinking about something or somebody carefully. Attention is, therefore, concentrating one's mind on something through watching with the aim of understanding it. Iroegbu, et al (2003), state that attention is focusing one's mind and concentration on something. The scholars further stress that many things are reflected in

the memory of an individual but not all of them attract the individual's attention. Often, an individual is exposed to different stimuli but very few of them attract the attention of the individual.

In a child, four (4) aspects of attention development have been identified:

i. Ability to control attention: This means that as a child matures, he pays more attention to important points than minor issues.

ii. Fitting attention to the task: This implies that as the child grows, he becomes capable of paying more attention to more than one task at a time.

iii. Planning: This means that as the child matures, his ability to plan to direct his attention improves. He looks out for signs that will tell him what to do and he focuses attention on such signs.

Iv. Monitoring: This implies that as the child matures, he improves in ability to monitor his attention. He corrects his strategy and can change his approaches where necessary (Iroegbu, et al, 2002).

The attention strategy of an individual is called selective attention. Selective attention involves focusing on special aspects of learning task. For example, a learner can plan to listen to key words, phrases or clauses, in a particular topic or subject of study. The development of the capacity of an individual to pay attention helps him to focus his attention on more than one stimulus at a time. The next of stage of attention development of a child involves his ability to direct his attention through signs. The last stage involves developing the ability to monitor one's attention. During this stage, the child will be able to think out more strategies or signs that will help him direct his attention.

Attention is divided into two "focal" and "peripheral". Focal attention is the maximum concentration given to information processing such as the type of attention learners give to reading a passage for the purpose of answering the questions from the passage. On the other hand, peripheral attention is the type of attention that demands less concentration on the information processing. In other words, in peripheral attention, the information processing does not take much of the learners' time.

McLaughlin's Attention Processing Model. Attention processing model is propounded by McLaughlin in 1983. The major relief of this model is that attention plays a crucial role in information processing which may be controlled or automatic. It involves the processing mechanisms with classes of attention to property of language. The model emphasizes on the significance of attention to information processing in language learning activities. According to the model, there are four (4) classes of attention into which controlled and automatic processing and attention may be presented include: focal, peripheral, automatic and controlled.

The focal attention process involves the ability of the brain to deal with numerous types of information at a time. This demands total attention in processing already mastered information. It can be demonstrated by a learner who reads and understands a passage and answers the questions from the passage with ease and with limitless effort and speed. Hence, automatic processing is characterized by speed and effortlessness. Processing answers to the questions from the passage by the learner demands his maximum attention for effective performance because many things are stored in the long-term memory but only the one that is to be performed is given focal attention. Performance here attracts a reward.

The second class of attention is characterized by "focal controlled process". In this class, the learners' performance is based on formal rule learning. The language teaching task has just been learnt and the information is temporarily stored in the short-term memory, but if the information is not practiced by the learners, it will be lost. Brown (2002) states that the

automatizing of this multiplicity of data is accomplished by a process of restructuring in which the components of a task are coordinated, integrated, or reorganized into new units, thereby allowing the old components to be replaced by a more efficient procedure. This can be demonstrated by a learner who wants to write an informal letter and did not practice it. In such a situation, the learner may forget the proper procedure. This, therefore, requires the learner to give more attention to informal letter writing in the learning time until he masters it. When this information is now learnt, it will be transferred from the short-term memory to the long-term memory. This condition paves way for the short-term memory to receive new information or message for processing.

The next class refers to "peripheral controlled process". This involves learning skills without any instruction. In learning a language skill such as reading, many aspects of processes are involved but the teacher concentrates on the aspect that he is interested in; however, in paying full attention in a major area of interest, the teacher will also help the learners by giving peripheral attention to other aspects that are not within his major interest in order to help the learners comprehend. In teaching reading for instance, the attention of the teacher should be focused on pronunciation by the learners but less attention may be paid to the meaning of words or other aspects of mechanical accuracy.

The last class of attention processing model focuses on "peripheral automatic process". This can be illustrated through a learner and his performance in learning communication skills. Automatic process is said to be relatively permanent (Brown 2002). In other words, a learner who has mastered the rule of a particular language will show more skills in communicating in it with little or less attention. McLaughlin's attention processing model is presented in a table below as illustrated by Brown (2007:284).

	CONTROLLED: New Skill, Capacity is Limited	AUTOMATIC Well-trained, practiced skill capacity is relatively unlimited
Focal intentional attention	A. • Grammatical explanation of a specific point • Word definition • Copy a written model • The first stages of memorizing a dialogue • Prefabricated patterns • Various discrete-points exercises	B. • "Keeping an eye out" for something • Advanced L_2 learner focuses on modals, clause formation, etc • Monitoring oneself while talking or writing • Scanning • Editing, peer-editing
Peripheral	C. • Simple greetings • The latter stages of memorizing a dialog • New L_2 learner successfully completes a brief conversation	D. • Open-ended group work • Rapid reading skimming • Free writes • Normal conversational exchanges of length.

Adapted from (Oluikpe and Oluikpe, 2014:223)

The above table shows practical application of attention processing model by McLaughlin. The cells describe ones processing of and attention to language forms (grammatical, phonological, discourse rules and categories and lexical choices). For example, peripheral attention is given to language forms in a more advanced language classroom; focal attention is no doubt being given to meaning, function, purpose, or person. Child second language learning may consist almost exclusively of peripheral (cells C and D) attention to

language forms. Most adult L2 learning in the classroom involves a movement from cell A through a combination of C and B, to D (Dekeyser, and Sokalski, 1996). Peripheral, automatic attention processing of the bits and piece of language is thus an ultimate communicative goal for language learners.

Implications of Mclaughlin's Attention Processing Model For Language Pedagogy

McLaughlin's (1983) attention processing model for language teaching and learning has a lot of implications on Language teaching and learning involves a lot of complex skills. It requires that the language teacher should know the content of what to teach the methodology, strategy and techniques to be applied in teaching language to the learners in schools. This knowledge becomes imperative because without the knowledge both the language teacher and the learners will find it difficult understand and acquire a second language in schools.

Reading is an aspect of language learning which promotes communication and increases fluency among individuals in the society. The following are the implications of McLaughlin's attention processing model for language pedagogy:

A language teacher has to know that learners can only become interested and pay attention to what is being taught when they become fully aware of the topic. This is because language learners do better when they are able to relate what is being taught to their existing knowledge. In other words, if something new is to be taught, the language teacher has to make conscious effort in the right direction to link the new information or relate such information to the previous knowledge/experience of the learner to enhance easy understanding. The learners' attention is fully drawn to a topic when they know what is expected of them in the learning process. In teaching reading skill, a language teacher should be specific

in what he wants the learners to read and to comprehend. The learners should be allowed to relate the present knowledge to their previous knowledge in order to facilitate learning. This requires the language teacher to specify the lesson objectives to be achieved by the learners at the end of the lesson.

- Automatic learning in the long-term memory is achieved through constant practice. The implication is that the language teacher should create enabling learning environment that will enable learners to automatize a process through several repeated practices. In other words, learners will be given opportunity to practice what they have learnt.

- In addition, it is to be observed that a task is learnt when serious attention is given to information during controlled processing. This implies that the teacher has to ensure that adequate attention of the learners is secured while paying his own attention to what he wants them to achieve. When learners' effort and attention are on what to be mastered during the learning process, they will be in a position to practice and understand it the more.

- Language teachers should know that information is processed in stages. The language teacher should therefore ensure that so many things/activities should not be taught at a time while teaching reading. The activities should be done in bits. This is because the learner should proceed from their previous knowledge to new ones. This relationship will help for easy storage of the information permanently in the long-term memory. The implication here is that, the teacher should apply continuous or formative evaluation to redirect the attention of the learners in the teaching and learning process. Reading should be taught from the simple aspect of the language to the more difficult ones. For instance, in reading, learners should learn first how to identify letters in a word before pronouncing it or identify paragraphs in a passage before a topic sentence in a paragraph.

- Learners should be provided with clues that will help them in solving reading related problems. This is because, teaching learners requires methods for attending to problems which promotes cognitive activities.   In teaching reading, if the teachers' attention is on pronunciation of words with similar sounds like eyes and ice, sea and see, buy and bye, peak and pick, etc, they should ensure that adequate examples of such words are given to the learners so that they will follow same in attempting others.

- Language teachers should also know that learners' attention is limited. This implies that age and experience may determine the attention of the learners and how far the learners can concentrate on any given information. This means that the teacher who is teaching reading skill should know that the learners should not be given tasks that require too much reading at a time. In other words, short comprehension passages or short essays that will not demand the learners' attention for a long time should be given. The idea is to help sustain the attention of the learners within the time frame for any given exercise. Even in giving reading assignment, this should be taken into consideration.

- The language teachers should know that learners give attention to information when they are aware of the information. Many contemporary theories on language suggest that language learning has to be related to the existing knowledge of the learners. From the L2 learning perspective, Leo Van Lier's approach of "Language awareness" (Van LIER, 1996: 12) which seems to be an essential aspect of language learning lends a fresh perspective to the issue of learning. He states as follows:

> To learn something new, one must first notice it … Paying attention is focusing one's consciousness or pointing

one's perceptional powers in the right direction and making "mental energy" available for processing. Processing involves linking something that is perceived in the outside world to structures (patterns of connection) that exist in the mind. (Van Lier, 1996:11)

Learners pay full attention when they know what is expected of them in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, in teaching reading skill, the language teachers should make the learners to be aware of what they want to read, how what they want to read is related to their previous knowledge and what is expected of them at the end of the reading.

The general implication of McLaughlin's attention processing model for language pedagogy is that, the learners cannot handle too many new structures that require conscious thinking at a time. The language teachers should wait for the learners to master a simple structure before they should be given more difficult ones. Teaching reading skills should proceed from teaching simple skill such reading of sentences to complex skill like reading of short comprehension in any teaching and learning process.

Conclusion

Attention processing model is an essential teaching model especially with regards to language teaching and learning. The central point of this model is that, language teachers have to realize that learners' awareness of any topic is a necessity for captivating the learners' attention to the learning task. Therefore, the teaching of reading skills should proceed from simple to complex skills in order to ensure effective participation of the learners in the teaching and learning process.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations may be considered vital for successful language

teaching:

i. Language teachers should provide the necessary enabling environment to ensure that learners achieve their reading objectives in the second language learning in the classroom.

ii. It has been observed that many qualified language teachers and student teachers do not have any knowledge about McLaughlin's attention processing model. They need to be aware of the model for effective teaching and learning to take place. The school should organize language workshops and seminars where current pedagogical issues relating to language will be discussed for effective teaching and learning to take place.

iii. The learners should be made to be aware of the significance of attention to learning. This will enable them to make effort to pay attention in the teaching and learning process. This can be carried out by organizing orientation/workshops for them.

Iv.   Attention clues help learners to organize attention. The language teachers should teach learners the clues they need or solving problems. Learners need to know how to solve problems fast when they are given clues on how to tackle them.

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