

**PROMOTING CRITICAL LITERACY SKILLS IN PROVERBS' TEACHING AND LEARNING  
GRAMMATICAL STRUCTURES FOR SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**

**BY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper aims at x-raying new method of teaching critical literacy at primary and junior secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The new method is using English proverbs in the teaching and learning grammatical structures for sustainable educational development. Barnwell's theory of language propounded in 1974 which states that 'language system is an open-ended system, because it constantly develops and expands to accommodate new ideas' was used to advance the thesis of this topic. Primary data for this study was sourced from existing literatures. This paper concludes that using English proverbs in teaching grammatical structures can make it easier for the learners to retain the topics taught and also to stick in their mind, as well as become part of the learners' usage. Use of English proverbs also serves as a means of effective vocabulary development. The paper recommends that researches on other methods such as psycho-grammatical descriptions, tense and aspect in English, and context-sensitive grammatical structures, among others, be conducted.

**KEY-WORDS:** Critical literacy, Proverbs, Grammatical structure, Sustainable education

## Introduction

Nigeria's woes in primary and junior secondary school education are not only in the period of economic recession, but also in dire need of promoting sustainable education a case of primary and junior secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The target of this study is to teach grammatical structures especially with the use of English proverbs. Students' use of English proverb to remember lessons on grammatical structures cannot be undermined. Perhaps teachers of English can exploit proverb method of making sentence patterns more memorable to their students. Literacy is the ability to read and write. It inculcates in children permanent ability to communicate meaningfully and effectively to proffer solution to problems. It is a means of identification, understanding, interpretation, and creation of new and modern ideas to communicate with an increasingly information-rich in the fast-changing world. Literacy skills are many but this study is interested in critical thinking and vocabulary acquisition.

Critical literacy has no pin-down definition, but in this paper refers to an interaction between the teacher and the learner in particular, and the learner and the text or learning environment in general. Oyinloye (2023) is very emphatic that critical literacy helps students to digest subjects they have read and not just brush it on the surface or cram the information. It improves intellectual growth and affective abilities of learners. This is the major reason teachers should always search for better approaches, methods and materials to enhance effective and productive teaching and learning as demonstrated in the use of English proverb in teaching grammatical structure. Proverb and critical literacy are examples of language system.

Critical literacy leads to **critical thinking** of how to involve learners in active process of knowledge construction and meaning instead of passively receiving information. Folasade Esther Jimola & Bolaji Rechael Borode (2023) insists that critical literacy starts with reading or listening, speaking or writing, and that it is a central thinking skill that seeks to develop learners. It involves the questioning and examination of ideas, and requires learners to synthesize, analyze, interpret, evaluate and respond to the text they read or listened to.

Theoretically, Barnwell (1974) sees language as a system of creative art, which facilitates the expression of ideas. He further describes the language system as an 'open-ended' system which constantly develops and expands to accommodate new ideas. Nevertheless, man essentially meditates with his world through language, which is one of the most conservative social institutions that shape both perception and behavior, as this study uses English proverb to influence human thoughts and actions. Generally speaking, proverbs are loaded with figurative mode of expression foregrounded in metaphor.

**Proverbs** are short popular meaningful sayings among people. It is a short sentence that people often quote to give advice or comment on life. Proverb is known as adage, aphorism and apothegm being a

brief popular saying, such as “Too many cooks spoil the broth”. It gives advice about how people should live or express a belief that is generally thought to be true. Nweze (2023) opines that Proverbs usually come in the form of moral advice or truth expressed in economy of words. It is rich in imagery and mainly used to elucidate a point in a story or in a situation. Nweze (2022) quotes Finnegan’s (1976) proverb as being a part and parcel of a language which is an important tool of communication to every human group. Through proverbs, ideas are shared, relationships are established, information is communicated, instructions are given and even problems are solved.

Of a truth, proverbs are culture bound. Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and other languages have proverbs as the English does. Among the Igbos, Achebe (1958) opines that the art of conversation is highly respected and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten. Kosemani (2000) in his discussion of ‘... Concept of African Morality’ cited Hausa proverb that ‘character is a line drawn on a rock, nobody can erase it’. Also, Yoruba proverb says that ‘good character is a symbol of beauty’. This research is not interested in Igbo or other ethnic, but focuses on English proverbs. Biblically, (Proverbs 21:23) says that if you want to stay out of troubles, be careful of what you say. (Proverb 21:19) says, better to live in desert than with a nagging complaining wife. In this study, classified English proverbs are cited and discussed in details as a new method of teaching grammatical structures.

### **The importance of English proverbs:**

English proverb method demystifies the difficulties surrounding the learning and forgetting grammatical structures of English Language in L2 environment. It is axiomatic that one of the requirements of a good proverb is that it should be memorable, if it is not easily remembered; it will quickly fall into disuse. Proverbs to be used in teaching must be easily memorable and richly meaningful in order to establish a moral point. It is quite unarguable that English proverbs may not always be as colourful as their indigenous African counterparts, but every proverb is important in effective communication, and in social life.

**Grammatical structure** is the proper arrangement and effective respect of the value of the rules governing the grammar of a language. Grammar is the rules of a language which describes how sentences are formed. Every dialect of English has rules of grammar. If someone’s language is grammatical, it is correct because it obeys the rules of grammar. Grammatical structure combines related words to form larger units of phrases, clauses or sentences. Examples of grammatical structures that are discussed in this paper and well-illustrated by using suitable English proverbs are: position of frequency adverbs, conditional sentences, clauses of time, relative (or adjectival) clauses, verbs in the passive, certain verbal constructions, structures of comparison, use of like, as, and alike, reflexive pronouns, use (or absence) of the definite and indefinite articles, indefinite pronouns, determiners and determiner-pronouns.

### **Purpose of the study:**

The purpose of the study is mainly to use English proverbs to foster method of teaching grammatical structures to both L1 and L2 English speakers to understand the grammar lesson, and never to forget it. Use of English proverbs method also serves as a means of vocabulary development in teaching and learning of the structures of grammar.

### **Findings:**

Education managers believe that the inability of learners to read well, speak and understand well is often blamed on teachers. Over the years, observations have been that the English Language has posed a problem for both the teachers of the language and those that have attempted to acquire it. We also believe that since the English Language like many other languages spoken in the world is subject to dynamisms. There is the dire need to use all available resources in its teaching and learning to increase its chances of developments and understanding grammar in particular, and all the six language skills of reading, speaking, listening, viewing, representing, and writing in general.

Learning and forgetting grammatical structures of the English language is in the increase, and this paper has targeted to use English proverb method to forestall such a malaise. Ordinarily, many English proverbs are easily remembered and spoken according to the context of the situation. Many younger scholars disregard proverbs as the business of old people, and forgetting that it is a very important aspect of language communication. Also, grammatical structures always sound so strange to many old and younger scholars who pay less attention to it, and always speak ungrammatically. This study has carefully used English proverbs to teach reasonable examples of grammatical structures in order to demystify the fear surrounding English proverbs and grammatical structures to make sure that learning has taken place for sustainable educational development.

### **Methodology:**

English proverb is used here as a new method to facilitate the teaching and learning of grammatical structures. Keer (1969) emphasized how he used some examples of English proverb as one of the patterns of grammatical structures to teach a lesson on conditional sentences like: 'If wishes were horses, beggars would ride'. He was surprised that after six weeks of a long vacation, a majority of the students remembered the proverb perfectly well but could not recall the topic that the proverb illustrated. Students' use of English proverb to remember lessons on grammatical structures cannot be undermined. Perhaps teachers of English can exploit English proverb method of making the learning of important grammatical structures and conditional sentence patterns more memorable to learners.

Nevertheless, care must be taken to avoid any aspect of the grammatical structure which is likely to cause confusion or difficulty to learners. To be avoided also, are questions or short answer related proverbs such as: ‘Pennywise, pound foolish’ is not typical of normal modern usage. Another group such as: ‘An apple a day keeps the doctor away’ or: ‘One swallow does not make a summer’ reflects an alien environment and would require laborious explanations to African and other alien students. The underlined-words in the English proverbs’ columns are the examples of grammatical structures under study:

S/N	Grammatical structures	English proverbs
(a)	Position of frequency adverbs	(i) It is <u>never too late</u> to mend.
		(ii) Barking dogs <u>seldom</u> bite.
		(iii) A bad workman <u>always</u> blames his tools.
		(iv) Sticks and stones may break your bones, but Words will <u>never</u> .
(b)	Conditional sentences	(i) <u>If at first you don't succeed</u> , try, try, and try again.
		(ii) <u>If it were not for hope</u> , the heart would break.
		(iii) <u>If wishes were horses</u> , beggars would ride.
		(iv) <u>If I had wings</u> , I could fly.
(c)	Clauses of Time	(i) <u>While there's life</u> , there's hope.
		(ii) <u>When the cat is away</u> , the mice play.
		(iii) <u>Don't count your chicks before</u> they are hatched.
		(iv) <u>Never trouble trouble until</u> trouble troubles you.
(d)	Relative (or Adjectival) Clauses	(i) It's an <u>ill wind that blows nobody</u> good.
		(ii) Don't bite <u>the hand that feeds</u> you.
		(iii) People <u>who live in glass houses</u> shouldn't throw stones.
		(iv) He <u>who hesitates</u> is lost.
(e)	Verbs in the passive	(i) A man <u>is known by</u> the company he keeps.
		(ii) The road to hell <u>is paved with</u> good intentions.
		(iii) Rome <u>was not built</u> in a day.
		(iv) Fingers <u>were made</u> before forks.

(f)	Certain Verbal Constructions	(i)Make: <b><u>Absence makes</u></b> the heart grow fonder.
		(ii)Let: Live and <b><u>let live</u></b> .
		(iii)No need: there is <b><u>no need crying</u></b> over spilt milk.
		(iv)Be worth: What's <b><u>worth doing at all</u></b> is worth doing well.
(g)	Structures of Comparison	(i)Truth is <b><u>stronger</u></b> than fiction.
		(ii)Empty vessels make the <b><u>most</u></b> sound.
		(iii) <b><u>More</u></b> haste, <b><u>less</u></b> speed.
		(iv)The <b><u>higher</u></b> you climb, the <b><u>harder</u></b> you fall.
(h)	Use of 'Like', 'As', and 'Alike'	(i)Like: There's no place <b><u>like</u></b> home.
		(ii)As: When in Rome, do <b><u>as</u></b> the Romans do.
		(iii)The Devil is <b><u>not as</u></b> black as he is painted.
		(iv)Alike: Great minds think <b><u>alike</u></b> .
(i)	Reflexive Pronouns	(i)God helps those that help <b><u>themselves</u></b> .
		(ii)Every ass likes to hear <b><u>himself</u></b> bray.
		(iii)Take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of <b><u>themselves</u></b> .
		(iv)Be careful not to shoot <b><u>yourself</u></b> in the leg.
(j)	Use of Definite and Indefinite Articles	(i)Definite: <b><u>Fools</u></b> rush in where <b><u>angels</u></b> fear to tread.
		(ii)The <b><u>early</u></b> bird catches the <b><u>worm</u></b> .
		(iii)Indefinite: <b><u>Every one's</u></b> business is <b><u>no one's</u></b> Business.
		(iv) <b><u>Everything</u></b> comes to him <b><u>who wants</u></b> .
(k)	Determiners and Determiner-Pronouns	(i)Determiners: <b><u>All works</u></b> and <b><u>no play</u></b> , makes Jack a dull boy.
		(ii) <b><u>All play</u></b> , and <b><u>no works</u></b> , makes Jack a toy.

	(iii)Determiner-Pronouns: One <u>good turn</u> deserves another.
	(iv) <u>Too many</u> cooks spoil the broth.

## Discussions:

- (a) At primary and junior secondary schools' levels, pupils and students find it very difficult to identify adverbs in sentences. In grammar, 'adverb' is a word which gives you more information about the time, place or manner of the action. In the above sentences, frequency adverbs are easily identified as never, seldom, and always.
- (b) 'If' is a conjunction in conditional sentences to mention an event or situation that might happen, might be happening, or might have happened. In the sentences above, pupils and students have learnt that 'if' indicates conditionality in a sentence.
- (c) In grammar, a clause is a group of words which contains a verb. 'Verbs' are underlined in these clauses, 'while there is life', 'when the cat is away', 'don't count your chicks' and 'never trouble trouble until' ('trouble troubles' is colloquial English structure) in the proverb.
- (d) The relative adjectival clauses show that someone is involved in the action, but the doer is not definite, and it could be anybody.
- (e) Verbs in the passive 'is known by', 'is paved with', 'was not built', and 'were made' are clauses that indicate nonresistant eternal actions.
- (f) '...no need crying over a spilt milk'. Everybody knows the nutritional value of milk, and out of carelessness, it is spilt, crying can never recover it; suggesting to be carefully handling our valuables.
- (g) Structures of comparison teach degrees of adjective.
- (h) In the above proverb, 'as' can be used as an adverb or conjunction while 'like' is adjective, 'alike' is adverb in the same manner while 'if' is conjunction on condition.
- (i) In this proverb, pupils and students have learnt that examples of reflexive pronouns are 'themselves', 'yourself', 'himself', 'herself', and 'itself'.
- (j) This proverb contains definite articles 'the fools' and 'the early' and their functions are specific while the pupils and students have learnt the meaning and the use of indefinite articles- 'everyone' means all the people in a group and 'everything' refers to all the objects, activities, or facts in a situation.
- (k) In grammar, a determiner is a word that is used at the beginning of many noun groups in order to indicate which particular thing or person you are referring to. In this proverb, determiners are 'all works and no play' refers to 'a dull boy', while 'all play' and 'no work' refers to 'a toy'. Again, pupils and students have learnt that determiner-pronouns indicate cause and effect responses.



### **Sustainable educational development in Ebonyi State:**

Eze (2023) opines that sustainable educational development is a trend in educational initiatives that promotes concern for others. Sustainability is meant to continue to help and keep you alive or gives you a meaningful sense of direction to succeed in life. Educational development should continue at the same level of activity or pace without harming, but improves, supports, and encourages valuable learning and development. Learners must be equipped with a continuous satisfactory level of proficiency in English language usage in and out of school. There must be a stimulation of reading as pleasurable activity, to ensure promotion of the art of spoken English as a medium for national and international effective communication. The teaching of English at the junior secondary school level should be based on the critical and literacy skills to further sustain the development of various competences already acquired at primary school level; which will in turn help to develop the learners' potentials to the fullest.

### **Strategies for sustainable educational development:**

The strategies are tripartite in nature, meaning that teachers, government and learners are involved. Teachers as stakeholders can engage learners in planning in-depth researchable and activity-based teaching and learning. The teachers themselves should be eager to regularly improve and update their knowledge in their areas of specialization. Teachers also, should be committed and proud of their teaching profession. In order to avoid incompetent and so called mediocre teachers, government should stop using appointment or employment of teachers to compensate their political party faithfuls and campaign supporters.

Government should select and sponsor TRCN certified subject-based-expert teachers to always supervise teaching and learning in the primary and junior secondary school class rooms. For adequate funding, the management of primary and junior secondary schools should be removed from Primary School Boards and Local Government Education Authorities in order to be funded by the presidency. Government should put more effort on retraining of teachers on a regular basis. Also, government should make computer literacy and class-point a must acquire knowledge for all serving teachers. Government should improve teachers' salary; pay them as at when due, including reasonable working condition for better service delivery.

Pupils and students must avoid blind acceptance or being passively submissive to everything the 'so called teacher' says, but should rely on an experienced teacher's guidance on self-study. Teachers' Development Programme (TDP) and *Strengthening Teachers' English Proficiency: STEP* (2017) links sustainable educational development with self-study. It insists on a self-teaching and learning process without the assistance of a teacher or just through a deliberate effort to learn by oneself. Educational

development is a study done at one's pace and time for the purpose of a reasonable feedback for self-improvement and sustainability.

### **Recommendations:**

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations became necessary in tackling and solving them. As this study focuses on the use of English proverbs to teach grammatical structures, further researches are expected to be advanced in the areas of using ethnic languages and dialects to teach literacy. More researches could be conducted on Psycho-Grammatical Descriptions, Tense and Aspect in English, and Context-Sensitive Grammatical Structures among others.

### **Conclusion:**

This study is only a guide to use English proverb to teach and learn grammatical structures because, the list of English proverbs and grammatical structures are inexhaustible. When teaching grammatical structures is challenged, this study will serve as a reminder to provide memorable guide, and inherently interesting examples, likely to stick in the mind and even become part of the learner's own usage. If Ebonyi State in particular and Nigerian society in general desires to meet up-with the global best practices in the development of English Language, then greater attention must be focused on the teacher's capacity development. This research has concluded that promoting critical skills to facilitate the English language literacy, to achieve sustainable educational development is inevitable.

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