Abstract

This study examines the challenges facing the teaching of English language in secondary schools in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State Nigeria. The purpose of the research is to determine the basic factors that can be attributed to poor usage of the language by school leavers and graduates. The methodology of the study was the use of questionnaire to elicit response from English teachers. The questions contained in the questionnaire covered areas of perceived difficulties in the teaching and learning of English, the motivation of teachers, availability and use of teaching resources, training of teachers and exposure to modern teaching methods. Findings from the study show that the problem of poor usage of English is a combination of various factors which include problem of indiscipline among students, teachers’ inadequacy to teach effectively, inadequate coverage of course contents, etc. Recommendations are made.

Background to the Study

Results of candidates who sat for both the West African Examinations Council’s (WAEC’s) and National Examinations Council’s (NECO’s) Senior School Certificate Examination (SSCE) in recent times show that most school leavers performed poorly in English. Faniran (2011) states that:

Candidates’ SSCE results in English Language have been embarrassingly poor. For instance, only two per cent (2%) of the candidates who sat for the 2009 November/December SSCE of NECO had five credits including English Language and Mathematics (Nigerian Tribune, March 31, 2010, p.17); and seventy-nine per cent (79%) of the candidates who wrote the examination in June/July 2010 failed to get credit passes in English Language (The Punch, October 7, p.14). These extremely poor results in English, the language of education and learning and academic empowerment point to an important fact: that the Nigerian educational system is heading for total collapse (p.2).
Given the state of English as a language of instruction in schools and as Nigeria’s official language, it is natural to express concern over these observable deficiencies among school leavers. The secondary schools produce candidates for the higher institutions therefore any deficiency in teaching and learning in the secondary schools spills over to the higher institutions vis-à-vis the quality of graduates produced for the country. Thus, it is imperative that the teaching and learning of English in the secondary schools should be given proper attention. On this basis this study was conceived to examine some of the likely challenges facing the teaching of English in secondary schools in Nigeria with the aim of highlighting the areas that require attention.

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem of this study is to determine the basic factors that may be attributed to the poor performance of students of tertiary institutions in the use of English.

**Purpose of the Study**

The choice of this research area arose from a growing noticeable poor usage of the English language by many school leavers and even graduates from some Nigerian universities. The purpose of the study is to highlight the challenges facing the teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools in Nigeria.

**Significance of the Study**

This study hopes to inquire into areas of difficulties in teaching various aspects of English particularly grammar and how effectively teachers utilize teaching resources in schools particularly in these days of information and communication technology (ICT). It is expected that the areas of deficiencies unveiled in this study will help to improve the teaching and learning of English in schools. Such unravelling of the problem areas will give an insight into how best to approach the teaching of English and possibly review existing methodology. The research will also provide a platform for other researchers to look into this all important aspect of language teaching in Nigeria. It is hoped that ultimately, this research work will help advance the course of learning English to improve proficiency among users of the language in Nigeria. The study also may set a basis for highlighting and expanding views on the danger of declining proficiency in the use of English in Nigeria. It is hoped that setting the agenda for the discussion of this problem from this perspective or rather reinforcing discussion on the issue through this research there would be a more concerted effort at tackling the problems that have been unveiled from this research.

**Research Questions**

- What are the challenges facing the teaching of English language in secondary schools in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State?
What are the factors responsible for poor performance of students in the use of English in tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

Does the non-availability of teaching resources constitute a major challenge facing the teaching of English Language in the secondary schools?

Assumptions

This research work was carried out based on a set of assumptions. These are:

- That there are challenges facing the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian secondary schools.
- That problems arising from these challenges negatively affect the teaching and learning of English and these have resulted in poor usage of the language by school leavers and graduates.
- That if these challenges are identified they could be solved and when they are solved it may lead to improvement in the use of English by educated Nigerians.

Delimitation

This study covered 15 secondary schools in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State Nigeria. Interviews were conducted among some English teachers. Interviews conducted among the English teachers were used to analyse the problems investigated.

Population

The population of this research consists of English teachers in secondary schools in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State Nigeria. But the research could not cover every teacher therefore; we decided to take certain percentage of the English teachers through the stratified random sampling method from which the questionnaire was administered to 66 English teachers. The sample size was considered adequate because of the homogeneity among those selected.

Instrumentation

The instruments for data collection in this research were a questionnaire administered on English teachers and oral interviews with some teachers. The questionnaire is divided into three sections, and the three sections comprise 30 questions. The thirty questions were drawn to cover the three research questions so that relevant data could be obtained to address the questions. The questions in the questionnaire were developed by the researcher. In developing the instrument, the researcher relied on perceived challenges facing the teaching and learning of English in the secondary schools. These perceived challenges provided the source for evolving the questions.

Literature Review

What today is English has its origin in Britain and it evolved through a series of conquests of the British Isles by various tribes that invaded the Isles at various times in history. Around 500B.C the British Isles were inhabited by the Brythons
(Greene, Loomis, Biedenharn and Davis 1979:5). The Romans were the first to conquer Britain around A.D 43. Later, around A.D. 400, the British Isles were invaded by the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes. These later invaders, who were later known as Anglo-Saxons, brought their languages and imposed them on the Isles. Through linguistic fermentation and dilution the English language eventually evolved.

From its homeland in England, the English language has spread to every part of the world to entrench itself to assume the status of a world language. Colonialism is a major factor for this dominance. Barber (1999) posits that:

…..English has become a world language because of its wide diffusion outside the British Isles, to all continents of the world, by trade, colonialism, and conquest. (p. 235).

In his assertion on the spread of English, Pei (1979) declares that the language is the greatest beneficiary of British colonialism and American expansionism.

The advent of English in Nigeria was through European contacts around the 15th century through trade and missionary activities. Missionary activities helped the spread of the language to all parts of the country. Later, when Nigeria was colonized by Britain English was entrenched as an official language. Even post colonial and independent Nigeria continued the use of English as an official language. Thus English has continued to play a dominant role in Nigerian socio-economic and political activities. According to Barber (1999), “In Nigeria, the most populous of Black African countries, there are three main languages (Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa) and over four hundred local ones, but English is also an official language, and plays a major role in government and administration” (p.238).

One of the reasons why English is so central to Nigeria’s educational growth is because of its significant role as a medium of knowledge delivery in Nigerian schools. English is the language of instruction in schools particularly the upper level of primary school and secondary school and beyond. Barber (1999) attests to this fact when he acknowledges that, “In Nigeria, primary schools are being built which teach the local languages, but the secondary schools and the universities are still predominantly English medium” (p.239).

Added to this basic role of a medium of knowledge delivery, English is a marker of status in Nigeria. A good use of the language is highly cherished and such gives the user a defining status. Opubor (2006) in a foreword to Uyo, O. A. (2006) ‘Rite, It Right: Analysis of Writing Errors in Nigerian Mass Media, posits that,

English is the language of the Nigerian elite…. Mastery of the language is a defining attribute of elite status, since it correlates with other social markers such as post secondary or professional education,
a good job and the comfortable income that comes with it...acquiring a mastery of English is one of the goals of those aspiring to elite status.

With the growing influence of English around the world it is ironical that Nigeria, reputed as having the largest population of second language speakers of English in the world (Akere, 1998:21) may be witnessing dwindling proficiency among its school leavers and graduates. In his observation of the state of the use of English in Nigeria, Akere (1998) states that:

There is today an embarrassingly poor level of competence and grossly inadequate proficiency in both spoken and written English among graduates of our tertiary and secondary institutions, and among students and pupils at the various levels of the educational system. One is forced, therefore to question the quality of education delivery process that is taking place in our educational institutions and as a corollary the quality and depth of knowledge and literacy with which their products are equipped to be able to function effectively in the competitive cognitive and communicative world (p.3).

Several other questions have been raised regarding the state of proficiency in English among graduates and secondary school students. The state of English in Nigeria and around the world naturally makes it worrisome to see that users of English in Nigeria are declining in proficiency. The major cause attributed to this problem has been the state of teaching and learning of the language in secondary schools. Mgbemena and Ewurum (2011) feel there have been some reasonable efforts in the past to help with the development of communicative competence among students both at the secondary level and the tertiary level. But the unfortunate thing is the dismal outcome of these efforts. In raising questions about some of the factors that could be accounted for students’ poor performance in English, they say:

…it is disheartening to observe that despite the efforts that have been made in the educational sector to ensure that students attain communicative competence in the basic educational levels – primary and secondary – the situation shows that communicative competence among students in Nigeria is far from being achieved as evinced by their poor performances, especially in writing. Thus, Nigeria keeps producing graduates who cannot contribute meaningfully to burning issues in the society. This situation incites such question (sic) as: do these students possess adequate facility in English that will enable them to understand, interpret and evaluate some of the crucial developmental issues that are raised? Do they have adequate vocabulary in English to express their ideas about the concepts? Are their lexical choices intelligible to the international community? (p.78).
Given the state of English as a language of instruction in schools and as Nigeria’s official language, it is natural to express concern over its poor usage among educated Nigerians. The secondary schools produce candidates for the higher institutions therefore any deficiency in teaching and learning of English in the secondary schools spills over to the higher institutions vis-à-vis the quality of graduates produced for the country. Thus it is imperative that the teaching and learning of English in the secondary schools should be given proper attention. On this basis, this study was conceived to examine some of the likely challenges facing the teaching of English in secondary schools in Nigeria with the aim of highlighting the areas that require attention.

Methodology

The methodology used for conducting this research involved the drawing up of a set of questions in several aspects of the teaching and learning of English in the secondary schools. The questions were set out in a questionnaire which was distributed to English teachers in the secondary schools in Aniocha South Local Government of Area of Delta State. The questions set covered areas of perceived difficulties in the teaching and learning of the various aspects of English such as grammar, oral English, summary and comprehension. The questions also touched on the aspects of discipline in school, motivation of teachers, teacher’s welfare, curriculum, and availability and use of teaching resources. To facilitate the analysis of data collected the use of percentages was employed.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question One

What are the challenges facing the teaching of English Language in secondary schools in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State?

Under this research question four perceived areas of problems were highlighted in the questionnaire. These are:

- Problems of indiscipline among students such as examination malpractice and lack of interest in learning.
- Problem of non-availability of relevant English textbooks for use by teachers.
- Problem of non-retraining of teachers.
- Problem of teachers’ welfare/remuneration.

The data from the response to the questions drawn in the questionnaire are analyzed below:

Table One
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Area of problem</th>
<th>no of respondents</th>
<th>Affirmative Response</th>
<th>Negative Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Problem of indiscipline among students such as examination malpractice and lack of interest in learning</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Problem of non-availability of relevant textbooks for use by teachers</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Problem of non-retraining of teachers</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Problem of teachers’ welfare/remuneration</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of subjects responses to questions on challenges facing the teaching of English Language in secondary schools.

**Research Question Two**
What are the factors responsible for poor performance by students in the use of English in tertiary institutions in Nigeria?

Under this research question the conclusions reached in the analysis of the data collected under research question one are applicable to this next research question. Because with such problems hindering the teaching of English Language at the secondary school level performance at the tertiary level will certainly be below expectation. However, to ensure specific findings in this aspect of the research, specific questions were drawn out in the questionnaire which was administered to English teachers in the secondary schools. What was required of the teachers in the questionnaire was for them to respond in the affirmative if they agree that those areas of problem stated in the questionnaire were the factors responsible for poor performance by students in the use of English in the tertiary institutions. The teachers were also asked to specify if they disagree. The factors highlighted under this research question were:

- Problem of teachers’ inadequacy to teach effectively.
- Problem of inadequate coverage of course contents due to non-maximization of available time.
- Problem of student’s inability to assimilate adequately knowledge of English being passed on to them.

The data from the responses are as analyzed below:

Table Two
Analysis of subjects’ responses to question on factors responsible for poor performance of students in the use of English in tertiary institutions in Nigeria

**Research Question Three**

Does the non-availability of teaching resources constitute a major challenge to the teaching of English Language in the secondary school?

To address this research question, two main questions were drawn out in the questionnaire in which the respondents were required to affirm or disagree with each of the two questions in the area of non-availability of teaching resources as constituting a major challenge facing the teaching of English Language in the secondary schools. The data collected from responses are analysed in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Area of problem</th>
<th>No of respondents</th>
<th>Affirmative Response</th>
<th>Negative Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Problem of non-enhancement of teaching with modern teaching</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Problem of non-training of teachers in area of ICT</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis of subjects’ responses to questions on non-availability of teaching resources as constituting a major challenge to the teaching of English in the secondary schools

**Discussion on Findings**

8
Among the major findings is that the problem of indolent students has impacted negatively on knowledge delivery in the secondary schools and this has affected negatively the teaching of English. Among the areas of difficulties by teachers in the teaching of English is the teaching of oral English. Teachers hardly teach this area. Conversely, students find it difficult to understand the aspect of oral English. Also, most teachers do not teach ways of approach to tackling comprehension to the students. They do not go beyond reading the passages in class and answering the questions that follow. Findings in this research also show that most teachers are inadequately equipped to teach English effectively.

With regard to the use of teaching aids, though in the response to questions in this aspect of the problem of teaching English, 95 per cent of the respondents agree that the non-availability of teaching aids constitutes a major problem to the teaching of English, during the oral interviews it was revealed that this was not a big problem per se. However, with the rate at which the world is travelling on the super highway of information and communication technology (ICT) the availability and use of modern teaching resources could enhance learning of English. From the findings, apart from the chalkboard and the chalk all the schools covered by the study have no resources for educational technology. Teaching method is still anchored on the use of chalk and chalkboard. Only one school mentioned the availability of radio, and another one the availability of a tape recorder. Teachers from two schools mentioned the use of chart to aid teaching.

It is highly necessary that approach to solving the problem of proficiency in English should be through the secondary school level so as to maximize efforts at teaching the language in the higher institutions. Professor Ayo Banjo in a foreword written to David Williams (1999) English Language Teaching: An Integrated Approach stresses the importance of approaching the problem of proficiency in English from the lower level of the educational system. In the foreword he states that:

Given the understandable importance of English Language at all level of the education system, it is important to ensure returns which are commensurate with the vast amounts of time and resources spent on the teaching of the subject. It is generally agreed that the problems lie with the foundations at the primary levels, and a great deal of energy has been expended in recent years on various forms of remedial programmes, even up to the university level.

While stressing the importance of laying proper foundations for the learning of English at the tertiary level, he emphasizes the centrality of the teacher and methodology of knowledge delivery in English. He says:

This system is….bound to be locked in this vicious circle unless bold attempts are made to lay a proper foundation at the primary and
secondary levels with skills of oracy receiving prime attention at the primary and those of literacy at the secondary. It will be possible to take nothing short of a revolution to bring about the desired state of affairs, but obviously, the centre-piece of such a revolution is the teacher of English who, besides being, himself a worthy model of the linguistic skills he seeks to impart, should also have a clear idea of the best methods to achieve his goals.

**Conclusion**

This research has concentrated on the problems facing the teaching of English in the secondary schools and it is hoped that the findings here will set agenda for further study in the area of poor usage of English in Nigerian post secondary education.

**Recommendations**

Arising from the findings in this research the following recommendations are being made:

- Pupils in primary schools should be properly and adequately taught English. Consideration should be given to the quality of students entering the secondary schools. Quality should be maintained through administering of entry test and only pupils with good performance should be admitted into the secondary schools.
- Parents should partner with teachers in ensuring that students are serious with their studies of English; parents should assist their children to study at home.
- English teachers should study widely and improve their competence in the teaching of English. Teachers should apply self effort to complement opportunities available for re-training.

**Limitations**

Some of the limitations of this study need to be highlighted here. Though we have applied as much honesty and sincerity as possible to the study to avoid misleading assumption and conclusion, we have to emphasize that we cannot say we are one hundred per cent certain that what we have found out is applicable across the country. We note here that most modern private schools do not have these problems; that the problem is largely associated with government own (public) schools.

In the course of the research there were constraints to getting sufficient responses from the schools earmarked for the entire local government area. Two major factors were responsible for this. First, the cost of covering the entire Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State is enormous and there was no sufficient fund to go round the nooks and crannies of the local government. Secondly, the time for the research was limited and most teachers could not respond as quickly as would have enabled the researcher to complete the research within the stipulated time. As a result of this we have to resort to the use of random selection of the subjects. We were limited by people’s attitude towards collection of data for research purpose in
Nigeria. In some instances, respondents were not so enthusiastic while in others response was highly encouraging.

The stated limitations notwithstanding, we believe this study has been able to provide an insight into some of the challenges facing the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian secondary schools, particularly the government owned schools.

References


