

## Ellis' (2005) Ten Principles for Language-Teacher Education: A Review from the Ghanaian Context

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### ABSTRACT

Language learning is a multifarious activity. One reason owing to this multifarious nature of language learning is the fact that all languages have four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Therefore, mastery of language teaching and learning demands obligation on the part of both the learner and the facilitator, in terms of applying some rules and principles. Since principles for language teaching are essential in language education, several of them abound. Therefore, this paper is a review of Ellis' (2005) ten (10) principles for language-teacher education. Specifically, the paper employed narrative review design which summarises selected texts on basis of the author's experience, existing theories and models (Noguchi, 2006). There is no consensus on the standard structure of narrative review (Noguchi, 2006). Our review of the selected text – Ellis (2005) – was therefore, basically centred on the strengths and weaknesses of the 10 principles, as well as our perspectives of the principles from the Ghanaian context, since language teaching and culture are intertwined. The paper is segmented into three parts – introduction, the principles, and the conclusion. The introduction discusses various definitions, functions, and linguistic components of languages in general.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the core of humanity. Antique definition by Sapir (1921) states that 'language is a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols.' Thus, language is a complex human phenomenon without which communication is difficult. Language is perceived by Chomsky (1957:13) as 'a set of finite or infinite of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements.' This definition according to Chomsky is true for all natural languages because they have a finite number of phonemes (or letters in its alphabet) and each sentence is represented as a sequence of these phonemes (or letters).

Every language has functions. Five main functions of language have been identified by Leech (1974). These are informational, expressive, directive, aesthetic, and

phatic functions. The informational function enables us deliver, describe entities, and give out information to target audience. The expressive function helps us to communicate our feelings, thoughts, dreams, aspirations, ideas to people. The direction function, which is a function of social control and interpersonal interaction, is used to induce certain actions or reactions (Leech, 1974). An example of such reaction is a command. Another characteristic of the directive function is that the response of a hearer is even more significant than a thought expressed by a speaker, since this reaction determines whether such a phrase achieved the target or not. The aesthetic function doesn't have a specific purpose. The aesthetic function just enables us to use words as tools of poetic art, and as certain signs (Leech, 1974). Thus, the beauty of some selected words and phrases is more vital than the worth of the information. For example, when you are describing the dress code of female entity, you can use

adjectives such as beautiful, elegant, devastating, and stunning in series. This creates aesthetic atmosphere. The phatic function is used to maintain social relationships, and to initiate or continue a discourse (Leech, 1974). For example, when two individuals meet for social discourse, they may discuss politics, the economy of a country, work-life balance, health, weather, education and so on. Usually, the reason for such topical issues in our discourse may be centred on talking and maintenance of social relationships. The participants may not have interest in the topics for discussion.

Language learning efficiency is improved by the participant's own comprehension of the entire process and the importance of embarking on such a process. It also involves the learner to be able to make choices about the process, and the learning aids which are important, meaningful and practical (Van Lier, 1996). The linguistic components of language facilitate systematic and methodical language teaching and learning. According to Freeman and Freeman (2004) the linguistic components the learner and the teacher need to delve into are syntax (sentence structure), phonology (sound system), lexicon (vocabulary), semantics (meaning), and pragmatics (usage).

Principles are essential in teaching and learning these linguistic components. A principle is as a basic rule that has received massive recognition as a basis for executing a course of action. Debates and developments about principles of language teaching and learning have been continuing. The intricacy of contexts and the greater appreciation of the subjects lead us to the conclusion that the solution of a single, universal, optimum method for teaching and learning contemporary languages does not exist (Quist, 2000). However, Ellis (2005) has propounded 10 principles for language-teacher education. This paper therefore reviews his 10 principles from the Ghanaian context.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***2.1 Formulaic Expressions and Rule-based Competence***

The first principle of Ellis (2005) states that 'instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence'. Thus, for learners to be proficient in a second language, acquisition of both prefabricated patterns of expressions and some grammatical rules is vital. As the use of the fixed or prefabricated patterns

helps the learner to be fluent; that of rule-based enables the learner to develop basic editing skills which eventually assist the learner in achieving accuracy in both written and spoken L2 (Skehan 1998).

A number of authorities have recognized the role of both prefabricated patterns and grammatical rules in the teaching of the L2 learner. According to Foster (2001) formulaic expressions in language use has gained an extensive recognition to the extent that even native speakers have been shown to employ a much larger number of it (formulaic expressions) than even advanced L2 learners do. Ellis (1996) has suggested that learners learn grammar by first internalizing and then analyzing fixed sequences. Long (1991) on his part endorses rule-based competence and has accordingly referred to it as 'focus-on-forms approach.'

Although both rule-based competence and formulaic expressions have received massive endorsement by great thinkers, they have some demerits. Myles (2004), for example, has warned curriculum designers and teachers about the fact that rule-based competence can lead to students learning rote-memorized patterns as in internalizing abstract rules.

To facilitate fluency in language teaching and learning, Ghanaian teachers of English and French language, can create prefabricated patterns and rule-based structures for their learners. Such structures may focus on registers used in specific contexts such as airport, financial institution, school, restaurant, just to mention a few. However, overdependence on rule-based and formulaic expressions could lead to rote-learning which eventually could succeed in killing the creative thinking ability of the learner. Consequently, Ellis (2002) has proposed that it may be important focusing on formulaic expressions at the initial stages of the L2 learner and that the teaching of grammar could be deferred until a later date.

### ***2.2 Focusing on Meaning***

The second principle states that 'instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning.' Ellis (2005) categories this kind of meaning into two forms – semantic meaning (that is the meanings of lexical items or of specific grammatical structures) and pragmatic meaning (that is the highly contextualized meanings that arise in acts of communication). There is sense in this principle. Of course, if learners do not understand the text that they learn, it becomes an

abstract phenomenon. Thus, for L2 learners to understand the text they treat in class the facilitator should ensure that the key words are effectively treated. For example, at the lower level in Ghana, the facilitator's use of codeswitching may lead to the attainment of semantic and pragmatic meanings of the target language.

Instructionally, the approaches required for semantic and pragmatic meanings should not be the same (Ellis 2005). With semantic meaning, the facilitator and the learners can treat language as an object (and by this the individual items in the language could be given the maximum treatment); but in the case of the pragmatic meaning, the two parties – the facilitator and the learner – need to view the L2 as a tool for communicating and to function as communicators. So pragmatic meaning is the contextual meaning that the learner derives from the text. If facilitators could therefore aid learners in focusing on both, semantic and pragmatic meanings, communication may be smooth.

### **2.3 Focusing on Form**

In principle three, Ellis (2005) has suggested that 'instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form.' In SLA, this is to say that, giving attention to form is vital for acquisition. For instance, Schmidt (1994) has argued that learning cannot take place without conscious attention on form. Form in this context could be looked at from different dimensions. In the first place, it refers to a general idea of seeing language as a unit. Thus, to Schmidt (2001) there are some specific structures of the language that L2 learners are supposed to focus on. For example, the grammar, morphology and orthography of a language are all kinds of form. Again, form, could mean that learners need to attend to the graphic or phonetic instantiations of linguistic forms. Thus, the sounds of a language are also considered as form. Focus on form, moreover, might be assumed to refer to awareness of some underlying abstract rule.

To Schmidt (2001) instruction can cater to a focus on form in a number of ways: one, through grammar lessons which have been designed to teach certain grammatical features such as: word classes, phrases, clauses and sentences. Two, it can also be done through tasks that require learners to understand and process specific grammatical structures in the input, and/or to produce the structures in the performance of

the task. An example of this grammatical structure is ambiguity and how they can be avoided in written and spoken English. Also, by means of methodological options such as (a) the provision of time for strategic and on-line planning (Yuan and Ellis, 2003; Foster and Skehan, 1996) and (b) corrective feedback (Lyster, 2004) attention could be given to form.

Our observation in the area of teaching and learning of English and French languages in most SLA classrooms in Ghana is that most teachers do their best to focus on form through the teaching of some grammatical rules; but there is a challenge in the application of some methodological options like using corrective feedback.

### **2.4 Implicit and Explicit Knowledge**

In principle four, Ellis (2005) has argued that 'instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge.' In second language research, explicit knowledge refers to the 'knowledge that is available to the learner as a conscious representation' (Ellis 1994:355). With this knowledge, the learner is able to explain some concepts without the use of technical terms. Implicit knowledge on the other hand is where an L2 learner explains an error or a concept with the use of technical terms. This is known as 'metalingual knowledge' (Ellis 1994:355). For example, when a learner explains the error in the sentence below:

*The Mr Osei was looking for you,*

as this: '*Mr Osei* cannot be used with *the*', we say the learner has exhibited explicit knowledge. However, if the explains the error as: 'Proper nouns should not be preceded by definite articles except under rare cases (for example, we have a rare case like *the Gambia.*)', then we can conclude that the learner has exhibited implicit knowledge. By this, he or she has been able to use a particular jargon for cataloging linguistic conception.

In the teaching and learning of English and French languages in Ghana, especially at the second-cycle and tertiary levels, emphasis should first be placed on implicit knowledge since there are situations where some marking schemes of some examination papers

give credit to candidates who are able to employ some terms in cataloging linguistic conception. We believe that when implicit knowledge is well developed, it will automatically lead to explicit knowledge.

### **2.5 Instruction and Learner's Built-in Syllabus**

Principle five states that “instruction needs to take into account the learner’s ‘built-in syllabus’”. By built-in syllabus, Corder (1967) suggests that learners have their own natural order means for learning grammar as implicit knowledge. This idea is in consonance with early research into naturalistic L2 acquisition which showed that learners follow a ‘natural’ order and sequence of acquisition (Ellis 2005). Thus, they (L2 learners) learn different grammatical structures in relatively fixed and universal order and the overall mastering of each grammatical structure is achieved via sequence of stages of acquisition.

Ellis (2005) has proposed three ways through which instruction can take account of the learner’s built-in syllabus. First, teachers should adopt a zero-grammar approach. Thus, a task-based approach that makes no attempt to predetermine the linguistic content of a lesson should be employed. Learners will learn in a natural way. Second, teachers should ensure that learners are developmentally ready to acquire a specific target feature. This is possible if an approach to cater for individual differences is adopted. Third, teachers should focus while teaching on explicit rather than implicit knowledge. This is because explicit is not subject to the same developmental constraints as implicit knowledge.

Consequently, if teachers of English and French languages should learn to make room for individual differences while teaching, instruction could take into account the individual learner’s built-in syllabus.

### **2.6 The Relationship between Extensive L2 Input and Instructed Language Learning**

Ellis’s sixth principle – successful instructed language learning requires extensive L2 input – is about the contribution of input in L2 acquisition. There has been a plethora of studies about the role that input plays in SLA. Gass (1997) has pointed out that second language (L2) learning cannot take place without input of some sort. According to Corder (1967) input is “what goes in” not what is available for going in. Ellis (2005:217) argues that ‘language learning, whether it occurs in a naturalistic or an instructed context, is a slow and laborious process.’ So, young learners

acquiring an L1 usually use a maximum of five years before full grammatical competence is achieved. Ellis and Wells (1980) have revealed that there is relationship between the variation in speed of acquisition of children and the amount and the quality of input learners receive. This is not different in L2 studies. For L2 learners to be victorious in their lessons, input should be comprehensive. Thus, massive exposure of the target language leads to successful acquisition.

The question is how can the language teacher ensure that his or her students have access to extensive input? According to Ellis (2005:217) this can be achieved if (1) extensive use of the L2 inside the classroom is encouraged. By this, the L2 should be both the medium and the object of instruction. (2) The L2 teacher should create more opportunities for students to receive input outside the classroom. An example of this situation is the provision of a lot of reading programmes.

In Ghana, the English and French teachers could provide comprehensible input for the L2 learner by: (1) creating more exchange programmes for the learner; (2) using a lot of audio-visual aids (in the target language) in delivering of lessons; (3) encouraging the L2 learners to monitor the media being broadcasted and telecasted in the target language; (4) occasionally, asking for the services of a native speaker in terms of delivering a lesson or two to the L2 learners; and (5) if possible encouraging the L2 learners to take a vacation outside the country (Ghana) where they (the L2 learners) could interact with native speakers of the target languages of English and French.

### **2.7 The Relationship between Successful Instructed Language Learning and Output**

The seventh principle states that ‘successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output.’ The output hypothesis holds that language learners will pay attention to phrases when they can attach meaning to (Swain 1985). Since, speaking the language is different from understanding it, the conditions under which the act of speaking and also writing take place can either facilitate or impede the process of second language learning.

Most researchers have in recent times, acknowledged the role of output in second language acquisition. For example, Skehan (1998) drawing on Swain (1995) has suggested that output can make a number of

contributions: one, it provides opportunities for learners to develop discourse skills; two, it is important for helping learners to have an authority in communication; and three, it facilitates automatization of existing knowledge (this enables the knowledge to become part of the learner).

Therefore, in developing the course of study for the L2 learner in Ghana, emphasis should be placed on activities such as: interaction within the classroom with teacher and peers, practising at home what has been taught at school, constantly encouraging learners to reflect upon the language learned and internalizing linguistic knowledge.

### ***2.8 The Relationship between L2 Interaction and L2 Proficiency***

The eight principle, says that 'the opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing L2 proficiency. This principle talks about the role that interaction plays in fostering the acquisition of language in the L2 classroom setting. According to Long (1996), the Interaction Hypothesis holds the view that, 'interaction fosters acquisition when a communication problem arises and learners are engaged in negotiating for meaning. Thus, interaction helps input to be understandable; it also provides corrective feedback, and pushes learners to modify their own output in uptake. Again, interaction serves as a form of mediation. This idea is backed by the sociocultural theory of mind hypothesis, which also avows that interaction serving as mediation enables learners to construct new forms and perform new functions collaboratively (Lantolf, 2000).

So, how can interaction facilitate acquisition? Johnson (1995) has identified four key requirements for interaction to create an enabling environment for acquisition to take place in the L2 classroom. These are: creating contexts of language use; providing opportunities for learners to use the language in expressing their own personal meanings; helping students to participate in taxing language-related activities; and offering a full range of contexts that cater for a 'full performance' in the language.

Consequently, the L2 teacher in the Ghanaian context, in his or her bid to achieve superior language performance in his teaching, could (1) allow his students to join debating clubs, and (2) encourage inter-personal, person to group, mass, and mediated

forms of formal communication. The use of formal oral presentations, for example, can trigger massive L2 interaction which can lead to L2 proficiency in Ghanaian institutions.

### ***2.9 Instruction and Individual Differences in Learners***

According to Ellis's ninth principle, 'instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners.' Thus, Ellis believes that individuals differ especially when it comes to learning; therefore, the language teacher should create room for individual differences when teaching. Ellis (2005), again, argues that learning in particular, is more successful when: (a) the instruction is matched to students' particular aptitude for learning, and (b) the students are motivated. What this means is that, a successful learning is dependent on the aptitude of the learner towards the subject matter being discussed. For this to happen, the instructor has to investigate the learner's ability for a particular subject matter before planning his or her lessons. If this is not done, the likelihood of the learner not taking active part in the instruction process is very high.

Motivation is also another strong variable that has the propensity of affecting the learner and his or her learning. Motivation could be internally imposed (intrinsic) or externally imposed (extrinsic). If there is an external force that pushes the learner to learn, performance is not very encouraging. However, performance is high when the learner has an inner desire to achieve something or himself or herself.

On the issue of instruction being matched to students' particular aptitude for learning, language aptitudes tests could be used to identify different learning styles. After that, the learner's preferred approach to learning could be sought for (Wesche, 1981). Thus, those tests (aptitudes) could help the teacher to have a fair idea about how different learners learn so that this will inform the teacher's decision about the kind of teaching that should be done in order to meet those learning styles. When these different learning styles are known by the teacher, he or she can vary his or her teaching style(s) so as to make room for varieties of learning activities. This is known as a flexible teaching approach. Moreover, the teacher can use simple learner-training materials (e.g Ellis and Sinclair 1989) specifically designed to make students aware of their

own styles of learning and to develop awareness of alternative approaches.

Alternative approaches are the different ways of teaching a subject or a topic. For example, in teaching reading, the alternative approaches could either take the form of the teacher himself reading the text aloud or asking the learners to read it aloud in turns, or asking them to read it silently or asking students questions after they had read a paragraph or two of the text. When these tasks are alternated, it makes it possible for the learners to learn better since at least their learning method(s) might have been used.

### 2.10 Assessment of Learners' Proficiency

The 10th principle states that 'in assessing learners' proficiency it is important to examine free as well as controlled production.' Norris and Ortega (2000) as cited in Ellis (2005) have identified four types of measurement: (1) metalinguistic judgement (e.g. a grammaticality judgement test), (2) selected response (e.g., multiple choice), (3) constrained constructed response (e.g., gap filling exercises), and (4) free constructed response (e.g., a communicative task). Effective proficiency assessment of the L2 learner should include both free-based and controlled-based tasks.

In free production assessments, the L2 learner is at liberty to express his or her opinion on a subject matter in diverse ways. Consequently, there is nothing like one correct response in free production. Examples of free production language tasks that most Ghanaian examiners use in their classrooms are essay-based and letter writing questions. But, at the higher level of education, teachers may also explore critical review and mini-project tasks.

In controlled production, there is always one correct response to a question. So, the L2 learner does not have the opportunity of expressing his or her opinion on an issue. Examples of controlled production tasks that most language examiners in Ghana explore are: multiple-choice questions, fill-in questions, true or false questions, and short answer questions. If English and French teachers in Ghana employ an all-inclusive approach (both free and controlled production) in assessing students, students are likely to excel since the language teacher would have made provision for all categories of learners to experience a certain level of success in tasks given.

### 3. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, these 10 principles, though drawn on a variety of theoretical perspectives, have certain limitations. Ellis (2005) himself, had confirmed of its lack of social sensitivity: 'it fails to acknowledge the importance of social context and social relations in the language learning process as propounded by Block (2003). This explains the reason why the current study reviewed the 10 principles from the Ghanaian context only. Because the 10 principles of instructed language learning as an area of study in L2 has become one of the most controversial areas in SLA studies, L2 researchers from diverse social and cultural contexts may review our current review and also review Ellis's 10 principles from their perspectives. Such local studies can foster teaching and learning of L2 in diverse jurisdictions.

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