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A Pragmatic Investigation of Prompts in Classroom Interaction: A Study of Six Public Primary Schools in Plateau State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The classroom is a learning environment facilitated through discursive interaction between teachers and students. Prompt is among the many interactional strategies employed by teachers to facilitate interactive learning in the classroom by stimulating participation, cognitive engagement and meaning negotiation and proficient language development. Despite the pedagogical and pragmatic significance of prompts in classroom interaction, prompts have received limited attention within Nigerian primary school classrooms, particularly in Plateau State. The study adopts a qualitative research design anchored on the pragmatic theories of Speech Acts, Cooperative Principles and the Sociocultural Theory to investigate the significance of prompts in classroom interaction. In order to generate authentic and naturally occurring data suitable for the study, the data for were generated through classroom audio-recorded teacher–students interactions, in-class observation, and semi-structured interviews involving teachers and students across the selected schools. The recorded interactions were transcribed to produce the discourse data that enabled the examination of the various forms of prompts and the pragmatic functions that they perform in classroom interaction. Prompts were seen to perform instructional functions, to contribute to learner participation, and influence the flow of classroom interaction. The study found prompts function beyond their known linguistic form and function and perform deeper pragmatic function of scaffolding learning, decrease the likelihood of communication breakdowns, encourage collaborative meaning-making, and sustain effective classroom interaction. This study offers significant contributing to classroom discourse studies, discourse pragmatics, educational pragmatics, and language pedagogy by providing empirical evidence on how prompts facilitate teaching and learning English Language Teaching classrooms in Nigerian public primary schools.

Keywords: *pragmatics, classroom interaction, prompts, speech acts, classroom discourse, scaffolding.*

Introduction

The teaching and learning of English language are fundamentally communicative and interactive activities between teachers and students especially in conventional classrooms. Mercer and Littleton (26) asserts that Learning occur collaborative engagement between teachers and students in form of information transmission in which both teachers and pupils negotiate meaning and construct knowledge. Walsh, Marguerite, and Matsumura believe that the negotiation of meaning between the teacher and student often result in the collective solving of problems (39). The classroom provides a discursive platform for teacher-students interaction. Scholars like Cazden have attributed the emergence of 'teacher talk' the classroom where it is seen as a major factor that shapes classroom interaction because it determines opportunities for learner participation, feedback, scaffolding, and meaning construction

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(Cazden 35). Teacher talk is manifested through carefully selected linguistic strategies, classroom activities, monitor learners' understanding, corrective feedback, and stimulating critical thinking as well as the effective use of prompting strategies.

The act of prompting refers to the deliberate use of verbal or non-verbal cues in ways that learners are guided towards uncovering what the teacher intends for the leaner to learn independently. Pranam, et al. believes that prompts hold the advantage of enabling the learner to self-discover answers or complete learning tasks independently rather than simply depending on the teacher to provide direct solutions (12). Prompts are therefore structured in the form of questions, hints, sentence starters, repetition, gestures, and request for clarification, reformulations, or strategic pauses that place additional demands on the student to say more. Alexander notes that the use of prompts in the classroom offers learners the opportunity to retrieve what they have learned in the past as a means of activating their reasoning and participating actively in classroom discussions.

This study draws from J. L. Austin's view that utterances are used to perform actions. Therefore, from a pragmatic standpoint, prompts are seen as communicative acts interactional goal's interpretation depends largely on context, shared knowledge, speaker intention, and conversational expectations and not entirely on grammatical forms (Levinson 23) similarly, Kamarudin underscored the believe that Pragmatics is the examination how speakers use language to perform actions and how hearers infer and make meanings of what has been said within particular social contexts (226). It suggests therefore that a teacher's utterance such as can be interpreted and perform functions that it is intended to perform so long as it is effectively decoded by the student.

Prompts are designed by teachers on assumptions that learners able to deduce and deconstruct the implied meaning, and respond accordingly by provide relevant responses, and contribute to ongoing classroom discourse. This aligns with Sinclair and Coulthard's Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) model as cited in Risna (26) demonstrates that teacher prompts often determines the direction of classroom discourse. The use of prompts is significant in primary education because at the level as the learners are still developing linguistic competence and communicative competence. The use of prompts at this level of education is important because it serves as learning support to the young learners and helps them develop confidence that would enable them achieve tasks beyond their current level. Wood, Bruner, and Ross (93) contend that the effective use of prompts in the classroom serves as scaffolding devices that gradually lead pupils towards autonomous learning.

The investigation of prompts as an area of interest has received some attention especially in the field of educational psychology and pedagogy. However, few studies have examined prompts as pragmatic phenomena classroom discourse and especially within the Nigerian educational context. This study therefore investigates the significance of prompts in teacher-students classroom interaction across six public primary schools in Plateau State, Nigeria. This study focuses attention the forms, communicative functions, and contributions of prompts to effective teaching and learning of English language.

Statement of the Problem

Classroom interaction is greatly impacted by the quality of communication between teachers and learners. Walsh believes that among the communicative resources that are available to teacher is the use of prompt (33). Prompt has been consistently identified as one of the most effective strategies for eliciting learner response, participation, supporting comprehension. Zohar, Anat, and Barzilai noted that prompts are used in the classroom to facilitate higher-order thinking (44). Nevertheless, many researchers have focused attention more extensively on questioning techniques used in the classes. The social positioning of teachers and students during interactions as Gonsum and Cavusoglu other scholars have focused attention on interactional competence, effective classroom management, instructional methods and materials, and learner achievement than on the pragmatic functions of prompts in classroom discourse (336). Prompt is seldom investigated as context-dependent speech acts whose meanings are shaped by communicative intentions, shared knowledge, and sociocultural contexts.

The absence of scholarly works on prompts as they relate to classroom interaction is particularly evident in Nigerian public primary schools. This is because teachers at this level of education operate under conditions characterised by multilingual classrooms, overcrowded classrooms, the lack or inadequate instructional materials, and varying conditions that demotivate learner abilities. These negative realities require teachers to rely extensively on interactional strategies capable of maintaining learner engagement. Teachers that are able to achieve this experience facilitated meaning negotiation in their classes. These problems are further worsened by the dearth of empirical evidence regarding how prompts function pragmatically within Nigerian classroom discourse.

Additionally, previous studies on classroom interaction have largely been conducted in other climes other than Plateau state where educational practices, teacher-students relationships, and sociocultural norms differ remarkably from those found in Nigerian classrooms (Gonsum and Cavusoglu 339). Consequently, findings from these contexts may not adequately explain

classroom communication patterns in multilingual public primary schools such as may be seen in Plateau State. The paucity of pragmatic studies on the significance of prompts in the ELT classes constitutes a significant gap in educational linguistics and classroom discourse research. It is important therefore fill in this gap by firstly understanding how teachers strategically use language to facilitate learning and, secondly understand how pupils interpret these communicative acts during classroom interaction.

The overarching aim of the study is first to identify the various forms of prompts employed by teachers during classroom interaction with their students. This is followed by a close examination of the prompts to see the pragmatic functions performed by these prompts in teacher-students discourse. The investigation of these prompts is in teacher students interaction is to see how prompts facilitate learner participation and classroom engagement. The study also aims to analyse the prompts and reveal the relationship between prompts and meaning negotiation during classroom interaction as seen students' responses to different categories of teacher prompts. It is hoped that these layered analysis will reveal the contribution of the use of prompts as effective pragmatic tools in the teaching and learning of English in public primary schools in Plateau State.

Classroom Interaction

The term 'classroom interaction' refers to the communicative exchanges between teachers and students and indeed between/among students during instructional and learning activities. In other words, classroom interaction refers to all forms of exchanges that constitute part of the learning or teaching process. These exchanges involve the use of verbalized language in the form of questioning and feedback and nonverbal expressions such gestures, facial expressions and even silence. Cazden believes that other communicative resources through which teaching and learning are accomplished form part of classroom interaction (45). Classroom interaction is therefore involves transmission of knowledge that is collaboratively done and through which participants jointly construct meaning and negotiate understanding.

Brown, Douglas, and Lee see classroom interaction as the crust of language learning (38). This is because language learners best learn a language through active participation in communicative engagement in interactive episodes. In a Similar vein, Walsh contends that interactions make learning opportunities available to learners (18). This is achieved through making classroom communication the strongest of educational success. In the view of Mercer and Littleton (58), classroom interaction is a dialogic process where teachers and learners collaboratively engage in collective reasoning. In their view, dialogue enables learners to

explain ideas, justify opinions, ask questions, and solve problems collaboratively. This perspective seemed to agree Bruner view that the constructivist perspective regards learning as an active process of meaning construction rather than passive knowledge acquisition (113).

One feature of Interaction in classrooms is typically characterised by power positions as seen in institutional roles of teachers vs students. According to Brown, Douglas, and Lee, in classroom interaction, teachers generally control the initiation of discourse, teachers determine assign turns, teachers also evaluate responses, and regulate classroom activities (22). There is a clear distinction between classroom interactions with ordinary conversations. This is because classroom interaction is goal-oriented, and pedagogically structured. The quality of classroom interaction positively influences learners' cognitive development, language proficiency, motivation, and academic achievement (Mercer and Littleton 134). Walsh (20) further argues that dialogic classroom interaction promotes critical thinking because learners are encouraged to explore multiple perspectives rather than merely memorising facts.

Another term closely related to classroom interaction is Classroom discourse. Classroom discourse refers to the organised patterns of communication that occur during teaching and learning activities. According to Cazden, classroom discourse encompasses the verbalised and non-verbal interactions through which both teachers and students negotiate meaning, establish relationships, accomplish instructional objectives, and construct acquired knowledge in ways that demonstrate that the goal of that enterprise has been achieved (23). Classroom discourse is institutionally organised and pedagogically motivated. In the view of Christie, classroom discourse follows predictable structures that reflect the instructional responsibilities of teachers and the students responsibilities of students. As noted by many scholars, teachers generally determine discussion topics, allocate speaking time, allocate speaking opportunities, evaluate learner contributions, and ensuring classroom order during classroom interaction.

A systematic description of how classroom discourse is constituted and plays out was developed by Sinclair and Coulthard. They develop a system: Initiation–Response–Feedback (IRF) model. Based on this framework, the Initiation (I) is the teacher who initiates communication through a question, prompt, instruction, or explanation. The Response (R) refers to the learners that provide answers or reactions to what has been initiated. Finally, the Feedback (F) element refers to the teacher evaluation of the response, confirmation of what the alignment of the response to what has been said, correction of what has been said, or provision of extension to the learner for additional responses. Walsh has been criticised IRF

model for portraying classroom interaction as teacher-centred. However, there seemed a consensus among scholars (Mercer and Dawes 242) that the model remains one of the most influential frameworks for analysing instructional discourse with the believe that it is not in all cases that the teacher is the initiator of dialogue in an exploratory talk situation where interactants engage in collective reasoning.

From a pragmatic perspective, classroom discourse refers to a series of communicative acts. These acts are framed in different forms and their meanings often depend on contextual interpretation (Gonsum and Cavusoglu 348). It can be claimed that every classroom utterance performs one or more actions or functions. These actions or functions align with Levinson speech acts of requesting information, giving instructions, encouraging participation, correcting errors, or maintaining social relationships. Consequently, analysing classroom discourse requires that attention is paid to grammatical forms as well as the speakers' intentions, conversational norms, institutional expectations, and learners' interpretations. Studies within educational pragmatics, according to Walsh are characterised by responsiveness, flexibility, and sensitivity to learners' communicative needs for effective classroom interaction and classroom discourse (68). Teachers who successfully manage classroom discourse in the above manner succeed in creating greater opportunities for learner engagement and collaborative learning to take place. This is necessary because within the Nigerian classrooms, teacher-students interaction often reflects sociocultural expectations concerning authority, politeness, and institutional hierarchy. Teachers are expected to maintain classroom discipline while simultaneously encouraging participation, making pragmatic competence particularly important in managing instructional interaction.

Prompts in Classroom Interaction

The use of prompts in classroom interaction refers to the intentional provision of verbal or non-verbal cues often produced by teachers as deliberate guide to the learners. Prompts are used to guide learners toward producing the appropriate and expected responses or completing learning tasks independently. Walsh posits that prompts provides students with the opportunity of supplying direct answers as well as provide encouragement learners to activate and apply prior knowledge, reflect critically on a concept or an idea, and the opportunity to infer meanings (56). All these are achieved through guided and structure participation in classroom interaction. Educational psychologists such as Wood et al. and Rosenshine describe the use of prompts as a scaffolding strategy. Scaffolding is seen as a learning strategy that provides temporary assistance until learners become capable of independent performance and enable the learner to independently process information thus improving their levels of comprehension.

From a pragmatic perspective, prompts are communication acts that are context sensitive and, their meanings extend beyond their linguistic forms. Prompts are intentional speech acts use by teachers to encourage students' participation, collaboratively negotiate meaning, and monitor students understanding of concepts during classroom interactive activities. In this regard, prompts that have identical linguistic forms and expressions may perform different pragmatic functions depending on contextual factors. Levinson contend that context variables such as speaker, speaker intention, learner competence, institutional expectations, and classroom dynamics often determine meaning construction and meaning negotiation in classroom interaction (43). As have been mentioned, the teachers' utterance or prompt could be framed as a request for clarification, an invitation to reconsider, indirect corrective feedback, an encouragement to think more deeply, or an assessment prompt. All these depend on the interactional context that the utterance occurred in. This agrees with Alexander's perspective that prompts are central to dialogic teaching (11). This is because they provide a viable platform for learners to explain, justify, predict, evaluate, compare, and synthesise ideas rather than merely recall information. In pragmatics, prompts can be viewed from the perspective of direct and indirect speech acts because they perform the three identified pragmatic functions of locution, perlocution and illocution (Searle 45).

Researchers have identified different types of prompts based on the functions and how they are used in classroom interaction. Some of these include; verbal prompts that are structured in the form of questions, hints, incomplete statements, sentence starters, repetition, paraphrasing, and requests for explanation. These prompts are mostly used to stimulate critical thinking of the students in classroom interaction. There non-verbal prompts that represent very significant aspect of classroom interaction. These include gestures, eye contact, facial expressions, body movements, pointing, visual demonstrations, and strategic silence. These non-verbal prompts are seen in the teachers' intentional pauses, gazes etc especially after questions have been asked often as a way of allowing the students to deconstruct the demands of the questions thus giving the students ample time to respond. The non-verbal prompts are closely related to what Cazden refers to as cognitive prompts (23). Cognitive prompts are used by teachers to encourage learners to independently draw from their memory and think, analyse, infer, compare, evaluate, predict, and justify ideas. Also related to cognitive prompts are metacognitive prompts. Schraw posits that Metacognitive prompts are used by teachers to encourage learners to reflect on their own thinking processes and learning strategies. Similarly, procedural prompts are used to direct learners' attention in classroom interaction to particular classroom routines or task requirements on the students. Procedural prompts are used to facilitate smooth classroom management by reminding pupils about expected procedures and outcomes of expected of the students. Finally, there are

reflective prompts that are used by the teachers to encourage learners to connect classroom learning while deepening their understanding and encouraging meaningful knowledge construction by the students (Alexander 36).

Theoretical Framework

The present study is anchored on three theoretical perspectives that are complementary to each. These theories have helped explaining the communicative, pedagogical and social significance of prompts in classroom interaction. These theories are: Speech Act Theory propounded by Austin in 1962 and expanded by Searle in 1969), the Cooperative Principle propounded by H.P. Grice in 1975), and the Sociocultural Theory propounded by Vygotsky in 1978. These theories provide framework for the systematic description and understanding of how teachers use prompts as pragmatic tools to initiate interaction in their classes. Another significant contribution of these theories to this study is the provision of grounded explanation on how meaning is negotiated by interactants while serving the important function of scaffolding and facilitating learning in classroom discourse.

Speech Act Theory provides us with the affordance to explain the communicative functions of prompts as perlocutionary, illocutionary and locutionary acts. Similarly, the Cooperative Principle enables us to account for how teachers and learners collaboratively construct meaning during interaction by providing us with speech act verbs of directives, commissives, declaratives among others. The social Sociocultural Theory equally provides us with adequate explanation of how prompts are used within certain sociocultural boundaries and how they function as scaffolding devices that support learners of diverse or multicultural background and their cognitive development within the classroom.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design by employing analytical approach to investigate classroom discourse to examine the pragmatic significance of prompts in classroom interaction in six purposively selected public primary schools in Plateau State, Nigeria. Creswell and Poth (208) noted that the advantage of using qualitative design includes the ability to unearth deeper layer meanings from a phenomenon that would ordinarily be taken for granted at the surface meaning. As such, the adoption of a qualitative design enabled us to focus attention on how prompts function as communicative acts within naturally occurring classroom interactions in six public primary schools.

The choice of these schools also enabled us to compare the use of prompts and their function across the spectrum of these schools. As observed by Yin (18), qualitative designs enable

common pragmatic patterns and practices to naturally emerge from discourse data without relying on quantifying the patterns and practices. The adoption of this design Walsh (27) allows for classroom discourse to be examined in details that reveal the use and functions of teachers' prompts, as well as the responses of the students and the accompanying contextual factors influencing the use, function and interpretation of prompts during instructional activities in the classrooms

The population comprised of selected teachers and students from six public primary schools in Jos South, Barkin Ladi, Mangu, Pankshin, Shendam and Quan-Pan local government areas of Plateau State. The target population of this study consisted of classroom teachers and students of Primary Five. The choice of these categories of students and teachers is because learners at these level, the students are expected to possess sufficient communicative competence to participate meaningfully in classroom interaction given the fact that they have only a year to go into junior secondary schools. One classroom was selected from primary five in each of the selected schools from the six local government areas giving a total of six teacher participants. The unit of analysis remained the discourse data of all the students of the selected classes of the six schools from their interaction with the teachers.

The data for the study were obtained basically from primary sources such as recording of naturally occurring classroom interactions. These interactions were transcribed and the discourse data were generated and accounted for from the transcribed interactions. The transcribed in interaction were then supplemented with nonparticipant classroom observation data. These were gotten from carefully entries from the field notes. The data here accounted for prompt correction strategies, clarification, facial expression, tone of presentation of the prompts among others. By using this method to supplement the discourse data, the researchers were able to capture authentic teacher prompts and students' responses as they occurred during teacher-students engagement in classroom interaction. To achieve this, the field notes were design to pick out and record types of prompts used, instructional contexts in which prompts occurred, pupils' responses, turn-taking patterns, classroom participation, non-verbal prompting behaviours, and interactional outcomes.

Data Analysis

The data for this study were analysed by first transcribing the classroom recordings verbatim using Jacobson's (1983) transcription conventions. The data were analysed using pragmatic discourse analysis methods by first identifying, categories of prompts (elicitation prompts, clarification prompts, probing prompts, confirmation prompts, procedural prompts, reflective prompts, and scaffolding prompts), speech acts performed through prompts

(directives, commands, commissives, declaratives etc), pragmatic functions of prompts (scaffolding and rephrasing functions), pupils' responses, conversational sequences, instances of meaning negotiation, and interactional outcomes. The data for the analysis were presented form selected extracts (six extracts representing the six schools) and, the analyses were done in line with Speech Act Theory, Cooperative Principle and Sociocultural Theory to account for teacher prompt, pupil response, pragmatic function, speech act type and interactional effect. To protect participants' anonymity, the teachers and the students are simply identified as pseudonyms while the schools are identified as School A, School B, School C, School D, School E, and School F.

Extract 1 School A

The extract bellow is taken from the English language lesson 'noun'. The extract is presenting in the form of the classroom interaction that it occurred in:

1 Teacher John: who remembers what a noun is?

2 Me! Me! Me! (students in chorus)

3 Teacher John: Nanle

4 Nanle: A noun is a name… mmmm

5 Teacher John: Okay… Think! Name of what? Nandom, (pointing at a student)

6 Nandom: the name of a person, animal …

7 Teacher John: … excellent. Give me some examples

8 (Students in chorus) Pa[ul… Jos…

Analysis of Extract 1

In line 1, Teacher John's question Who remembers what a noun is? Has the pragmatic force of a directive aimed at encouraging the students to draw from their memory of the previous class on noun. In other words it is an example of the use of prompts to elicit learner participation in classroom discussion. The response of the students in line 2 is demonstrative of the fact that the teacher's use of prompt was successful as the students were stired to provide the needed answer. In line 4, instead of immediately correcting the incomplete response provided by the student, Nanle, the teacher employs the use of a follow-up prompt think! Name of what? Nandom. In this instance, the prompt here functions as a scaffolding strategy that encourages peer-correction and deeper cognitive processing. As can be seen,

students responses to these prompts are quite positive. While it can be said that both the teacher and the students have kept to the requirement of the Maxim of quantity in terms of the use of prompts and the students' responses, it can also be said that the use of prompts by the Teacher John in lines 1 and 5 illustrate Vygotsky's (1978) concept of scaffolding, whereby temporary assistance offered by the teacher enables learners to move from partial understanding toward complete conceptual knowledge.

Extract 2 School B

The extract below is taken from a classroom interaction that came about after a comprehension passage was read in class. The students were asked to read the passage again before the questions were asked by the teacher as seen in the extract below:

1 Teacher Dom: Do Plants need sunlight?

2 Students: Yes! (Students in chorus)

3 Teaccher Dom: Why? (looking at the students) Yes, Nenpin (pointing at a student)

4 Nenpin: sunlight helps plans…

5 Teacher Dom: Helps them to do what? Who can help us? Peter!

6 Peter: Helps them to make their food

7 Teacher Dom: Good…! What do we call that process?

8 Peter: Photosynthesis!

9 Teacher Dom: Excellent!!

Analysis of Extract 2

The prompt in line 5 Helps them to do what? Who can help us? is an example of a clarification prompt aimed at prompting the students provide a clearer and more elaborate response. The prompts in line 5 were necessary following Nenpin's response to why plants need sunlight in line 4. Rather than rejecting the answer entirely, the teacher initiates a resourceful platform for meaning negotiation through the use of the prompts as seen in line 5. This aligns with Gonsum and Cavusoglu view that clarification requests are negotiation strategies that are used to facilitate message delivery, language development and conceptual understanding (341). Teacher Dom's use of prompt enables the students to refine the original response to arrive at the correct answer 'Photosynthesis' while maintaining conversational continuity. From a pragmatic perspective, the prompts are used to achieve clarification and to perform

multiple communicative functions. These prompts have the pragmatic force of demanding for additional information from the students. Request prompts also provide signals to the interactants that the previous response is not sufficient while also serving as encouragement to the student to do some reflective thinking without threatening the learner's face.

Extract 3 School C

The extract below is taken from a classroom interaction that played out after a comprehension passage on environmental sanitation was read collectively in class by the students and the teacher. The objective of the lesson on comprehension passage is to see if the students are able to make sense of what they have read. The interaction panned out thus:

1 Teacher Jude: from the passage, why should you keep your environment clean?

2 Janet: Everywhere will be clean?

3 Teacher Jude: Is that all? Who can help us? … Precious (pointing at a student)

4 Precious: To avoid germs that cause diseases

5 Teacher Jude: Good! Who wants say something again? … Yes John!

6 John: To kill the mosquitoes

7 Teacher Jude: Good!

Analysis of Extract 3

In this extract, the teacher employed prompts to probe and extend learners' reasoning beyond surface responses as a way of drawing from their long-time memory. In line 1 the utterance from the passage, why should you keep your environment clean? performs the pragmatic function of an indirect invitation to the students to draw their answers from the passage they have just read. Although Janet's response in line 2: Everywhere will be clean was superficial, teacher Jude did not criticise her answer, rather, he used her response as an opportunity to use a probing prompt that would cause the students to think deeper by stating in line 3:Is that all? Who can help us? … Precious (pointing at a student). The teacher's pragmatic move in this instance moves the task of learning from the individual to the collaborative dialogue that includes him as one of the learners by using the pronoun 'us' and inviting multiple perspectives. The interaction in this extract aligns with Alexander's (2020) perspective on the principles of dialogic teaching, where prompts encourage learners to construct knowledge collectively (19). The extract demonstrates the role of the teacher in guiding the students towards providing the right responses by choosing appropriate prompts for the students.

Extract 4 School D

The interaction in this extract is taken from classroom interaction between the teacher and the students during the lesson on adjectives. The interaction played out in the following manner:

1 Teacher Mary: pick the adjectives from these words: boy; green; young; girl; old;

2 Students: teacher… teacher… teacher

3 Teacher Mary: Raise your hands if you know the answer (points at a student)

4 Peter: boy!

5 Teacher Mary: boy?? Are you sure?

6 Peter: mmm… green

7 Teacher Mary: Good!

Analysis of Extract 4

In this extract, the prompt: boy? Are you sure? This prompt functions both as an error indicating prompt as well as confirmation prompt. The use of this prompt by the teacher is used to invite learners to verify the correctness of their response and offers the opportunity to self-correct and gain confidence in their responses. The prompt: boy? Are you sure? is an example of an indirect prompt. Although it is framed as a question, it stirs the thinking of the student by signalling that the student's response could be wrong and thus it shifts classroom interaction from answer production to that of deep reasoning. This is because the teacher uses the prompt to sow doubt in the mine of the student using a question prompt strategy. This strategy encourages metacognitive reflection enabling the teacher to assess student response while encouraging the student to produce correct answers not from memorisation but from what they know. The pragmatic strategy employed in this extract falls within the Speech Act Theory and serves as an indirect directive.

Extract 5 School E

The interaction in this extract is gotten from classroom interaction on the lesson on sentences. The extract exemplifies peer interaction in class as a basis for learning. The extract runs:

1 Teacher Ruth: Look at the first sentence and read carefully

2 Students: (students reading silenty in pair)

3 Teacher Ruth: Agree with your friend. What time of sentence is this? Why? Yes, Paul!

4 Paul: It is a simple sentence

5 Teacher Ruth: why?

Analysis of Extract E

In this extract, the prompts used by the teacher are mostly procedural prompts. These prompts help the students to follow a particular procedure along with the peer in class to collaboratively arrive at their answers. These prompts perform the function of regulating participation and creating opportunities for collaborative learning. This is seen in the instruction outlined by teacher in line 3: Agree with your friend. What time of sentence is this? Why? Yes, Paul! The use of this prompt in this instance ensures that pupils have adequate time to process information before responding publicly. Such prompts reflect Vygotsky's emphasis on collaborative learning through peer interaction. These prompts help promote deep learner-engagement with the subject being discussed in class.

Extract 6 School F

This extract is gotten from a classroom interaction that emphasises on students understanding of community relationship and social cohesion. The teachers asked a student to read the passage on the selected topic while the other students were asked to listen attentively so that they can respond to the questions that would be asked. The interaction runs thus:

1 Teacher Gift: Have you ever helped someone in your community? (pointing at a student)

2 Jane: yes ma

3 Teacher Gift: How did you help the person?

4 Jane: I helped an old woman to drugs at the shop

5 Teacher Gift: From the passage, is it good to help people

6 Students: (in chorus) yesss!!!

Reflective **Analysis of Extract 6**

prompts such as those employed by Teacher Gift in lines 1 and 3 are used to encourage learners to connect classroom concepts with their personal and lived experiences. In this extract, the teacher's use of these prompts is beyond just serving as a question but it moves

factual recall in a way that encourages the students to do a reflection and evaluation, which could result value formation. This is seen in Jane's response in line 4: I helped an old woman to drugs at the shop. To help in value formation, the Teacher Gift's utterance in line 5: From the passage, is it good to help people is a deliberate targeting of teacher societal moral to the students. This prompt was well interpreted by the students as seen in the response in line 6. This aligns with the perspective of integrating academic learning with authentic social experiences as canvassed by Alexander (202).

Findings and Discussion

Analysis of prompts in classroom interactions of the selected six schools showed close similarities in the use of prompts by teachers of different schools despite differences in in the topics and the different classroom contexts. The analysis showed the commonest type of prompts used by most of these teachers is the elicitation prompts. The elicitation prompt is found to be used at the beginning of new lessons in order to help students foreground on the concepts being developed. The use of clarification and probing prompts often followed elicitation as way of clarifying on the answers provided the students as well as providing them with the opportunity to say more where it is needed. These types are prompts are found to be useful because the provide guides to the students to self-discover concepts rather than being told directly. Across the six public schools, confirmation prompts were seen to have been used by the teachers to encourage learners to speak up and this helps greatly in boosting the confidence of the students while improving on their reasoning ability. Procedural prompts facilitated classroom organisation and collaborative learning, while reflective prompts were particularly evident during treatment of noun, comprehension and passage lessons where teachers encouraged learners to relate classroom concepts to everyday experiences.

The use of prompts by the teachers across the six schools functioned mostly as directive speech acts with the locutionary function of stimulating students' participation, negotiating meaning, and scaffolding learning in classroom interaction. The understudied prompts as used by the teachers have enabled the teachers and the students to sustain classroom interaction, encourage collaborative learning, and sustain learners' engagement with classroom activities. The findings of this study showed that prompts constitutive and indispensable pragmatic resources used in classroom interaction. These prompts are used in consistent manner with Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), teacher prompts have been used to influence learners' cognitive and communicative behaviour. However, these prompts were generally indirect and supportive, preserving learners' face and confidence while encouraging classroom participation by the students.

The findings on the use of prompts by the teachers also support Grice's Cooperative Principle as information were given in the right quantity, quality and in very clear manner. The teachers have employed follow-up prompts to guide learners' responses whenever violation of any of the conversational maxims occurs. Through the use of clarification prompts, requests prompts, probing prompts, and confirmation prompts, teachers facilitated successful meaning negotiation and maintained cooperative classroom interaction. The findings of this study corroborates Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory as it demonstrates as scaffolding function of prompts as mechanisms that enables learners to accomplish tasks beyond their immediate independent abilities. Finally, the analysis showed that the teachers' use of prompts as a sophisticated pragmatic strategy for managing classroom interaction helps in facilitating meaning negotiation, promoting learner participation, and supporting cognitive development. These findings reinforce previous studies by Mercer and Howe, and Alexander.

Summary and Conclusion

This study investigated the pragmatic significance of prompts in classroom interaction in six public primary schools in Plateau State, Nigeria. The study recognises that classroom teaching and learning are communicative in ways that teachers and students construct meaning through interaction. The study adopted a qualitative classroom discourse approach and collected through non-participant observation and audio recordings of classroom lessons and field notes of teachers and students interactions from the six selected schools. The Speech Act Theory, Cooperative Principle, and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory guided the analysis in this study. These theories allowed for the examination of prompts as communicative acts, interactional pragmatic resources, and scaffolding mechanisms within naturally occurring classroom discourse.

Prompts have been shown to perform multiple pragmatic and pedagogical functions in classroom interaction. Prompts are used as interactional resources elicit responses, encourage participation, clarify incomplete or ambiguous contributions, stimulate reasoning, confirm understanding, organize classroom activities, and encourage learners to reflect on their experiences through classroom activities. The pragmatic functions of prompts include being used as strategies to guide students towards independent reasoning and participation in classroom discourse. Also, prompts are useful in meaning negotiation. Prompts therefore served as important mechanisms through which teachers and pupils collaboratively constructed meaning.

Another important finding of this study was that prompts can be used as scaffolding devices in classroom activities. The finding also show that the use of prompt as a means through

which teachers support learners' cognitive development and promote is important in ensuring independent learning by the students. Prompts are therefore used to serve additional function in the selected classrooms by helping teachers to bridge linguistic differences and sustain classroom interaction.

To conclude, the significance of prompts lies in their capacity to make classroom communication more interactive, responsive, and productive. When strategically employed, prompts enable teachers and pupils to negotiate meaning, collaboratively construct knowledge, and develop understanding collaboratively. Prompts should are recognized as fundamental to effective classroom discourse. Prompts are important area of continued research in educational pragmatics, applied linguistics, and language education in Nigeria.

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