

Enhancing Secondary Education Landscape: Case of English Clubs

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Abstract: *This paper investigates how education quality in secondary schools can be improved connecting schools to educational landscapes. The peculiar attention is on English clubs as the focus is the enhancement of secondary school learners' competences in the English language. The competences related to here are the ones gained outside the classroom framework. Documentary and qualitative techniques have been used for the achievement of this investigation. Examining literature, it comes out that there is close link between education landscapes and education quality in secondary schools. It is also seen that English clubs in communities enhance learners' competences in English as pupils attending such clubs develop competences than those who do not attend.*

Key words: English club, landscape, competences, secondary school, education

INTRODUCTION

Education is key element, for not only to the individuals but also to the whole community. It is generally developed at school. But supplement is gained outside the school, depending on the perspective of each learner. For this point of view, the present paper investigates secondary education landscape with peculiar look at how secondary education can be enhanced through English clubs. Landscape is a very reflected topic in education as it provides learners with additional training and knowledge acquisition (Gelen, Onay & Varol, 2014, p. 603). Education professionals and researchers try to understand how learners acquire further knowledge outside the school to become more skilled in some subjects. All these issues and others are reflected and researched on in this paper.

Context

Schools play a very important role in the provision of education. This makes personnel in the field of education put much focus on schools. Such focus, however, may blind teachers at the extent that most think schools constitute the only environment where education can be drawn. Learners use not only schools but also other environments to

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boost their growth in the process; therefore, schools are places where little time is devoted comparatively to other settings (Gelen, Onay & Varol, 2014, p. 603). This implies that, in addition to school, education can be enhanced from different environments. In this framework, education professionals consider the other areas than schools to foster learners' tastes of learning. Such environments may differ considering the level of education. An area which is worthy for learning for learners from early childhood or primary education may not be as important for those from secondary or higher education. Also, it depends on the subject learners need to get further knowledge in. For example, learners at primary school willing to enhance their skills in mathematics would be much interested in small frames found generally at home and content themselves in playing with them by numbering and naming them; comparing some to others, etc. while a different learner at secondary school may feel interested in becoming a member of a science club given the advantages the latter provides them. One of the benefits, as science states, is that as learners participate in science clubs, they realize an existing connection between those clubs and the regular school classes (Behrendt, 2017, p. 82). This enthusiasm would be different from a learner at secondary level who would like to improve his/her competences in a language like English. For such a learner, attending English clubs would be of much help.

Crucially, English clubs serve currently for topics in vogue in the area of English competences improvement and such improvement can be read when the language is used purposefully connecting experience, knowledge and culture (Au 1998, p. 306). Competences are enhanced and/or developed within English clubs thanks to their frame wherein every club member is a teacher of every member and club members learn from one another and through different activities they organize. In their organization, many topics are discussed and in discussing them, members develop, in addition to language skills, competences related to those topics which would serve them in life or job situations. Reading this idea, one understands that learning from outside class-related setting enables learners to develop knowledge, attitudes and skills they need for their integration and adaptability in the community (Banks, 2001, p. 25). Despite the statements above, it remains to question the real pedagogical implication of clubs like the ones of English since there are also some for science and may be for other domains on education levels, particularly secondary education. The implications should be framed by teachers since it is part of their responsibility to position children within these social practices and landscapes that meet their interest (Carrington, 2005, p. 121). But, the issue of resorting to clubs like English clubs and maximizing their resources remain a problem. It is therefore very important to think, as science shows, of how to integrate what learners bring to and experience in school (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo & Collazo, 2004, p. 41). Such integration allows contributions of different landscapes to be registered into the teaching schedule by teachers.

It is used to be perceived that English clubs are a continuation of English classes where there is a teacher and learners. Later, a paradigm shift came into life and the perception becomes that there is no teacher in language clubs (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 12;

McCaughey, 2017, p. 25). With this new perspective of English clubs, many secondary school learners, especially the ones much interested in English now join clubs in order to grow in the language. The consequence for these learners should be, undoubtedly that they should perform better in their regular English classes than before starting to join English clubs. On the other hand, such learners may be better than their classmates who do not attend the clubs since the main purpose is nothing else than “communicating and practicing English” (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 11). This may result into possible development of further skills like the involvement into the history, culture and values linked to the speaking countries, as well as the feeling of real sense of community (McCaughey, 2017, p. 23). Reading all the situation in this section, there is possibility of thinking about a recurrent problem. That is therefore the concern of point 1.2 scrutinizing the problems around the perception of English clubs and their implications to the development of language competences.

Problem statement

From the mentioned context, it can be understood that education landscape needs better understanding. It also needs attributes since it differs from one level of education to another; that is, elementary, middle, and high schools and this differentiates the skills and abilities that are gained in each (Gelen, Onay & Varol, 2014, p. 603). Also, it is conceived differently among learners according to their areas of interest. That is where lies the very first problem with this research. Clearly said, there is the problem of the understanding of landscapes in education, the way learners make use of them and how teachers view them. Reflections cannot be restricted at the way teachers view education landscape but also how the knowledge acquired from landscapes are capitalized and integrated into the classroom setting.

Given that English clubs are one of the most pertinent landscapes for the learning of English, the problem of how they are perceived may be raised. Also, the question of how English clubs are coped with and their pedagogical implication may be thought of (Moje, Ciechanowski, Kramer, Ellis, Carrillo & Collazo, 2004, p. 38). In addition, the problem related to how teachers of English make use of the acquisitions of clubs within their classes can be raised because the participation and interests those learners show to English classes depend on the acknowledgement teachers bear on their knowledge gathered in further setting (Norton, 2001, p. 170). Also, the focus on the possibilities of the organization of English clubs within schools as a basis of enhancing language competences within learners in a way of connecting their knowledge to language can be reflected (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 11). Briefly, the problem that the present paper addresses is the non-consideration of English clubs as education landscape by teachers of English at secondary schools.

Research questions

In the framework of the above stated problem, the existing discourse will shed light to the questions which are raised below:

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1. What is the link between education landscapes and quality in secondary schools?
2. How can English clubs in communities enhance learners' competences in English?

METHODOLOGY

This paper was conducted to question the input of English clubs to the enhancement of education at the level of secondary school. To better understand how can English competences be improved through participating in the activities of English clubs, I decided to involve meta-analysis

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Discussing the issue of English clubs and secondary education landscape, focus is put on how English clubs enhance secondary education. As English clubs have become popular in schooling spheres, experiences therefore from high school settings are brought into life.

Landscape as an education environment

There are many settings from which learners acquire education. Some are formal education institutions while others are not. It should be acknowledged that more environments than classroom offer enough education. That is why much time and focus should be attributed to landscapes (Gelen, Onay & Varol, 2014, p. 603). In the present section, literature is reviewed so to see how education can be drawn from landscapes.

Science shows that education is a process in which people get involved in their whole life (*ibid*, p. 603). This process, being a life-long issue (Blossfeld & Von Maurice, 2011, p. 19); needs to be reflected thoroughly. The education landscape depends first, on the level of learners. This looks whether the people exploring the landscapes are concerned with early childhood education; whether they are in primary, secondary or higher learning process in order to know how to adjust the teaching-learning process so as to overcome the complaints of not putting into practice the acquisitions that learners get from unstructured environments (Vettese, Thompson & Allan, 2018, p. 11). Second, it depends on the interests of learners. Some may be much interested in mathematics, and such interest leads them to be more involved into settings that can foster their science skills. On the other hand, some other learners may rather be interested in languages. In this option, all their focus may relate to environments where they gain knowledge and skills enabling them to communicate in the target language (McCaughey, 2017, p. 27).

It should be noted here that reflections on what kind of education do learners benefit from outside class environments are worthy as they may shape teachers' attitudes when dealing with classes in the sense that these environments (clubs like book club being one of them) have impact significantly learning in the classroom (Petrich, 2015, p. 8).

In this framework, transitions from home to early childhood centers, from these centers to primary school institutions and from those to secondary schools must be looked at. The rationale behind is teachers be aware of the environments which learners evolve in. This awareness enables teachers to know the kind of education these learners gain outside classroom. Doing this requires teachers to capitalize the acquisitions of different landscapes that have shaped learners and think of the possibilities of resorting to the results of those settings in order to foster the learning. The reason is that learning success comes in when home, school and community make the students' learning the priority (Epstein & Sanders, 2006, p. 87).

Reading the above ideas, one can understand that landscapes provide learners with some education. Given that, schools should reflect on the different landscapes wherein learners are involved since those landscapes contribute to learners' knowledge and competences. If schools do not pay attention to landscapes, the classroom is not able to meet learners' needs (Petrich, 2015 p. 3).

Importance of landscape for secondary education

In this section, arguments go around the roles, importance and influences that landscapes play on secondary education.

The literature already reviewed in the preceding sections show that landscapes help in education acquisition. In this sense, the question of knowing at which degree does landscapes influence such education persists. Reviewing discourse, it comes out that landscapes play important roles. Landscapes constitute areas for learners to practice knowledge they gain in school and off-school (Gelen at al., 2014, p. 604). In addition to practicing the school and off-school acquisitions, learners may develop more competences among others are personal, physical, spiritual development; social, communication, self-confidence, democratic-related and teamwork competences (p. 604).

The fact that there is no evaluation in what students learn from different landscapes enhances freedom to the extent that they may even go beyond competences that are only developed in classrooms. Also, with landscapes, learners feel more confident as they work independently, i.e. they decide to do what is interesting for them under their peers' control, of course (Petrich, 2015, p. 9; Behrendt, 2017, p. 85). Their independence can be explained by the fact that there is, as said earlier, no worry of being evaluated, and this makes that there is less, if not, no anxiety (Behrendt, 2017, p. 85). In such a framework of less or no anxiety, there is much chance for learning success. Yet, since there is no evaluation, success may be seen from only the growth a learner displays since landscapes are informal settings.

It is worth mentioning that landscapes provide teachers guidelines on how to frame their teaching and make it meaningful (Gelen at al., 2014, p. 603) as they acknowledge the involvement of their learners within further education settings. Teachers, knowing that

learners deepen their knowledge and strengthen their skills in other environments, may be interested in the results from those environments. They get interested not only for the sake of knowing but also for the objective of rethinking their teaching processes and shaping them in line with learner's perception, desire, interest and needs (p. 603) as it is these needs which impose them which landscape to be interested and involved in. Reflecting the learners' needs allows teachers to come out with strategies that enable them to meet those needs. To attain that level, there is need for teachers develop tact without which their teaching may fail to reach the goals. This implies that teachers must resort to competency-based education (CBE). With CBE, the idea is that learners leave school with competences allowing them not only to address life problems but also to fit the labor market (Rainwater, 2015, p.42). To provide competences of this kind requires teachers to be very well informed about the other environments that supplement the education received from regular classrooms.

In this section, we try to show how important landscapes are regarding secondary education. Importance is discussed in a general way. However, there is way to particularize. This particularization tackles English clubs as one of the forms of landscapes that may exist. In this perspective, I discuss in the forthcoming section the rationales that triggered the birth of English clubs.

Functions of English language clubs in communities

English is a global language taught in more than 100 countries (Crystal, 2003, p.5) and encompasses some importance like promoting intercultural understanding, serving as an economical stabilizer, being used as a tool for peacebuilding (Amy, 2017, p. 26-27).

English is taught and learnt in some countries as second or foreign language. It is clear that in countries where English is learnt as foreign language, learners display low performance because the devotion is put on oral and written English which is not sufficient (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 10).

English teaching and learning attract the attention of many researchers. Research results prove that learners who possess good knowledge of English are lucky to get nice jobs, travel and to communicate fluently in English while speaking people. He/she can also pursue academic studies with all ease. Furthermore, mastering English contributes to the improvement of living, builds self-esteem of people and creates within them confidence (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 10). Some years ago, the slogan of "illiterate of second degree" got in vogue. It is used to refer to scientists who are incapable to handle computer and speak English. This view of things strengthens the endeavor of the use of English. On the other hand, results show that some learners leave school without acceptable competences in the English language, particularly in spoken English since much time is devoted to vocabulary and grammar (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 11). These learners, contrary to the kind discussed in the preceding paragraph, likely have limited chances regarding all the paramount benefits attributed to English.

In order to meet the requirements of the world market and respond to other opportunities related to English mastery, there is need to fill-in the existing gap. This pushes to find out ways and area where they can improve their English levels. Yet, the improvement depends on the area wherein people are not good enough. Some people may need to improve their speaking skills while others may wish their writing competences be improved. Such an idea is supported by the statement according to which as far as there is difference among learners, there are as well different needs that require each learner how to invest the target language (Norton, 2001, p. 165).

The strategy to be adopted depends therefore on the type of competences one wishes to foster. To overcome the lack in writing, one may go for English centers. Another person wanting to improve his/her English fluency may decide to get people to be talking to. This phenomenon is understood by the fact that outside classroom learning is linked to the perspectives of individual learners with this latter perspective, idea of settings whereby English is used and spoken, with focus on clarity and fluency (McCaughey, 2017, p. 26; Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 10). The main objective of such meetings is the use of English in a context where nobody is acting as a teacher but all participants behave either as interlocutors (McCaughey, 2017, p. 25) or as a facilitator or coach (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 12). This shows how English clubs function as landscapes. In English clubs, there is no curriculum but people decide about the topics to discuss; what matters is English be used and real-life issues be discussed (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 11). Another idea to strengthen the functions of English clubs is the acknowledgement that “much language learning is done outside class” (Van Marsenille, 2015, pp. 9-10).

Contribution of community English clubs to secondary education development

Every level of education pursues some missions. Secondary education for example seeks holistic development of learners. This means that secondary education should provide necessary skills to learners to meet qualifications needed for those embarking for higher education as well as the ones going for labor market (UNESCO, 2013, p. 8). School alone cannot carry out this achievement. There is need of other environments to intervene. Examples of such environments may include language clubs, science clubs, libraries, laboratories, excursions, etc. Peculiarity in this section is put on English clubs as one of the ways to enhance secondary school education. In this sense, the existing literature is reviewed for the completion of this section.

As said in section 2.3, the rationales for creating English clubs are to avail a space where people may meet to practice the language (McCaughey, 2017, p. 26; Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 10). Trying to understand the above arguments, one discovers that in joining English clubs despite the type, members improve the English language abilities and therefore become more and more performant.

Through education, the entire personality of a learner is sought and needed to be developed. This implies that in the implementation of education, the development of

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learners individually is very crucial (Kuhar & Sabljic, 2016, p. 93). Likewise, English clubs boost learners' skills. These skills are not only linguistic but also serve for the whole education inputs. In this regard, science has shown that in speaking English, learners exchange information with and within the language and "they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world" (Norton, 2001, p.166).

On the other hand, English clubs help learners develop public speaking competences. This can be explained by the fact that, for the sake of mastering English, and as one of the rules within an English club, every member is requested to speak (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 14). In case there is not enough time for everybody, resort is done to a classroom approach called literature circle (Daniels 1994 cited by Malu & Smedley 2016, p. 14). Through such a practice, learners, not only, gain the speaking competences but also, they develop abilities of how to speak in public and/or to an audience. In the same way, learners who are members understand what is meant by freedom of expression, their tolerance is enhanced, they understand that public speaking requires asking for the floor and be granted it before speaking since these and others are some of the rules to be observed within English clubs and during different meetings.

In addition, English clubs enable learners face the life problems and get to know how to overcome different life-related issues because during meetings, the club members talk about real situations of their lives, discuss topics related to the economic and political systems of their country so to identify real problems and think of solutions (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 21). From all these concerns of meetings, lessons learned are shared among members and that is where, learners gain some education. As there is not teacher in English clubs and meetings are very different from formal English classes, learners may feel free expressing themselves as they cannot be laughed at when committing mistakes. Thanks to such clubs, learners' sense of cooperation and collaboration are empowered (p. 12) and this may help in building learning communities among learners.

In brief, given that "people spend only limited time of their life in the formal education institutions" (Gelen at al., 2014, p. 603), it is then understood that school itself cannot provide the learner with all the necessary education they need for life; but informal education gained home, in the community and the alike spaces is good way to reach the goal. Existing discourse support the idea asserting that much learning and success occur when home, school, and community work together in order to support students' learning and development (Epstein & Sanders, 2006, p. 87). In the same way, it can be stated that environments (starting by the home) than classroom play important roles as they supplement the knowledge and skills gained in regular classrooms. For example, for language and literacy acquisition, the support and engagement of the family are of paramount importance (Sanderson, 2017, p. 100). Arguments in this passage highlight the pertinence that educational clubs embody. It is shown that through activities

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performed in educational clubs, learners improve social skills, communication skills, and self-confidence (Gelen et al., 2014, p. 604).

Concerning the question of English clubs, it has been shown in the previous sections that English clubs offer opportunities for learners to deepen, develop or practice the language. In practicing English, learners convey information as well as they construct their identity and they get related to the social world (Norton, 2001, p. 166).

Attending English clubs help learners develop more competences, in addition to the English ones. Accordingly, English clubs enable learners to relate English with life issues, politics, cultural norms together with further community issues; develop social competences through the collaboration and cooperation that characterize the members; make change of mindset and therefore develop critical thinking and enhance sense of creativity (Malu & Smedley, 2016, p. 11, 14).

Conclusion and Outlook

Landscapes are important environments whereby teaching must be expanded. In this regard, it is therefore pertinent that such environments to be available with the objectives of helping learners get spaces for their outside classroom learning by pushing them get involved into deeply. Yet, the most effective way of expanding learning out of the classroom is the use of social media (Heatley & Lattimer, 2013, p. 8). Also, it is crucial to resort to a multicultural education. The rationale behind multicultural education is scrutinized by the overall goal imbedded into education, one to help learners develop the knowledge, attitudes and skills they need so to fit the community in general (Banks, 2001, p. 25).

Concerning the English language, there is need to use the linguistic landscape which is defined as “the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings” (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25). It is worth mentioning that making use of the linguistic landscape provides opportunities for students to engage in contextualized authentic language discussions (in English) about their first language (L1) and English.

Reading the importance attributed to landscapes in general and particularly English clubs, suggestions must be formulated to make sure that those environments have some benefits on part of learners. In this perspective, suggestions need to be formulated for both Congolese teachers and learners of English, given the connection that exists between secondary school and landscapes on one hand and considering how English clubs enhance learners’ competences on the other hand.

I suggest that Congolese teachers of English relate their classrooms’ activities to the English clubs (Norton, 2001, p. 167) because not doing that may exacerbate learners’ non-participation into class language activities (Norton, 2001, p. 170).

Acknowledging that language learning is a social practice (Norton, 2001, p. 167), it is suggested to learners of English to embark into different clubs in order to develop not only more competences in the target language but also there is much chance for them to develop further competences which they may need for other facets of life. Supporting this idea, science asserts that since learning is an increasing participation in communities of practice, it therefore shapes the whole person to the world they act in (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 49–50).

The present paper only surveys how secondary school can be enhanced using landscapes with the case of English clubs. So far that all the issues on landscapes are not discussed, research aiming to know which language competences are enhanced in English clubs can also be conducted. In this framework, the door remains open for further studies.

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