

PDF - EFFECT OF THE FUNCTIONAL-NOTIONAL APPROACH ON SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENT IN ENGLISH GRAMMAR IN OWERRI NORTH OF IMO STATE, NIGERIA -

researchcub.info **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the effect of the Functional-Notional Approach (FNA) on students' Achievement in English Grammar in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State. Five research questions and five null hypotheses guided the study. The study adopted a non-equivalent control group quasi-experimental design involving the treatment and control groups. The sample of this study consisted of 162 Junior Secondary School Two (JSS 2) students drawn from three secondary schools out of a population of nineteen (19) government owned secondary schools in Owerri North Local Government Area of Imo State. The multi-stage sampling technique was used to draw the respondents. Intact classes were used in each school for the experiments, so there was no random assignment of the subjects to the treatment and control groups. The instrument used for data collection was an achievement test on English Grammar which consisted of 20 multiple choice items. The lesson plan used for the experimental group was developed using the Indigenous Communicative Lesson Model, while the lesson plan for the control group was developed using the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) which is the conventional method. The instrument for data collection and the lesson plans were face-validated by experts to ascertain the clarity and content coverage of the lesson objectives. A reliability index of the instrument was calculated using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient which yielded a value of 0.84. The internal consistency of the test items was obtained using the Split-Half method by Spearman-Brown, which yielded a value of 0.95. The method of data analysis adopted in the study was the mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to test the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results showed that the students who were exposed to teaching English Grammar using the FNA gained higher mean scores in the achievement test than their counterparts taught using the conventional method-GTM. The study revealed no significant mean difference in the achievement of male and female students taught English Grammar using the FNA. There was a significant mean difference in the achievement of urban and rural students taught English Grammar using the FNA. Finally, the study showed no significant interaction effect of treatment and gender as well as no significant interaction effect of treatment and school location in the achievement of students taught English Grammar. Some educational implications were raised which included the fact that teaching English Grammar with the FNA enhances functional use of grammatical expressions and communicative competence among the learners. English Language teachers should also create learning environment as natural as what the child finds while learning the first language. This will make the language learning process more effective and speedy. Recommendations were made in the study for the students, the English

Language teachers, authors, curriculum planners and authorities in teacher training institutions for the improvement of teaching English Grammar in secondary schools.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **Background of the Study**

Language is the expression of ideas by means of speech sounds combined into words. Words are combined into sentences, and this combination forms ideas into thoughts. Language is also described as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group co-operates. Brown (2001) defines language as an interaction, and interpersonal activity which has a clear relationship with society. In this light, language study has to look at the use (function) of language in context; both its linguistic context (what is uttered before a given piece of discourse) and its social, or situational context (who is speaking, what their social roles are, why they have to come together to speak).

Language is so vital in human existence that there is nothing human beings can do without the function of one form of language or the other. Block & Trager (2010) opine that every physiologically and mentally normal person acquires in childhood, the ability to make use, as both speaker and hearer, of a system of vocal communication that comprises a circumscribed set of noises resulting from movements of certain organs within his throat and mouth. By means of these, he is able to impart information, to express feelings and emotions, to influence the activities of others.

The English Language occupies a unique place in education in Nigeria because of its significant role and status in national life. This observation is made by Baldeh (2011).

Supporting the view, Ezeude (2007, p. 211) posits "It is heartening to recall the enviable position that Nigeria in her National Policy on Education (2004 Edition) accords to language teaching". According to him, languages are grouped under 'A' as core subjects made compulsory at both junior and senior secondary levels. To demonstrate this further, English is made the medium of instruction in the country from the upper primary level to tertiary level of instruction. Furthermore, he observes that English is the language of science and technology; it is the passport to educational advancement and prestigious employment; it is the language of commerce, trade and administration, and a means of national and international communication.

It is against this background that the need for the educational system in the country to keep abreast of the times in language teaching has been emphasized by Ezeude (2007). In the same vein, Baldeh (2011) further notes that an educational failure is primarily a linguistic failure, so a good educational system requires that the products of the system communicate their thoughts, ideas, emotions, and attitudes unambiguously and coherently.

Consequently, the essential use of language as the most remarkable tool for man is stated by Uzoegwu (2005). According to her, man's invention of language has been used for various

purposes such as communication, social interaction, learning, storing information, maintenance and transfer of culture. Therefore it is a means of social control and an instrument that enables man to communicate his thoughts. The English Language, according to Uzoegwu, empowers learners to live a fulfilled life, especially in Nigeria. To buttress its pride of place in the educational system in Nigeria, Olajire (2004) observes that a good pass (credit and above) has become mandatory for transition from primary to Junior Secondary School (JSS), and for admission to all levels of higher education in the country.

From the foregoing, the researcher having been in the system and taught English as a subject for a number of years, has observed a steady decline in students' performance in the subject. As a result, the researcher sees the need to make a contribution in the area of using the Functional-Notional Approach for improving the teaching method in order to enhance students' performance and achievement in communicative skills in English Grammar. The new teaching method in this study, which is the Functional-Notional Approach (FNA), is designed to help students acquire useful skills for the functional use of the language both for social interaction and for creditable performance in internal and external examinations. Essentially, the Functional-Notional Approach is an embodiment of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method. The goal of the CLT is to inculcate communicative competence into the language learner while the FNA actually applies the real communicative approach and techniques to teach the learner the practical use of language skills both in classroom situations and in his social environment. The FNA engages the learner to use language functions such as participating in a dialogue, making requests, asking for information and the like. Consequently, communicative competence is achieved by the learner.

However, some research and documentary evidences in Nigeria prove the fact that students' performance in English Grammar has been poor over the past decades. For instance, in a seminar organised for chief examiners of English Language by WAEC (2010), the Chief Examiners were of the view that the most reliable measurement of language achievement and competence is in Paper 1, and the possible performance in the other papers (2 and 3) should be closely related to it.

To substantiate this view, Uzoegwu (2005) identifies that the poor performance of students in essay writing affects their achievement in English Language because essay writing normally has the highest score in English Language examination. Similarly, in a résumé of the Reports of the Chief Examiners November/December (2008), the Report lamented the fact that candidates exhibited poor knowledge of the rules of grammar which hindered good essay. The Report further cited the following examples of wrong grammar samples in candidates' scripts:

a. Wrong concord: e.g.

(i) This days

(ii) The boys quickly runs for sticks.

b. Wrong tense usage: e.g. Since we leave school.

c. Wrong constructions after the verbs make, allow, enable, etc.e.g.

(i) He made me to learn a trade.

(ii) This will enable me ('to' omitted) process my admission.

d. Other wrong constructions, e.g.

She married lately (late).

e. Wrong expressions: e.g.

(i) You must have to face your studies. (either 'must' or 'haveto', but not both).

(ii) If you are illiterate, you cannot be able to succeed inbusiness (cannot and "be able" only one).

The Report (May/June 2006, p.6) identifies part of the problems as poor teaching techniques, and proffers a possible solution thus: " In order to remedy these problems, teachers at the senior secondary level should expose the candidates to speech, vocabulary development, as well as lexis and structure..... If the students are not adequately exposed to the skills of writing, they will continue to have problems."

In the same vein, the National Examination Council (NECO) syllabus for JSS 1-3 Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE), states clearly:

This new examination syllabus is designed to test level of mastery of basic knowledge, skills and abilities in communicative competence which the candidate is expected to have acquired in the course of 9 year basic education....how well the candidate has been equipped to communicate effectively in the context of the different kinds of everyday situations.... (NECO 2007,p.37).

Also expressing a deep concern over the fallen standards of English, Eyisi (2006, p. 9) states:

The problem is made explicit as one engages in conversations with students in secondary schools and even higher institutions of learning. The grammatical statements which they utter in sheer boldness send shudders to one's spine. They only possess a loose grasp of the Grammatical Structure of English .

Eyisi observes further that the sad situation depicts to a large extent why adequate attention should be given to teaching and learning of English grammar in schools.

In fact, the need for teaching of grammar in schools has been emphasised by language scholars including Anyanwu (2007) who offers about four(4) reasons why grammar should be taught in schools, namely:-

Languages differ and grammar is part of every language;

Languages are formally taught;

Grammar is a mental discipline;

There is a heuristic intent to guide the learner.

As a mental discipline, Anyanwu explains that grammar helps to expand the frontiers of knowledge, to increase our repertoire of choices among its numerous paradigms and to sharpen our perception of the relatedness of grammar as a whole and grammar to the real world in which we live. Since grammar causes the mind to grow and the learner has come to feed his mind on knowledge, he must be given the best of the knowledge of grammar through informed, sustained and adequate teaching of the discipline.

There are two broad types of grammar which Anyanwu (2007) posits. They are (a) prescriptive grammar and (b) descriptive grammar. Prescriptive grammar, according to Anyanwu, emerged as a result of rules and prescription which dominated the English Language reforms. Under that arrangement, every attempt was made to reduce English to rules which users were expected to memorize and use. Anyanwu (2007) regards prescriptivists as mentalists, traditionalists, diachronic grammarians, and so on. However, they have to their credit the elaborate structured discipline which language learning enjoys today.

On the other hand, descriptive grammar aims at identifying the language functions before the description. A language has structures which must be identified from the morphemic layer to the clause and sentence layer. Descriptive grammarians, like their prescriptive counterparts have also been regarded as functionalists, behaviourists, synchronic grammarians, and so on. Anyanwu (2007) therefore recommends the descriptive grammar because of its communicative and functional tendencies. However, he advises that the prescriptiveness be applied when all description has been said and done. The role of the teacher in this regard is crucial and decisive. He is the captain and the model. He must be competent and knowledgeable. Incompetent teachers do not only induce errors, they reinforce them.

In language learning, it has come to be appreciated that mastery of grammar can no longer be relegated to the background. Okwor (2007) observes that grammar is an integral feature of English Language teaching and learning in varying degrees from primary to tertiary levels of our educational system. In the same vein, Eyisi (2006) adds that every game has a set of rules that govern its *modus operandi*. To be successful, players must not only acquaint themselves with these rules, but must also endeavour to apply them in the course of playing. In the same vein, human language is a rule-governed behaviour. For one to use it effectively, one must not only be familiar with its rules but must also be able to apply them correctly during usage. On a somewhat concluding note, Baldeh (2011) reaffirms that it would be a great disservice to the education system if the teaching of grammar is abandoned in the system for any reason. Thus, if the eager Nigerian youth must forge ahead in the liberal arts, social sciences and science and technology, and display responsible roles in the country, then they desperately need effective communication skills.

From the foregoing, the researcher in this study is taking a stand with the functionalists and focusing the study on the need to produce language users who will be able to use the English

Language to perform academic functions as well as social and interactional functions in given situations. This approach is quite opposed to the Grammar Based method which produces only users of 'bookish' English.

The Functional-Notional Approach lays emphasis on communicative competence in language teaching. It employs the application of language functions to teach the real communication in the classroom. The teacher focuses on inculcating the social aspects of the language in the learner, as well as the roles of the individual learners in language interaction. In essence, Communicative Language Teaching is the broad view of the Functional-Notional Approach. It applies the communicative techniques in language teaching. Therefore, the language class is one of more student-talk, less teacher-talk. The purposes and processes of verbal interaction are expressed through role-play, group activity, seeking and getting information, and non-verbal stimuli including visuals, gesture and mime. These techniques place certain demands on the teacher for their preparation and execution. In practice, the Functional-Notional syllabus does not invent new language to teach, rather it selects the language which the learner is familiar with, by making use of a set of criteria. A very important characteristic of the Functional-Notional Approach is the fact that it takes into consideration the individual needs of the language learner by the different types of interaction and communication the learner may be involved in.

In this study, the researcher has applied the methods of verbal interaction, simulation, conversation and dialogue to expose students to the language functions of asking for permission, making requests, expressing necessities and obligations with the appropriate Modal Auxiliaries. The method is in line with the view expressed by Opeibi (2004, p.387), where he observes that it is not just enough to teach the rules of grammar which is referred to as "a bottom-up approach", it is as well important to employ the pragmatic methods of looking at language as a tool for communicative purposes. The bottom-up approach as explained by Opeibi (2004) is an approach which focuses on the formal language system, often in isolated sentences without showing how that system operates in context. It divides communication into discrete levels which can be dealt with separately. The "top-bottom approach," on the other hand, regards all the levels of a language as a whole, working together to achieve a specific goal, such as a social relationship.

The tendency in the approach is to supplement the narrow grammatical perspective restricted to phonology and syntax, with an analysis and teaching of the pragmatic and communicative functions of English in verbal interactions. For instance, in order to achieve the objectives of the functionalist, the teacher should integrate, in the same lesson units, mastery of language structures through drills with a freer use of the same structures in communicative practice exercises.

The approach is described as functional because it emphasises the point of using language for communicative purposes more than just using language forms correctly. According to

Agbedo (2007), the context in which language is used is extremely relevant to linguistic interaction between groups and individuals.

In the same vein, this study is based on the stand-point of socio-linguistics that is, using language to meet the societal needs of the learner, so that he, the learner, can interact meaningfully in his social environment using the appropriate and acceptable language forms. According to Williams (1999), the Functional-Notional Approach puts the spot-light on the learner as a social person. It views language as primarily intended for use in society. Williams records that the Functional-Notional Approach (FNA) was the outcome of a project to prepare teaching materials for adult 'guest-workers' who would need to communicate in the language of their host countries. The project was carried out by representatives of the Council of Europe Modern Language Project. It set up a list of language functions which could form the nucleus of a teaching syllabus. One of the major publications of the project, *Threshold Levels English*, Pergamon (1980), specifies situations in which adults may be expected to use a foreign language with regard to roles, settings and topics (Williams 1999, p. 60).

Furthermore, the Functional- Notional Approach to language teaching is a material-oriented approach which emphasises syllabus content as well as method of teaching. It is material-oriented in the sense that the teacher deliberately selects and prepares instructional materials to suit the lesson content. Syllabus content is developed with reference to functions and notions in language. This approach is very much in line with the general emphasis on communication in the classroom, and it integrates concern for the social aspects of the language with concern for the role of the individual in language interactions. Materials for the syllabus consist of language functions which are identified by Williams (1999, p. 54) as "speech acts", and not on the traditional units of grammar. Typical of the new trend is the title of a lesson unit such as "Asking for Information". Other units may have titles such as "Asking for Direction", "Apologising to Someone" "Expressing an Opinion", "Interacting Socially" and so on. Williams stresses that these lesson titles represent a departure from titles such as 'The Present Continuous Tense', 'Countable and Uncountable Nouns', 'Masculine and Feminine Pronouns' and 'Transitive and Intransitive Verbs'. What communicative competence aims to do is to help the learner turn his considerable dormant grammatical competence into a real mastery of the language, being in such everyday activities as buying stamps, going to the supermarket, asking the way, visiting the dentist, asking the time, and the like.

An appropriate scheme suitable for the Functional- Notional syllabus is prescribed by Williams (1999, p.52) as stated below:

An example of dialogue involving the formulas, structures and lexical items for expressing the roles of a customer and a bank clerk.

Customer: Excuse me please.

Bank Clerk: Yes, can I help you?

Customer: Certainly, I want to find out how much money I have in my account.

Bank Clerk: What's your account number?

Customer: I've forgotten it. Can I just write my name instead?

Bank Clerk: I suppose so. Could you sign here please?

Customer: Alright. Thank you.

In addition, what informs the use of modal auxiliaries as language functions in the study is that they form the speech acts used in expressions of social interactions, making polite requests, expressing necessities, obligations, intentions and capabilities to others. The practice of these language functions offers users the opportunity to learn more accurate words to use in social interactions, which is the principal focus of the FNA. The concept of communicative competence is described by Agbedo (2007) as the knowledge needed by a speaker or hearer to use linguistic forms appropriately. According to him:

The goal of a student of language should be to account for the fact that a normal child acquires knowledge of sentences not only as grammatical, but also as appropriate. He acquires competence as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner.... It is this type of linguistic knowledge that characterises the objectives of the functionalist approach to Language Teaching (LT). (Agbedo, 2007, p. 343).

Identifying the objectives of communicative language teaching, Williams (1999) reports that it can be specified with reference to the social purposes of language. The concerns would thus be:

- appropriateness of usage ;
- conventional usage;
- transactional usage; and
- interactional usage.

The principles of the Communicative Language Teaching have a broad view on the goals of language teaching which include how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of the teacher and learner in the classroom. The principles recognise communication as a social interaction. Communication also has a purpose, in which case, communicative activities should be geared towards some functional objective, such as asking for direction or giving information. Broadly speaking therefore, communicative competence is the goal of the Functional-Notional Approach. The approach emphasises on syllabus content and organises learning materials around the specific needs of the learner as well as specific classroom situations for specific communicative purposes.

At this point, the study took an overview of certain traditional approaches to language teaching, their merits and demerits, as well as their similarities and relationship to the Functional-Notional Approach. Specifically, the traditional methods that were reviewed in



relation to the FNA were the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), the Direct Method and the Audio Lingual Method.

One of the earliest methods in language teaching is the Grammar Translation Method originated by Johann Valentine Meidinger in Prussia, Germany at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. It is based on the premise that language is rule-governed. Some of the characteristics of Grammar Translation Method include: memorisation of vocabulary items with their native language equivalents often in isolation (rote method), and little or no systematic practice of pronunciation as speech is not emphasised. According to Odo (2007), a quick evaluation of the method shows that it is useful and economical when rules are stated and explained. Translation too can be an effective technique in second language teaching. But the neglect of aural and oral skills (listening and speaking) as well as communicative competence is a serious defect of the method since language is largely speech – a means of communication. The principle underlying the Grammar Translation Method is the fact that it emphasises the study of the form of language rather than the communicative use of language.

The defects in the Grammar Translation Method are based on the fact that it neglects the activities for developing communicative competence in the language class. It also has the tendency of selecting literary and artificial forms of language, with the primary aim of exemplifying grammatical rules. The result is that the teacher does much talking, denying the student the active participation that is so vital in second language teaching. Therefore, the Functional-Notional Approach has a number of advantages over the old Grammar Translation Method because it emphasises on teaching language to achieve communicative competence; it sees the learner as a social person who needs language for social interaction, so it gives the learner room for participation in the language classroom.

Another method is the Direct Method, which is said to have evolved as a reaction or alternative to Grammar Translation. It ruled out translation in teaching foreign languages and is based on the theory that language learning is a natural process. Its objective was to make learners think in the language they are learning. So listening and speaking the language took precedence over reading and writing. The method does not recognise the explicit formulation and teaching of grammatical rules, rather learners are encouraged to acquire grammatical structures inductively by practising with complete and meaningful utterances. The method was one of those that emphasised actual communication, so it received overwhelming approval in the field of language teaching. However, it was faulted by scholars like Odo (2007) for forcing learners too early to communicate in the foreign language, resulting in inaccurate fluency and for being unrealistic in teaching a foreign or second language because of its unstructured procedure. The method is mostly used at the primary and secondary levels of education. At the tertiary level, it is used in teaching foreign languages. The method is useful because it encourages an exciting learning experience. Learner

participation is high. However, dissatisfaction with the less structured aspects of the method has led to its modification which is the Graded Direct Method. The modified method tries to bring in some grammatical explanation and occasional translation. It is a kind of eclectic approach which makes it more in keeping with the Functional-Notional Approach, and it is useful in second language teaching and learning in the classroom.

Next is the Audio-Lingual or Aural Oral Method. It is a method based on structural linguistics and the theory of behavioural psychology. According to Odo (2007), structural linguistics is based on the idea that language is made up of structural units which are used in pattern practice as substitution, addition, combination of structural items and transformational drills. With this method, language items are not contextualised, but learnt through practice and repetition, mimicking and memorisation. Some of the basic principles of the Audio-Lingual Method as pointed out by Odo (2007) include the points that language is speech not writing; here emphasis is laid on listening and speaking before reading and writing. Language is a set of habits, so manipulative drills are used to teach the language so that learners form correct habits. A major defect is that communicative activities come after a long process of rigid drills and exercises. On the other hand, the new method, Functional-Notional Approach, uses communicative functions like dialogues, simulation and drills to achieve communicative competence in the learner. The new approach (FNA) essentially sees language as a vehicle for the realisation of interpersonal relations and for the performance of social transactions between individuals.

The teaching methods discussed have their strengths and weaknesses and contributions to language teaching. This study therefore is in keeping with the view that English Language teachers should make use of the innovations as well as apply eclecticism in language teaching in order to flow with the tide of times, and observe the swing of the pendulum to the functional method for effective communication.

The study also investigated whether the Functional-Notional Approach will be effective in determining the gender disparity in English Language Teaching. Research efforts concerning the issues of gender in academic achievement appear to have attracted the attention of many educational researchers in recent times. One of the major reasons for tenacious interest in gender issues in terms of academic achievement has been ascribed to the possible relationship between achievement and academic opportunities. In effect, the level of linguistic achievement of a learner, determines to a great extent, the opportunities open to him to succeed in other areas of academic pursuit.

The findings of research in gender differences have long established that the measured cognitive abilities of populations of girls and boys differ a little, if at all, in contrast within given populations (Murphy, 2002). However, there is a whole array of processes in operation from earliest childhood onwards whereby a particular view of masculinity and femininity holds sway. Schools are actively involved in determining this dominant perspective. Despite

the best efforts of schools, there are still inequalities in the aspirations, achievements and expectations of boys and girls.

Some research findings show that male under-achievement dominates much educational debate. Paula (2012) reports that a chart of GCSE results from 1962 to 2006 shows that boys are lagging behind in most subjects, except English, and girls are dominating the examination leagues in all phases and subjects, and are more likely to go to the university than their male counterparts. Similarly, the issue of under-achievement of boys in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) has been pointed out by Offorma (2005). Apart from enumerating the reasons for the low achievement of boys, the book recommended many useful language techniques for motivating boys such as target-setting, use of ICT materials, use of interesting topics, making learning fun, and single-sex modern language teaching which will promote the learning achievement of boys in MFL.

In the same vein, observations have been made on the area of language impairment. Lyons (2010) observes that Specific Language Impairment (SLI), is one of the most robust risk factors for many speech and language problems that have to do with a person's sex. Clinicians have long noted the greater numbers of males in their case loads. According to Lyons (2010), several studies have shown that SLI is more common in males than females. (SLI is a developmental language disorder which has challenged speech-language pathologists for decades and in recent years has become the subject of study). He discovered that among the children with language impairment in some of his studies, there was a 2:1 ratio of males to females. A common outcome for the elevated rates of SLI in males has been that males in general have poorer verbal skills than females.

The import of the study on gender variable is to recommend and enforce an effective communicative approach to language learning which will enable the female folk in the educational system to improve on their language proficiency in order to take their pride of place and bridge the existing gap in the scheme of things.

In terms of school location, the study investigated whether the Functional-Notional Approach will determine a significant difference in the language achievement of students in urban and rural locations. Research in this area of study has shown that the quality of the language environment is of paramount importance to success in learning a new language. As defined by Dulay & Krashen (2008), the language environment encompasses everything the language learner hears and sees in the new language. It may include a wide variety of situations- conversations with friends, watching television, reading street signs and newspapers, as well as classroom activities; or it may be very sparse, including only language books and records. According to them, teaching a second language means creating for students a part of their entire new language environment, and the entire responsibility of creating the language environment falls on the teacher who is teaching a language that is not used in the community.

In addition, findings have proved that a child growing up in the first two or three years requires interaction with other language users in order to bring the 'language faculty' into operation with a particular language such as English. Therefore, Yule (2007, p. 175) opines that a child who does not hear, or is not allowed to use language will learn no language. Hence the importance of social interaction, meaning that the language a child learns is not genetically inherited, but it is acquired in a particular language-using environment. Yule (2007, p. 176) also points out the issue of 'innateness' as propounded by Noam Chomsky. His theory of innateness states that every normal child is born with some innate tendencies to acquire language. This is what he describes as L.A.D. (Language Acquisition Device). Chomsky proposed that language development should be described as "language growth" because the "language organ" simply grows like any other body organ. The crucial requirement, Yule concludes, is the opportunity the child has to interact with others via language. That opportunity equips him to use language functionally in his social environment.

In this part of the study, the researcher has highlighted the influence which the language environment of a child can have on his entire developmental process, especially in his functional language achievement.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The steady decline in the performance of secondary school students in English Language internal and external examinations, has been of much concern to educationists in the country. This situation is because most of the students are deficient in the use of grammar. They have not acquired the basic knowledge of grammatical structures and expressions to enable them articulate their thoughts meaningfully in written medium. Paper 1 of the English Language in SSCE ( WAEC & NECO) requires the skill of continuous writing in Section A (Essay Writing), Section B (Comprehension), and Section C (Summary). Basically, Paper 1 constitutes 60% of the total scores in English Language examinations. Candidates' scores are rather relatively higher in Papers 2 and 3 which are Lexis & Structure and Test of Orals respectively, and these two papers are in multiple choice forms such that the chances to guess are high. In spite of the relative high scores in Papers 2 and 3, the overall performance remains low.

Notably, poor teaching method has been identified as a major factor contributing to the low performance of candidates in external examinations. Therefore, the recommendation by the WAEC Chief Examiners (2010), supported by the International Awards and Examiners Appointment Committee (2012), is that teachers should adopt better methods and strategies of teaching the language more effectively. It is for this reason that the present study is focused on the application of the Functional-Notional Approach which applies the Communicative Language Teaching Method to inculcate communicative competence into the learner. The need to help students acquire the basic writing skills is imperative, so that they will be able to achieve the set objectives by the examination bodies (WAEC & NECO), as well

as perform their social communicative functions effectively. This will put them in the right footing to achieve the expected goals in education.

The problem of this study, therefore, put in a question form is: what is the effect of the Functional-Notional Approach to English Language teaching on students' achievement in Grammatical Structures at the secondary school level?

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