

The Power of Student's Involvement: Using Posters as Teaching Tools in Managing Large Classes

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ABSTRACT

Over the years the number of candidates seeking admission into Nigerian Universities has increased. Not all applicants are successfully placed into the universities. At the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) Ogun State, Nigeria, the number of new intakes has increased from about 1500 to about 3500 in the past 3 years. The situation has further compounded the problem of managing large classes, a challenge that teachers and students were facing before the phenomenal increase. To overcome this challenging situation, and to improve the content of teaching and learning of language and literary skills, students are encouraged to work in groups using posters, graphic illustrations and power point presentation for the two compulsory communication skills' courses that are offered by all first and second year students. Our presentation is a descriptive overview of some of the imaginative posters used by students exhibiting their ingenuity, creativity and artistic abilities as they relate the contents of their discussions to the immediate happenings in their environment. Overall, teachers have developed closer intimacy with students and are able to introduce new skills and variety of digital applications for the promotion of mlearning, elearning, professional participation and learner-centeredness. Essentially, we hope to promote the use of posters, graphic illustrations and power point presentation as effective tools for teaching, assessing and managing large classes in Higher Education Delivery in Nigeria.

Keywords: Poster, higher education, communication, creativity, large classes

Introduction

The challenges of managing large classes has been further subjected to increasing population of candidates desiring higher education coupled with the necessity to enhance knowledge transmission and acquisition with improved performances. These backgrounds facilitate the growing concern for participatory involvement and symbiotic interactions between teachers and learners on one hand, and between learners themselves on the other hand.

It is significant to note that the 21st century classroom enjoys accessibility to knowledge, information dissemination and contexts for creative learning through the rapid invasion of new technology prompted by e-learning and m-learning opportunities. Thus, globalization has again, ignited the desire for improved performance birthed by individual enthusiasm to participate and the need to vary methodology and re-package course contents for effective management of knowledge acquisition for the teeming population admitted into higher education in our modern society.

Our concern in this paper is to project the hidden potentials inherent in poster technology, and electronic media (internet) and an overview of its use in managing large classes. The transfer of power, prompted by increasing desire to interact with opportunities afforded by an exposure to digital education also promote the adoption of new and varied methodologies for teaching and learning. These opportunities create synergic influence to enrich course contents, while at the same time; enhance cooperation and effective participation through individual and group involvement.

Defining the Poster Concept

Generally, posters consist of illustrative pictures/photographs; artwork and printed work used as communicative advertisements presented in concise forms for public display. They are not just pictorial, but visual presentation of simple, brief and well-articulated summary of written works to stimulate an audience.

The **UW-Madison Writing Centre Writer's Handbook** defines poster presentation as an advertisement or a display, which combines text and graphics to make project work “visually interesting and accessible...to a large group of other scholars and to talk to and receive feedback from interested viewers” (http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/presentation_poster.html#).

Again, the **WJSHS Science Poster Presentation** describes a poster as “a hybrid between a research paper and presentation.” Its main purpose is to communicate the whats, hows and essential findings of a research experience to guide future effort ([wyshs.org/...poster%20 presentation](http://wyshs.org/...poster%20presentation)).

These three definitions portray the description and essential characteristics of educative posters as visual medium of communication created for audience effect. They are designed in colourful, large font, attractive lay-out with logical appeal and concise illustration of ideas and summaries.

Evolution of Poster Technology

Poster technology became a veritable medium in the fields of Advertising and Communication with handbills, signs and the newspaper during the pre-industrial age (Arens *et al*, 2008). The **Gutenberg Printing Press** invented by Johann Gutenberg, a German goldsmith became an important revolutionary invention in 1439 (Walker, 2008).

From its humble beginning, poster production developed from the invention of the printing press and has assumed its modern posture from the emergence of industrialization in the 1800s and lithography, the new printing technology in 1798. Significantly, early poster production was considered “literal, straightforward and relatively unimaginative until the work of Jules Che’ret in 1867, [when] the art of poster begin to realize its full potential” (Microsoft Encarta, 2009).

According to D’Angelo (2012), the discursal genre of poster presentation has been investigated across several disciplines. It has also experienced rapid changes as a multi- modal genre affected by technology, which is also promoting interactional communicative purpose by its textual construction, the role of the presenter, and audience involvement/participation.

Research Contributions/Literature Review

Several scholarly works have projected the currency of visual learning tools in the 21st century classroom. Zevenbergen (1999) reports the implementation of a four-year alternative assessment project in a pre-service primary mathematics course. Pamela *et al*, (2000) undertake a reform exercise at adapting the use of poster as an alternative assessment to written examinations in science-based curriculum and to create opportunity to test student skills in other areas.

Again, the need to identify the peculiarities of higher education in order to maintain quality teaching and learning has since become significant for investigation (Kerr, 2011). A group of researchers from the University of Florida also report the effective use of posters as teaching tools for high school and college students (Raines *et al*, 2005) In addition, an action research, carried out by O'Brien (2006) reveals that the use of posters became a learning tool for school leaving certificate students in Loreto Secondary School, Donegal.

Furian *et al* (2007) in their article: " Chemistry, Poetry, and Artistic Illustration: An interdisciplinary Approach to Teaching and Promoting Chemistry," synthesize the collaborative effort of interdisciplinary faculty members to sensitize students' imagination, good understanding, and creativity in Chemistry classes. Moreover, a research conducted by a group of scholars in two American Universities stresses the need for students involvement and the use of alternative but complementary tool for assessment in the educational process (Wheland *et al*, no date).

By way of harnessing the integrative opportunities inherent in visual illustrations in the classroom, Nam (2013) provides a statistical estimate to boost teachers and learners' morale in adapting the use of posters, as expressed in the following extract:

Educational research estimates that the visual learner make up 65% of the population, while auditory learners and kinesthetic learners make up 30% and 5% respectively. Teachers should always keep this in mind when they are teaching in the classroom. Custom poster prints can be a great way for educators to integrate visual learning elements in the classroom (<http://EzireArticles.com/?expect=SamNam>).

Following this claim, Nam (2013) further identifies five gray areas, where poster prints can be utilized to promote effective teaching and learning. These five areas revolve around students in Science, **English and Literature**, Mathematics, **Foreign Language** and History disciplines.

Scholarly contributions projected above support the tapping of potentials inherent in the adoption of new media and alternative assessment systems to make the 21st century classroom productive, exciting, inviting, motivating, and learner- centred.

Problem Statement and Justification of Study

There has been a growing debate on the negative impact of large classes on students performance and effective teaching and learning experiences (Koshy, 2011; Ker, 2011). A review of literature reveal that large classes constitute a reduction in active participation of students in the learning process; promote a reduction both in the quality of learning instruction and frequency in feedback to students; further reduction in student motivation and development of cognitive skills in the classroom experience (Carbone & Greenberg, 1998; Cuseo, 2007; Fisher & Grant, 1983; Laria & Hubball, 2008; Kuh et al, 1991; TEDI, 2003; Wulff. Nyquist & Abbott, 1987 cited in Kerr, 2011).

A major reason for increase in students intakes can be tied to "the democratization of (higher) education." According to Koshy (2001:1) "Educators have had to adopt new practices to facilitate teaching and learning process without comprising quality." While group work is desirable, the lack of stimulation of the audience, little involvement of presenters, time consumption in grading individual work, free riding, unequal distribution of assignment and unhealthy relationship among members are identified as limitations of oral presentations in group work (Koshy, 2011). In addition, large classes make effective assessment of individual students and all aspects of teaching and learning process herculean tasks for instructors.

Moreover, Wheland *et al* (no date) have also pointed out that a reliance on the traditional approach subjected to written examinations, quizzes and term papers are inadequate to assess individual student's' ability (141).

At the Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAAB) the challenges of managing large classes are quite enormous considering the following factors: insufficient time allocation for

lectures, general apathy to the **Use of English Course (GNS 101)**, and **Writing and Literary Appreciation (GNS 201)**, boredom, over-emphasis on core Agriculture, Natural and Pure Sciences over and above General Studies (GNS) Courses; staff strength, space and inadequate facilities to manage large classes are peculiar in our own environment.

This background provide a justification for the need to adopt alternative/complementary assessment methods and strategic approaches to make teaching and learning of GNS courses viable, more appealing and result-oriented. Therefore, the use of poster presentation was introduced as an alternative and additional method in conjunction with the use of mlearning, elearning (mobile and electronic learning devices) and book technology. These blended approaches have enhanced better performance and more output in university-based communication skills' and literary writing courses over the years.

FUNAAB Experience

By 2009, the need to search for alternative and complementary approaches to promote interactive and result-oriented activities in the two communication skills' courses became expedient to enhance effective teaching and learning process. **Table 1** reflects students' enrolment from 2006/2007 session showing yearly increase in number of students admitted into the university.

S/No	No of 1st choice Applicants	Admission Quota	Number Enrolled		Year / Session
			Fresh undergraduates	Total undergraduates	
1	NA	NA	1,522	6,846	2006/2007
2	NA	NA	1,715	7,161	2007/2008
3	NA	NA	1,776	7,854	2008/2009
4	5,907	2,994	2,582	8,980	2009/2010
5	6,495	3,000	2,662	9,725	2010/2011
6	10,879	3,500	3,451	11,624	2011/2012

Source: Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta. *Statistical Digest* 6th Ed. Pp.6-7

The observable non-performing outcomes, which manifest in weak performances and mass-failure recorded in students' work; over-riding stigma attached to the Department of Communication and General Studies and its staff membership all hold sway for a justification to adopt new approaches and review course contents for a re-designing.

The two main Communication courses: Use of English (GNS 101) and Writing and Literary Appreciation (GNS 201) are mounted in addition to History, Logic, Philosophy and Sociology as university-based compulsory courses to 100 Level and 200 Level undergraduate students respectively. These courses are anchored in the Department of Communication and General Studies of the University.

Within a five year period (2009-till date), the courses mounted in the Department have been subjected to review with a view for a re- packaging and insistence on better performance on the part of staff and students.

Students are mandated to produce creative and imaginative posters on cardboards complemented with the use of Power Point slides and oral presentation to cover topics structured and distributed to students in groups. This participatory attempt enable both teachers and students to be actively involved in activities required to cover course contents, which are strategically-structured into group works for all students. Group-based presentations are then made on selected topics for 15-20 minutes and 5-10 minutes for questions and discussions. Students are further encouraged to tap the resources available through mlearning by taking pictures/photographs of their preparatory sessions and their cardboards with their mobile phones and connecting to the internet (elearning) to access lecture notes posted on the university website and other relevant literatures coupled with the opportunity to access relevant books in the library to guide their presentation output.

Figures 1-21 reflected under the appendices are selected samples of instructional, illustrative, educative and easy to learn posters presented in the two communication skills' courses. While Figures 1-10b are selections from GNS 101, Figures 11-21 featured specifically in GNS 201 presentations respectively.

Table 2: Selected Posters Presentation

GNS 101	GNS 201
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Fig.1a A pictorial illustration of Grammar(Singular and Plural verbs)	Fig. 11a A summary of the Importance of Literature
Fig 1b Using Family life to illustrate Verb Tenses	Fig. 11b Using literature to illustrate Forestry terminology
Fig 1c Illustrating verbs& correlative conjunctions with marital life	Fig. 12a Illustrating a Medium of Literature-Oral literature
Fig 1d Illustrating Concord between subject, verb pronoun and antecedent	Fig. 12b An Indigenous Festival depicted as a kind of oral literature
Fig 1e Using a pictorial story illustration to depict types of Verbs	Fig. 13a Kinds of Literature illustrated with a gun
Fig 2a An illustration of types of sentences	Fig. 13b Using the symbol of a tree to illustrate the Classification of Literature
Fig 2b An illustration of functions and grammatical forms of Sentences	Fig. 14a An Illustration showing the interrelationship between the three types of literature
Fig 3 A pictorial illustration of Conjunctions and Verbs	Fig. 14b Adapting the logo-Symbol (umbrella) of a popular Political Party (PDP) to Identify types of literature
Fig 4 An illustration of indefinite Pronouns	Fig. 15a Elements of Literature in graphical form
Fig 5a An illustrative tree displaying punctuation marks	Fig. 15b Illustrating types of characters in a literary work
Fig 5b Types of Punctuation marks 1	Fig. 15c Using literature to teach morals (Satire)
Fig 5c Types of Punctuation marks 2	Fig. 16a A pictorial summary of Chapters1-5 of A Woman in her Prime
Fig 5d A summary illustration of punctuation marks 3	Fig. 16b A Summary of Drama Presentation of Chapters 1-5 of A Woman in her Prime
Fig 6a Using a plant to illustrate how to write a good definition	Fig. 16c Illustrating Chapter 6 in A Woman in her Prime
Fig 6b A summary of important points in writing definitions	Fig. 17 Pictorial Illustration of Scenes of a literary text in a village setting
Fig 6c Illustrating how to build vocabulary and write good definitions	Fig. 18 Illustrating Chapter 7 of the text- A Woman in her Prime
Fig 7 Illustrating essentials or keys to Summary writing	Fig. 19 Illustrating scenes in Chapter 8 of a morality play (AWIHP)
Fig 8a Illustrating sources of common errors in English	Fig. 20 Illustrating Chapter 9 from a literary work(A Woman in her Prime)
Fig 8b An illustration of types of errors	Fig. 21 A presentation of Chapter 10 of a literary work in a stage performance
Fig 8c Errors in English Language	
Fig 9a A pictorial illustration stressing the need to develop the Reading Skill	

Fig 9b An illustration portraying the importance of reading	
Fig 9c An illustrative depiction of visualising as a strategy for effective reading	
Fig 9d Visualising - a key to successful reading	
Fig 9e An illustration of real and fake reading	
Fig 9f An Illustrative Reading Skill Pyramid	
Fig 9g Effective reading skills	
Fig 9h Steps to successful reading	
Fig 9i An illustration showing basic strategies of Reading Skill	
Fig 10a Psychological barrier to learnin9	
Fig 10b Physiological barriers to Effective Listening and learning	

Source: Classroom Experience, 2011-2013.

Result and Discussions

Initially, the traditional approach of lecture method, where the teacher manned the podium or an elevated platform to teach contents of the curriculum to students and various tasks were assigned to them to test their absorption of information and knowledge acquisition was the normal practice before the adoption of varied approaches introduced since 2009..

Under the present system, students were divided into an average of 20-25 in a group and are mandated to carry out researches to prepare an oral presentation of their findings, which are complemented with the use of posters (using multi- coloured cardboards) taken round the classroom, while a presenter is on the platform to make the presentation, complemented with the use of power point slides. The teacher seeks volunteers at the beginning of the semester from interested students to serve as time-keeper, rapporteur and team-leader for each group. At the end of 15 minutes, other students in the class are given opportunity to ask questions based on the presentation, while any of the group members was called upon to provide answers to some of the questions raised, with the assistance of the teacher under a period of 5-10 minutes or more depending on the responses to the presentation.

The teacher assesses the performance of each group from four perspectives: Organisation (O), Content (C), Expression (E), and Mechanical Accuracy (M.A.) fewer than 30% scores based on a division into 5, 7, 8, and 9 scores for each segment respectively. The summation of the total is

assigned as the group score, which is also assigned to individual members in the group. These activities are undertaken for GNS 101 and 201 classes each week covering a period of one semester- on three-month duration. In the former course, class activities cover two hour duration, while the latter, cover only one hour.

Findings from the situation analysis of the two courses reveal that: the use of posters acts as a supplementary effort to improve performance for the students in the two courses; it further enhances oral communication skills' development of the students in the area of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It was observed that students were afforded relational opportunities for leadership, cooperation and healthy relationship promoted by greater commitment to explore their innate creativities, enthusiasm and development of artistic ability. All these factors contribute immensely to boost teaching and learning output in the language and literary classroom.

Figures 1-30 are sampled posters from GNS 101, while Figures 33-48 are from GNS 201 classes for our discussion. A rundown of the figures illustrated under the Appendix showed ingenuity, creative presentation and performance of individual members of each group adjudged to have scored 20-27 over a total of 30 scores allotted to Continuous Assessment Test (CAT). While the CAT part was based over 30%, the electronic- examination (e-exam) part was assessed over 70% to give a total of 100% score in each of the two communication courses given compulsory status in the university.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Experiences since the introduction of varied approaches through the adoption of poster presentations, mlearning and elearning opportunities suggest a more convenient and faster assessment of students' assignments, more interactive relationships between teacher-student and student-student respectively. Apart from the evidence of improved performances observed from students' responses in the classroom, their assessment scores in CAT and e-examination have also improved significantly. Moreover, class attendances have also improved with both students and teachers looking forward enthusiastically to the next class.

From the foregoing discussion, the following suggestions are hereby made for better and greater output:

- Introduction of tutorials to assist weak students or to cover their areas of weaknesses and further enhance student-teacher relationship.

- Reduction in class sizes for effective management
- Increase needed for efficiency include: larger buildings/ classrooms, constant power supply, average furnishing with modern equipments.
- Involvement of Management through provisions of adequate financial support and required facilities to manage large classes.
- Collaborative support from teachers of other courses through invitation for team teaching and participant observation of classroom activities.
- Organization of exhibitions / Poster Fair to enable students transfer knowledge to other areas of learning /courses.
- Periodic assessments of classroom experiences and teaching methodologies needed for necessary adjustment and integration for efficiency.

Suggestion for Future Research

The following are suggested for future research:

1. Needs Assessment of Digital Classroom.
2. Individualised Learning Activity in the Language Classroom.
3. Integrated Teaching and Learning through Participatory Involvement of Stakeholders in Language and Literary Classroom.

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APPENDICES

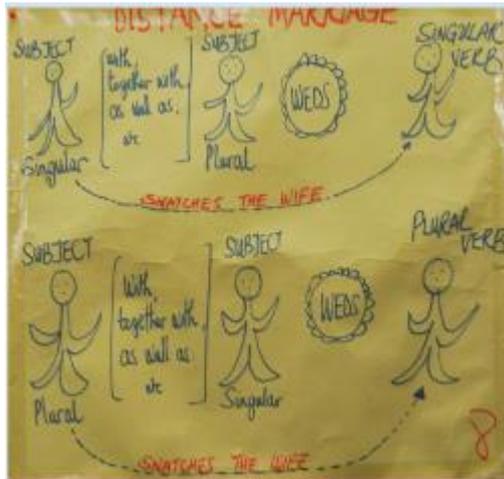


Fig 1a.

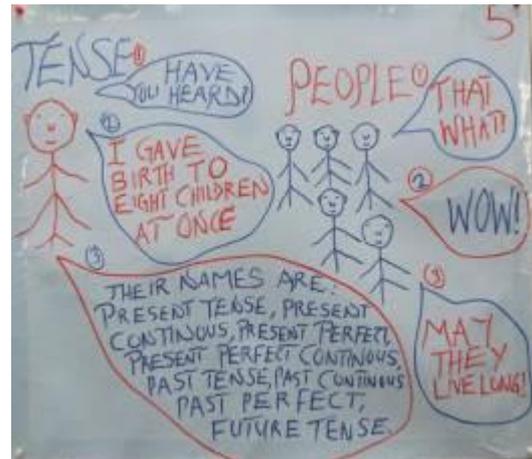


Fig 1b



Fig 1c

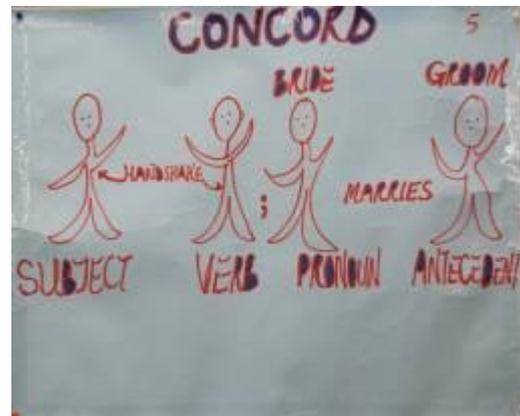


Fig 1d

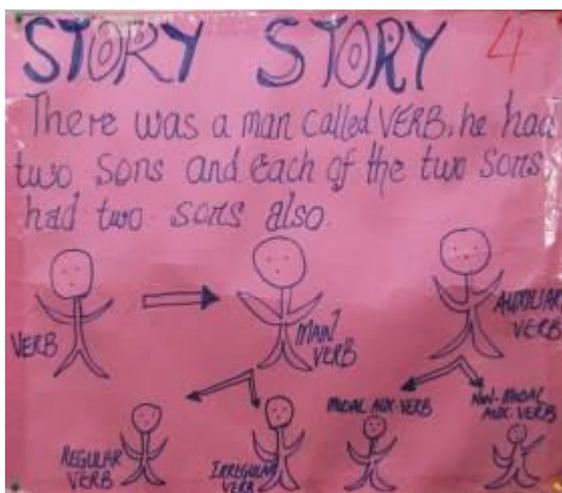


Fig 1e



Fig 2a

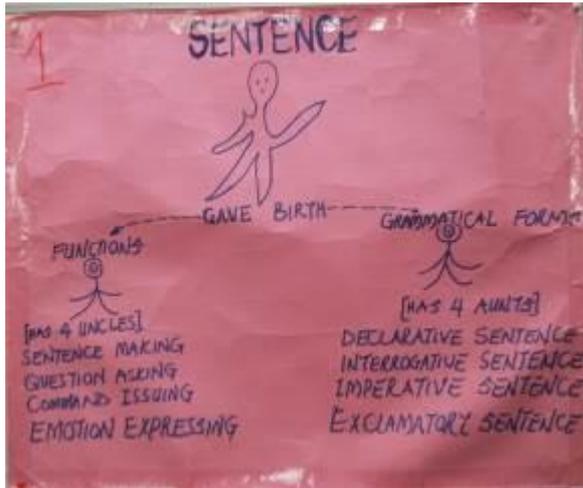


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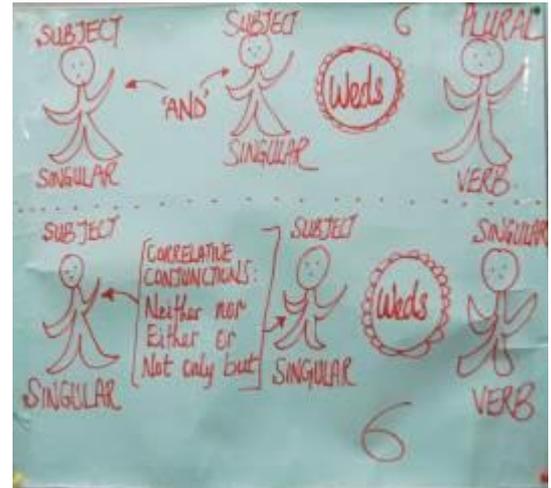


Fig 3

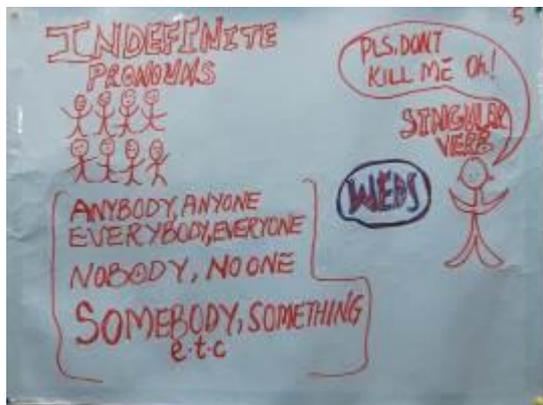


Fig 4



Fig 5a

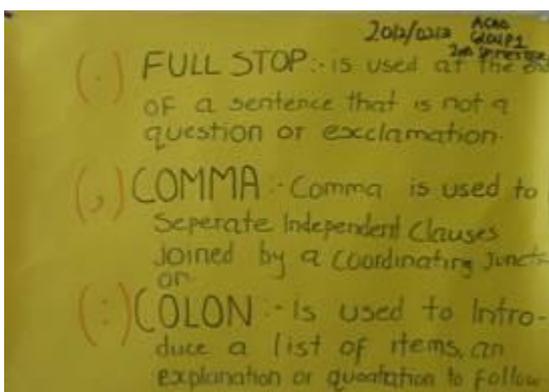


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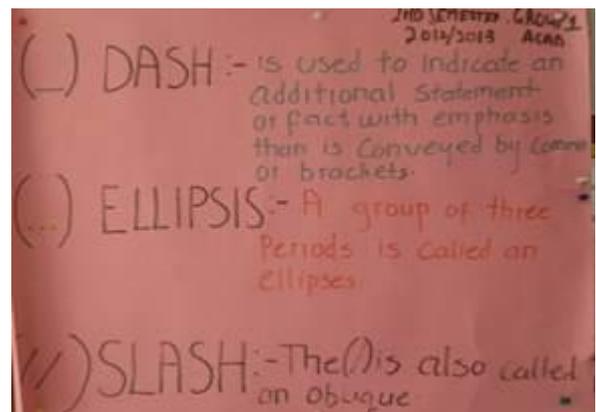


Fig 5c

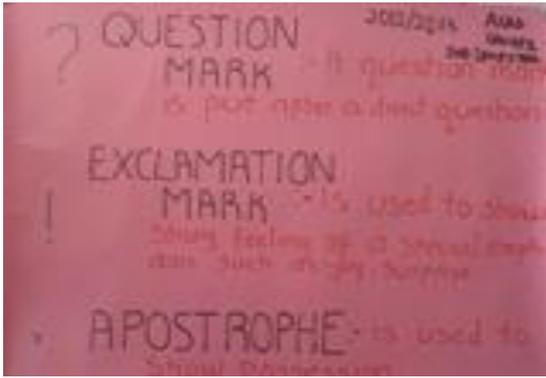


Fig 5d

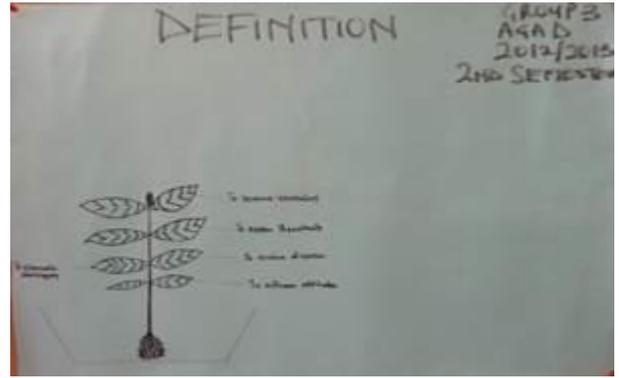


Fig 6a

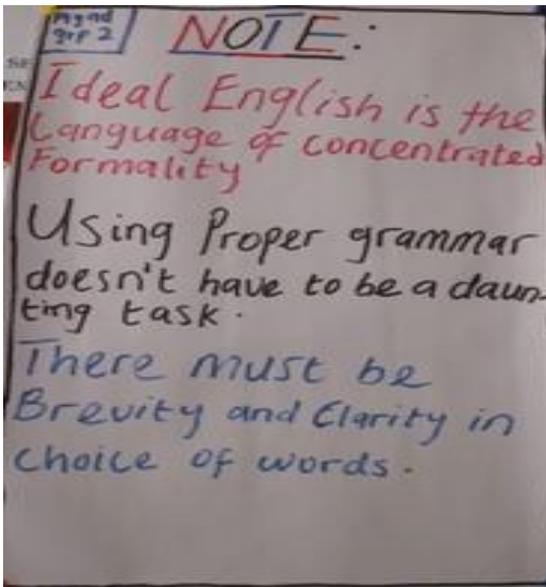


Fig 6b



fig 6c



Fig 7

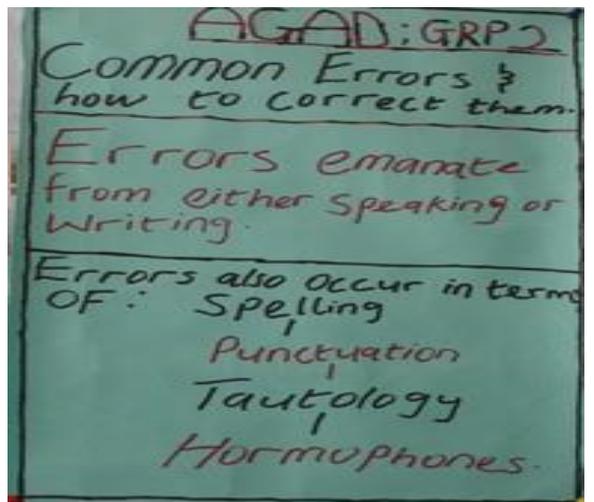


Fig 8a

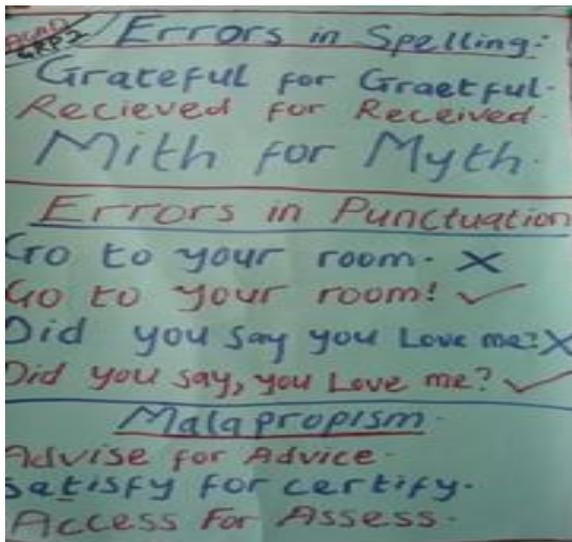


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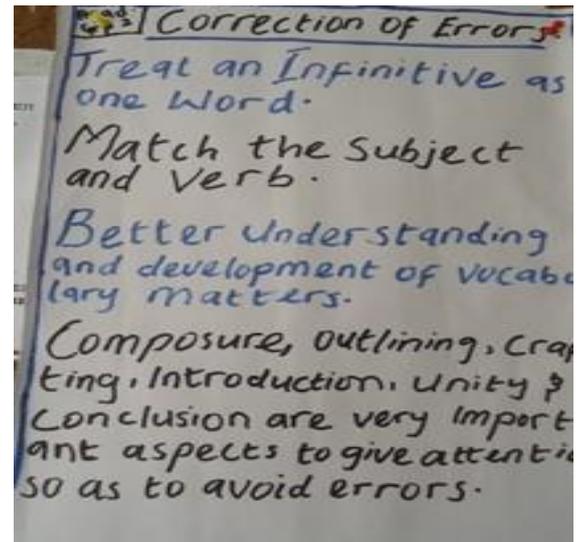


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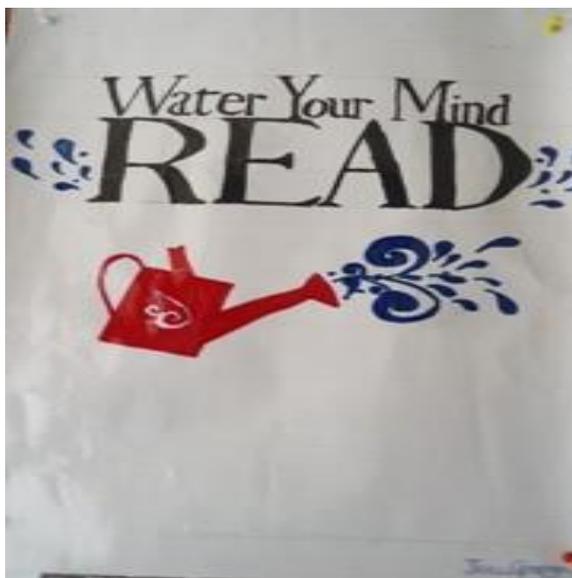


Fig 9a



Fig 9b

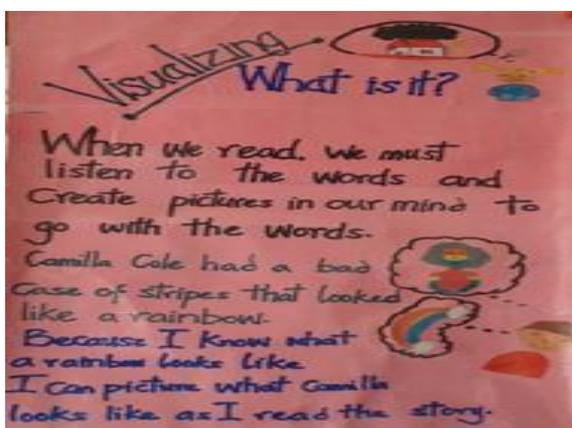


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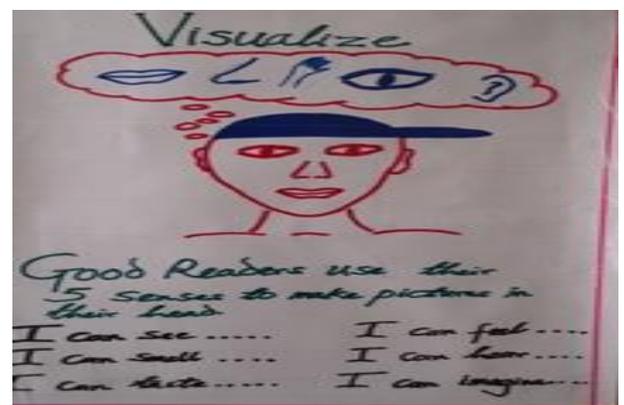


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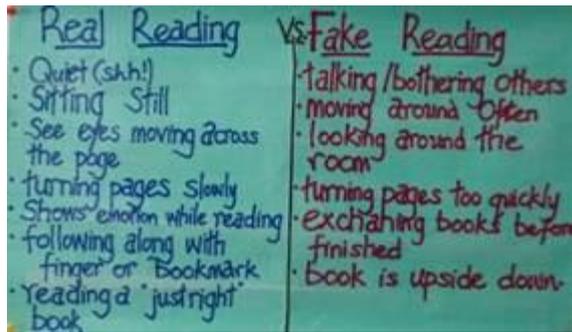


Fig 9e



Fig 9f

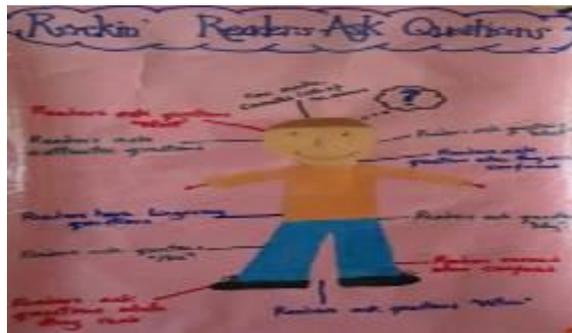


Fig 9g

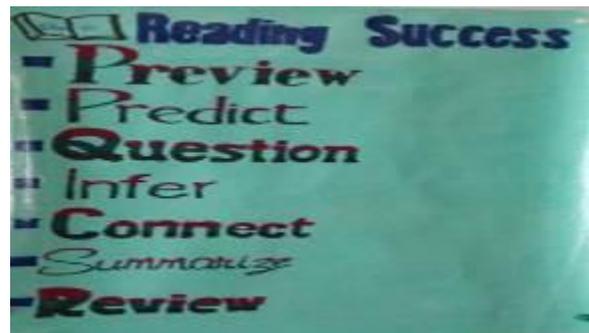


Fig 9h

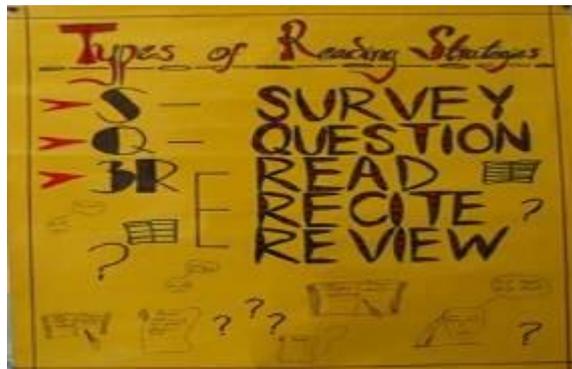


Fig 9i



Fig 10a

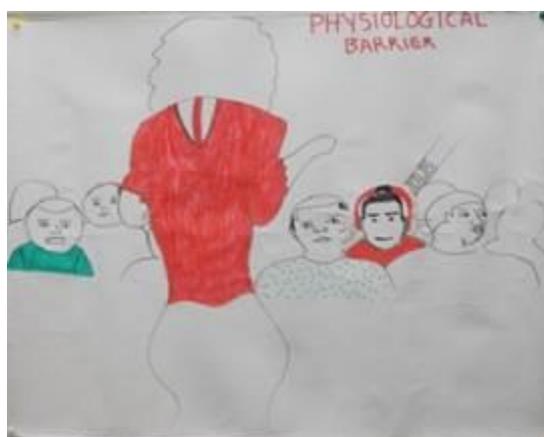


Fig 10b

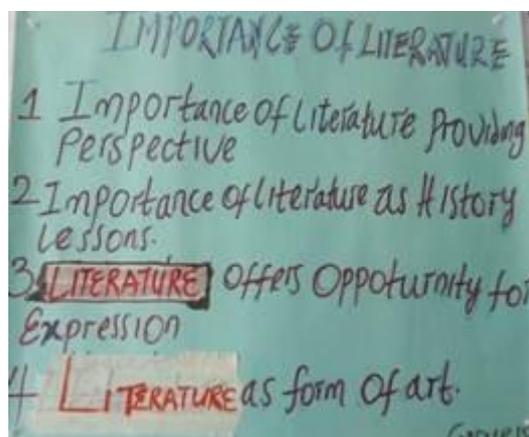


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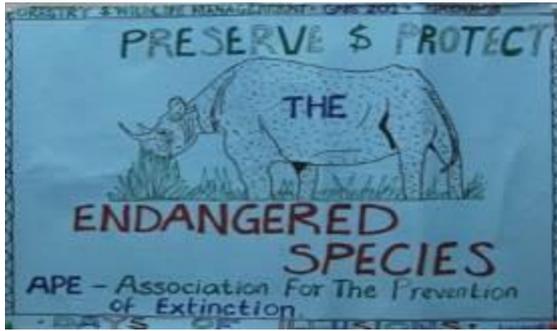


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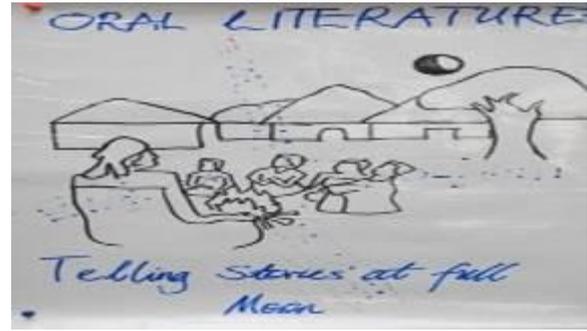


Fig 12a



Fig 12b

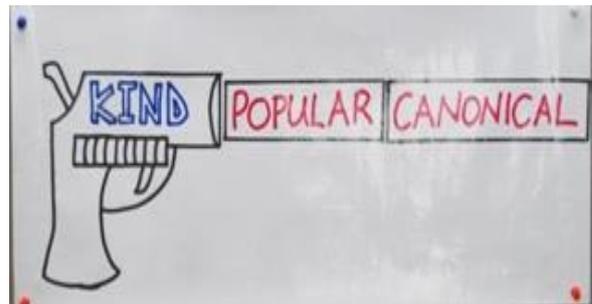


Fig 13a



Fig 13b



Fig 14a



Fig 14b

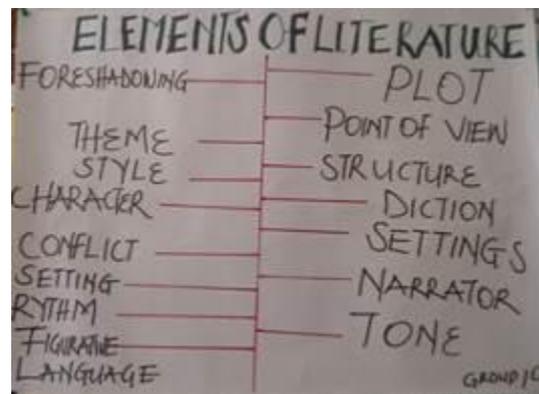


Fig 15a

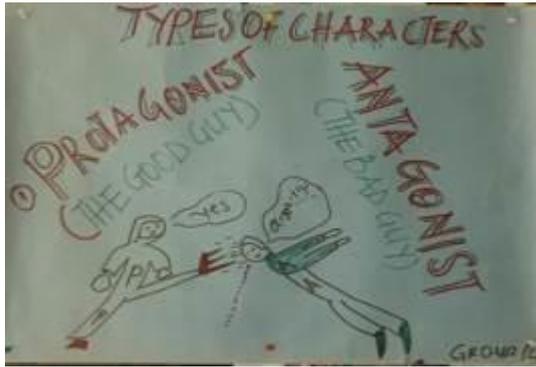


Fig 15b



Fig 15c



Fig 16a



Fig 16b

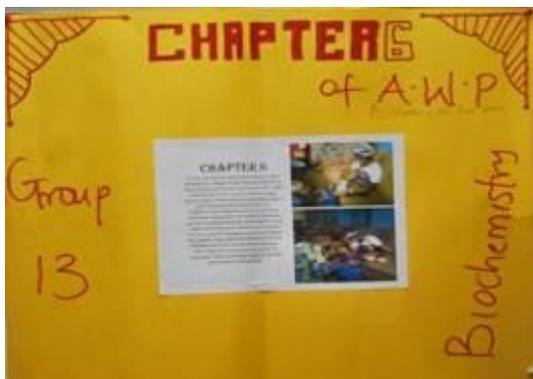


Fig 16c



Fig 17

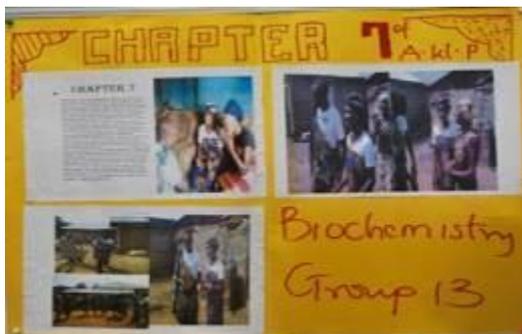


Fig 18

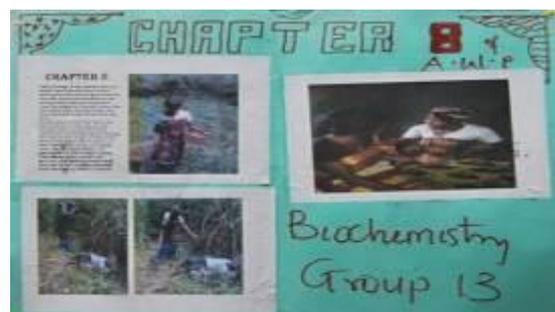


Fig 19

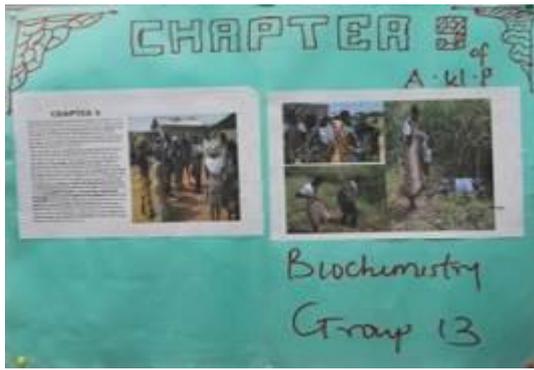


Fig 20

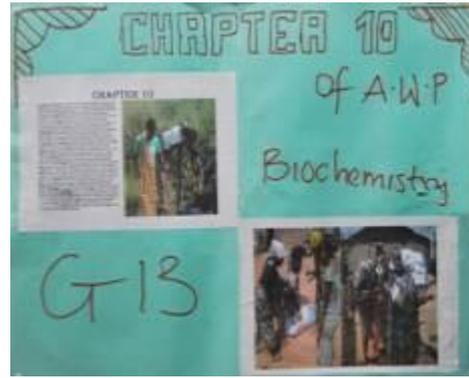


Fig 21