

Creating Effective Student Focus Group: A Guide for English Teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa.

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Abstract:

Focus groups as a research method can help teachers get a better picture of students in English-speaking classrooms in sub-Saharan Africa. This guide outlines best practices for conducting focus groups and making decisions that take into account the linguistic and cultural diversity as well as realistic concerns such as time and resource constraints that are common in sub-Saharan African educational settings. The approaches outlined will help English language teachers collect a large amount of qualitative data while addressing the regional challenges.

1. Introduction

English language teaching is an effective way to gain insight into students' experiences, learning. This method involves facilitated discussions between small groups of participants to gather qualitative data about their experiences, perceptions and attitudes (Nyumba et al., 2018). Thus, students use focus groups as a collaborative environment to share their thoughts without coercion, revealing important details about their academic experiences. Students' responses allow teachers to modify lessons according to students' actual assessments. English teachers, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, can improve their teaching practices to achieve better educational outcomes through the use of focus groups. Difficulties and language needs. In sub-Saharan African classrooms, where students with different linguistic and cultural characteristics are

taught, structured focus groups provide rich insights into students' learning processes (Bakay, 2023). However, it appears that many English teachers in the region struggle to implement focus groups successfully, especially when it comes to multilingual and documented discussions. For this reason, the demand for and interest in focus groups as a method of data collection appears to be increasing. This method involves facilitated discussions between small groups of participants to gather qualitative data about their experiences, perceptions and attitudes (Nyumba et al., 2018). Thus, students use focus groups as a collaborative environment to share their thoughts without coercion, revealing important details about their academic experiences. Students' responses allow teachers to modify lessons according to students' actual assessments. English teachers, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, can improve their teaching practices to

achieve better educational outcomes through the use of focus groups.



2. Principles for Effective Focus Group

a. Planning and Preparation

Focus groups in English language classrooms can provide a wealth of information, but several decisions need to be made that can either hinder or enhance the effectiveness of the focus group as an information-gathering tool. Essentially, the decision about focus groups is made in an appropriately systematic way. The ideal group size should be between six and eight participants to ensure representativeness and management (Motlhaka & Makalela, 2016). Selection should take into account gender, linguistic and academic abilities and knowledge. This depends on cultural factors such as age and response to cultural communication expectations, which must be integrated into the planning process (Lo Bianco, 2010).

The spatial arrangement is also crucial for the implementation of open dialogues. Seats arranged in a circle encourage participation and create a less formal atmosphere. Open discussions occur in spaces that are unique and special, rather than in a classroom as a stage for a lecture (Siegel-Stechler, 2023). In this regard, research ethics, such as obtaining

informed consent from participants, could help create a safe environment. Similarly, anonymous responses could protect participants' confidentiality.

b. Implementation Strategies

Greeting procedures should reflect the quality of the welcome and be culturally sensitive to include all participants. The purpose of the discussion should also be translated into English and the predominant local language. The order of questions should be hierarchical, starting with broad questions and progressing to more personalised language learning scenarios. Studies have shown that allowing strategic code-switching in translanguaging practices empowers students to communicate complicated ideas more easily and comfortably (Garcia, 2017), thus leveraging their diverse linguistic abilities.

Documentation techniques need to be based on the resources available. Simple notebooks are a good solution when audio recordings prove difficult. The practice of having a student assistant take notes while the teacher facilitates the discussion also ensures that all data is captured. Effective time management is also crucial.

c. Data Collection and Analysis

In collecting the data, the use of recording methods should be in line with local conditions. Where access to technology is available, audio recording is sufficiently facilitated by cell phones. Sometimes structured note-taking templates allow identification of important concepts and quotes. Simple transcription should focus only on the most important ideas.

Analysis should use simple coding methods of an investigation. Responses can be organised using colour coding on different themes and by creating simple tables. Interpretation should consider both verbal and nonverbal cues, which is especially important when nonverbal cues convey most of the meaning (Jia, 2023; Khoa et al., 2023).

3. Practical Tips

To ensure a smooth conduct of focus groups, researchers are encouraged to use some practical tips. The outlined practical tips describe how the theoretical conceptualisations are transformed into research approaches. These tips are very important when conducting research in multilingual and multicultural educational settings where conventional practices are less effective. They are:

- Establish ground rules that emphasise respect for all languages and dialects.
- Use local examples to illustrate discussion points.
- Allow natural transitions between English and local languages.
- Document contextual factors that influence responses.

- Maintain confidentiality through anonymous reporting.

Therefore, developing successful student focus groups requires thoughtful planning along with ethical considerations and language use based on available resources. English teachers in sub-Saharan Africa can improve their teaching practices and student learning outcomes by implementing these pedagogical methods in their classrooms.



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