

# TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION: CHALLENGES, PROSPECTS AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL MANAGEMENT

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## **Abstract**

*This paper examines the factors that affect the teaching and learning of English Language in Colleges of Education in Delta State. The paper highlighted and explained such observed problems as mismatch between the learners' conceptual and cognitive capacities, non-challant attitude among English Language teachers, dialectical or mother tongue interference among others. The paper posited that the poor attitude of English Language and non-English Language teachers toward the teaching and learning of English Language was a major challenge militating against the teaching and learning of English Language. The prospects of teaching and learning of English Language are envisioned to be bright if education managers and other stakeholders in education make the necessary inputs to the teaching and learning of English Language. The paper concluded that the quality of output from the educational system will continue on its downward trend unless concrete measures were put in place toward the improvement of teaching and learning of English Language. Nine recommendations were made which included the provision of English Language laboratories and requisite language equipment in the Colleges, sensitization of students on the importance of language and communication among others.*

**Keywords:** English Language, Teaching, Learning, Colleges of Education.

The origin of English Language has been traced to the North Western Europe. It is said to have evolved from the Indo-European language family. English Language is one of the heritages left behind by the British at the end of the colonial administration, and has assumed a prime position because it has become the language of government, business and commerce, education and the mass media. Since the attainment of independence from the British, English Language has been the medium of instruction in virtually all subjects in Nigeria. It serves several purposes which are very important to Nigeria's existence, for instance, it is the lingua franca of the country and the official language in the society due to multiplicity of ethnic groups within Nigeria's massive geographical area. English Language is, therefore, used to unite Nigerians and bridge the linguistic barriers among its component States.

The school curriculum in Nigeria is structured after the culture, education and history of the colonialists and transmitted through the use of English Language. The quality, efficiency and effectiveness of Nigeria's education and educational curriculum, therefore, relies on English Language as the official language, which is, the language of communication. This is because of the disposition of the nation's erstwhile colonial masters who showed no interest in further developing the native languages, but rather imposed their own language, thereby leaving indigenous Nigerians with the onerous task of teaching and learning a language that is completely alien to them and, sometimes, has no direct resemblance or equivalence with their native language. The challenges posed by the adoption of an alien language cannot be under-estimated.

The poor status of the use of English Language among pre-service teachers in Nigerian Colleges of Education has attracted the attention of researchers to investigate the challenges of teaching and learning English Language in the Colleges. Colleges of Education occupy a prime position in Nigeria's education system because these Colleges are charged with the responsibility of producing teachers for the basic education level. Whatever solid or poor educational foundation these pre-service teachers acquire at this training has far-reaching implications on their job performance and the future educational pursuits of every pupil imparted on in the teaching and learning process. The purpose of this paper, is to examine the challenges of teaching and learning English Language in Colleges of Education in Delta State. Specifically, the paper highlighted some challenges of teaching and learning English as perceived by Baba and Adakonye (2016). The paper also explained the root of such challenges, the prospects of teaching and learning English Language and the role of school management in brightening such prospects. Moreover, the paper proffered suggestions for the improvement of teaching and learning of English Language in Colleges of Education.

### **Explanation of Concepts**

Teaching, according to Azubike (2016), could be seen as a transmission of knowledge. It could be conceptualized as helping an individual or student to learn.

Learning on the other hand, “is a process and not a method”. In learning, the learner plays a crucial role. Learning is a change in behaviour or activities. Learning cannot be mandated. Teachers cannot guarantee that a particular student will learn. There are so many factors that affect the ability of an individual to learn. Hence, the relationship between teaching and learning is not only elusive but also complex. The learning process, therefore, supremely tests students’ motivation and physical condition, teaching resources and teaching skills. Hence John Dewey once opined that teaching and learning maybe compared to buying and selling. No one can sell unless someone buys. Teaching cannot be said to have taken place unless someone has learnt or is learning.

The concept of education according to Fiemotongha and Ogbor (2015), is of paramount importance to the development of any nation. Without education, no doubt the society will be marked with protuberance of illiteracy, ignorance and superstition. Ene (2015), opined that teacher education is an aspect of tertiary education that is concerned with equipping pre-service teachers with relevant knowledge and skills that will enable them to function effectively in the teaching profession. In line with the same assertion, Oriafor (2009) cited in Ene (2015), stated that teacher education is the sum total of educational experiences to which the pre-service teacher is exposed in preparing for being inducted into the sacred and noble profession of teaching.

The National Policy on Education FGN(2004), has clearly stated the objectives of teacher education programme which are as follows:

- i) to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teacher;
- ii) to encourage a spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers;
- iii) to help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large to enhance their commitment to the national objectives;
- iv) to provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate to changing situations;
- v) to enhance teachers’ commitment to the teaching profession.

Colleges of Education were established to train pre-service teachers and award the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE), which is the minimum entry qualification into the teaching profession in Nigeria as stipulated by FRN (2004). Pre-service teachers in Colleges of Education are, therefore, being prepared to teach pupils at the Basic Level of Education. In Delta State today, there are two Colleges of Education, namely, College of Education, Agbor and Federal College of Education (Technical), Asaba. At the junior basic level of education (Primary School), the language of the immediate community (LIC) is used as the medium of instruction for the first three years, thereafter, English and French Languages are taught as subjects up to the Junior Secondary School. English Language is, from then onwards used as the only medium of instruction all through the child’s education.

### **Teaching English Language in Colleges of Education**

In Colleges of Education, English Language is taught as a General Education course with course code GSE 321 as one Credit Unit course, FGN(2012). However, in some Colleges of Education like College of Education, Agbor in Delta State, students study English Language in combination with other courses as a double major courses. There are combination courses like English Language/Religious Knowledge, English Language/Social Studies, English Language/Igbo, Cultural and Creative Arts/English, English Language/Islamic Studies, among others. Pre-service teachers who choose English language as a double major in combination with another subject, are expected to study English Language throughout the duration of the three-years' NCE programme while other students offer the Language for only one semester, (FRN, 2012).. According to the new Minimum Standard requirement for teaching NCE students, pre-service teachers educators in Colleges of Education are to possess a minimum of Masters Degree in their areas of specialization. Many of these teacher educators continue to improve on their professional development through Tetfund-sponsored higher education programmes. Team-teaching and student-centred pedagogical methods are predominantly employed for teaching and learning in the Colleges.

### **The Challenges**

According to Kolawole (1998) cited in Iorember, (2013) a mastery of written and spoken language is highly desirable, yet its teaching and learning are beset by a myriad of problems. Below are some of the challenges affecting the teaching and learning of English Language in Nigerian schools as noted in Baba and Adakonye (2016):

- i) Mismatch between the learners' conceptual and cognitive capacities;
- ii) Students' Non-challant attitude and ignorance to the importance of English Language;
- iii) Non-challant attitude of English language teachers;
- vi) The Nature of English Language;
- v) The apparent nature of rules in the formation of English plural words;
- vi) Contrastive consonants and vowel system of English language;
- vii) Attitude of non-English lecturers;
- viii) Poor linguistic foundation of the students
- ix) Linguistic challenge of the school environment
- x) Dialectical or mother tongue interference.

Mis-match between the Learners' conceptual and cognitive capacities poses a fundamental challenge in the second language learning. Closely related to this challenge, is the learners' linguistic level. In mother tongue learning this linguistic level develop together but in second language they are grossly out of focus. Hutchison and Waters (1987) cited in Baba and Adakonye (2016), asserted that, the second language learner is someone who is conceptually and cognitively mature but linguistically an infant. The introduction of foreign elements into the more highly

structured domain of language such as the bulk of the phonemic system, a large part of the morphology and syntax, has an adverse effect on the intelligibility of the second language. This is because it could smack off an unprecedented challenge in teaching and learning of English Language. Diabua and Okafor (2018), affirms that mother tongue interference is a challenge in the teaching and learning of English of English Language because learners are nervous and afraid of orally practicing what they have learnt in the classroom. Furthermore, the fundamental fact is that some departments in the Colleges are taught the use of English just for one semester as against two semesters. Students who are taught English Language through out the duration of their programme are deficient in both spoken and written communication and therefore, those who offer the course for only one semester will not be expected to perform better beyond this expectation. Orame and Alaku (2015), confirmed the fact that NCE students perform poorly in English Language

The students' non-challant attitude and ignorance is another strong challenge in the teaching and learning of English Language. Students erroneously believe that the major courses of their areas of specialization are more relevant than the elective courses. Consequently they develop apathy towards elective courses from other departments especially English Language. This attitude negatively affects their interest in communication skills. Moreover, the students lack interest in further developing their reading habits through the reading of literature by foreign and local novelists. As Ijov Saidu et al (2015) puts it, they rather turn to "smart teachers on internet for information and guidance. This situation is worsened by the fact that libraries in Colleges of Education lack current English and literature textbooks. In a study, Igbinedion (2016) revealed that the Libraries in Delta State Colleges of Education were ill-equipped in space and materials and this contribute to the students' lack of interest in private studies and research. Consequently, the students' acquisition of more English vocabularies remain a mirage. Furthermore, experience shows that only a few students bother to buy relevant available teaching materials like textbooks or even take time to check words and their meaning in the dictionary. These lapses on the part of teachers and learners fuel poor vocabulary and diction. Moreover, teachers' and learners' apathy to reading and research affect their competence in the four language skills areas of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Infact, the attitude of students has shown that they do not appreciate the significance of English Language and communication as a means of excelling in their academic pursuits.

Similarly, the non-challant attitude of English Language teachers is the bane of the Nigerian education system. Some of the teachers went through school just to acquire a degree. In some cases, the teachers were compelled by admission exigencies to study English Language in place of their choice courses. These teachers' attitude is also affected by the work load in the school because they are made to teach many classes far above the size of thirty-five (35) and six hours per week as recommended by the NCCE Minimum Standard FRN(2012). The teachers are also ill motivated because of

inadequate financial and other incentives. They, therefore, appear unconcerned about their academic integrity and the learners' academic development. It is disheartening to state that some teachers of English Language in Colleges of Education do not encourage the students to master the basic rules of grammar as they, themselves, do not apply the rules in communication with their students outside the classroom situation. Consequently, the students get used to vague and ungrammatical expressions. It was asserted in Fernandes (2013), that most teachers of English Language lack experience in teaching young learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This position is affirmed in Lasagasbaster (2011), asserting that young learners have positive attitudes and motivation to learn a foreign language when the teacher shows proficiency and mastery of the language. This is therefore, a wake-up call for hardwork on the part of the English Language teachers. The teaching of rules and principles of grammar in Colleges of Education is geared towards the achievement of some appreciable measures of communicative competences among pre-service teachers in the College of Education. Unless English Language teachers shift from their present lackadaisical attitude to their primary assignment, the achievement of this objective may remain illusive.

Related to poor teaching and learning strategies adopted in schools, Oneji (2008), stated five basic principles of teaching and learning English Language. Firstly, the teacher should have a clear understanding of what he/she is teaching the students. Secondly, the teacher should start the teaching of English from listening and speaking before reading and writing will follow. Thirdly, the teacher should tell the learners the importance of learning materials because they are learning English as a second language. Fourthly, the teacher should tell the learners the importance of revision of skills learnt to identify mistakes. Fifthly, the teacher when teaching, should create much time and patience because he/she is teaching English to second language learner. However, these principles are rarely applied by English Language teacher at the pre-service teachers' preparatory stage. The learners, are therefore left to device their own principles which is observable from the poor state of written and spoken English in the College.

The nature of English is also another challenge in the learning and teaching of English in Colleges of Education. This is as a result of idiosyncrasies of English Language. This confusion is mostly found in English words which have the same sounds, but different spellings and meanings (homophones). Some examples of such words are given below:

- a) Aloud (not silent) - He spoke aloud
- Allowed (permit) - He allowed me to slap him
- b) Write (make letters with pen) - I will write a letter to you
- Right (correct) - The answer is correct
- Rite (ceremony) - He performed the marriage rite
- c) Fare (money charged for a journey) - The driver asked for his fare

Fair (just) - It is not fair to condemn him

This poses a great threat to the teaching and learning of English Language. These lapses as the case maybe are not observed in spoken English, but it is majorly reflected in the written work of the learners. The learners, sometimes, hardly know which word to apply in a given situation. This is mostly due to the technicality of English Language as observed by Egah (2012), which makes learners assume that proficiency in the language is not attainable. Evidence of this claim is observed by the mass failure of candidates during external WAEC and NECO examinations.

The apparent seeming inconsistent nature of rules in the formation of English plural words is another major area of confusion for English Language learners. The students have the notion that all nouns that end with “s” are plural. However, nouns like politics, linguistics, mathematics, dynamics, phonetics, news, among others, are plural in form but take a singular verb. There are also situations where these types of noun that end with “s” take plural verb because they refer to one pair, for example in the following sentences:

- a) The scissors cuts everything.
- b) The pants are too short

Again, the contrastive consonants and vowels system of English Language are also aspects of English Language that create difficulty to English learners in Colleges of Education. Such contrastive consonants and vowels are not found in the mother tongue ( $L_1$ ). Consequently, learners inter-change the English consonants and vowels with what is available in the mother tongue ( $L_1$ ), resulting in wrong pronunciation of words in English Language. Bamgbose (2007), observed that the greatest area of interference is on pronunciation of English sound systems by Nigerians. According to him most of the phonetic characteristics of English Language can be traced to the transfer of features from their mother tongue ( $L_1$ ) which is their first language. The danger of the phonological interference phenomenon is that intelligibility is lost and these faulty pronunciation find their way into learners’ writing process as reflected in essay writing. Translocation in English Language and dialectal interference is a major issue in the teaching and learning of English Language in Colleges of Education. When sentences are translated directly from  $L_1$  to  $L_2$ , they make little or no meaning in spoken or written English. In very bad cases, “r” sounds “L” in some Nigerian dialects. This flaw is brought into the classroom to further mesmerise the already confused learners who have other challenges from his or her dialect that are impeding the learning of the  $L_2$ . According to August and Shanahan (2006), for effective mastery of English Language, the learners are expected to comprehend the following:

- i) Similarity of native language to English Language - The more closely the student’s native language and English Language are related, the students can apply knowledge of similar vocabularies and grammar in the two languages to learning fundamental literacy skills in English Language, such as spelling of familiar words or determination of where a sentence starts and ends.

ii) Native language literacy - To the students, native language oral and written skills are effectively leveraged. Oral and written literacy knowledge and abilities can transfer to the acquisition of English literacy, thus accelerating learning process.

The attitude of non English teachers and other members of staff is also one of the challenges of teaching and learning of English Language in Colleges of Education. Most non English teachers in Colleges of Education mis-conceive the teacher-made materials like textbooks provided by the English Language teachers as a means employed by the teachers to extort money from the students in order to increase their earning power. Thus, they discourage their wards or children from buying these teacher-made materials specially prepared to handle the students' identified grammatical problems. Some of these non-English teachers also see English Language as a complete distraction which does not allow the students to concentrate on their areas of specialization. Against this backdrop, they ask embarrassing questions like "if a student has met the admission requirement in English, why does he/she need to offer English again as a course?" "Why don't we allow these students to concentrate on their areas of specialization instead of bothering them with foreign languages?" This prevailing negative attitude of non-English lecturers make the teaching of English Language in Colleges of Education an arduous task as it does a lot of harm to the concerted effort of the English lecturers. The English Language teachers are, therefore, not motivated to teach and the learners are not motivated to put in the much needed efforts to consolidate on the concepts they are learning. Ebenebe (2013), affirms that "the ultimate goal of quality teaching is to improve the quality of the learning experiences of students and through that, lead to realization of positive learning outcomes. In a situation, where teachers in Colleges of Education are not motivated to give in their best to the learners, the learners no doubt will come out of school as half baked graduates.

Poor linguistic foundation of the students right from their basic (primary schools) through to the secondary school education is a major challenge in the teaching and learning of English Language. An empirical survey by Elegba (2012) revealed that, many students lack proper foundation in English Language. They have neither learnt nor mastered the basic grammatical structures and their rules at the primary and secondary school levels. This affects their knowledge of grammar, lexis, phonology, semantics, spellings and punctuation marks, to the extent that some students do not know the symbols of some punctuation marks and how or when to use them in writing. Another fact also is that the use of the mother tongue for teaching and learning at the basic level of education is encouraged by FRN (2004). The basic level of education is the period where solid foundations are laid for good success in future educational endeavours. A faulty foundation at this level portends doom for other more serious future educational endeavours. The teaching and learning of English Language at the tertiary level to which the Colleges of Education belong, is seriously challenged by the shaky foundations laid at the basic level and built upon at the secondary level of

education. In addition, some learners are not exposed to the standard variation and the basic grammatical structures of the English Language at the early learning stage. Learning a language is boosted when a learner begins with spoken variety as this variety carries all the emotional and cultural nuances of the language and makes creativity in written language easier.

Teaching and learning English Language is also hindered by the linguistic challenge of the school environment which is different from that at home. Consequently, the varieties the learners are exposed to at home, sometimes, play out in his/her spoken and written English, thereby producing a home-grown variety called "Nigerian English". The word 'wonderful', for example, according to Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, means "great, amazing or good". Most learners of English Language however, use the same word as a common exclamation for any event that is 'good', 'bad' or 'admirable'. It is even used for achievement or even failure, not just by the learners but also by the teachers of English Language. In some cases, English Language learners impose the lexico-syntactic structures of their indigenous languages on English Language as a result of ignorance of the rules of usage of English Language. Below are some cases of sub-standard usage of spoken English by learners resulting in syntactic errors:

- i) Don't put your mouth in that matter - (incorrect)  
Don't interfere in this matter - (correct)
- ii) I will follow you to Lagos - (incorrect)  
I want to accompany you to Lagos - (correct)
- iii) The Food is sweet - (incorrect)  
The food is delicious - (correct)

There is also the worisome factor of the unbridled use of pidgin or broken English within the school environment. This has taken its toll on the teaching and learning of English Language in the Colleges. A variation of the pidgin English has sprouted from different geographical locations of the nation. People have become adept at formulating new pidgin English words and slangs from Warri and Sapele in Delta State and from Benin City in neighbouring Edo State. This new version of English Language find full expression in the Colleges and strongly challenge the teaching and learning of good English in schools. In addition, the introduction of social media and text messages in the ICT system, has also played a noticeable role in written English. Studies revealed that the use of social media coined words negatively correlate with students' performance in English Language.

### **Prospects of Teaching and Learning English Language and the Role of Educational Management**

A yet to be disputed truth is the fact that the British standard variation of English has a pride of place which cannot be compromised because of its adverse effects on the achievement of the goals and objectives of the Colleges of Education.

Colleges of Education are charged with the onerous task of producing teachers for the nation's basic education sub-system. This implies that pre-service teachers and learners in Colleges of Education need to work really hard towards enhancing their grammatical competence. There is no over-emphasising the fact that the teachers' ability to lay a solid foundation at the basic education level and produce meaningful academic development and growth depends on the outcome of their educational ventures at the pre-service training period in the Colleges of Education.

Szynalski (2014), suggests the following for learners of English Language:

- \* read English sentences and think about their structures
- \* learn new words from a dictionary
- \* write correct English sentences by consulting dictionary, grammar guides, and the Web
- \* practice the pronunciation of English sounds and words by using pronunciation dictionary. These guidelines have the capacity to further brighten the prospects of teaching and learning English Language.

School managers at these Colleges also have a significant role to play in brightening the future prospects of teaching and learning of English Language in Colleges of Education in Delta State. The nation cannot afford to remain outside the conclave of the world's quality education providers as has been the case for sometime now. The role of school management, as implementers of educational policy plans and achievement of educational goals, in enhancing the prospects of teaching and learning English Language in Colleges of Education are highlighted below:

- Sensitization of staff and students during orientation programmes on the need to take the English Language course seriously because of the important role it plays in effective communication. The country is now embroiled in security challenges the likes of which have never been experienced in the history of the nation with communal conflicts, inter tribal hatred and all manner of conflicts. Such conflicts cannot be resolved without effective communication skills. Good mutual understanding through language and communication is the panacea the world needs for lasting peace. Moreover, the need for good English, as the nation's lingua franca, in the process of national economic development and growth cannot be over-emphasised.
- Thorough screening of English Language teachers during the recruitment and interview stage. School management, through this process will ensure that only the best suited candidates are selected.
- Provision of enabling school environment for teaching and learning English Language;
- Liaison with the controlling bodies of education for the provision of requisite training materials;
- Liason with international interest groups for training and retraining of English Language teachers in Colleges of Education in other English Language speaking

countries as is done with French teachers who are sent to Francophone countries as part of their training programme. These roles of educational management cannot be undermined. .

### **Conclusion**

The millenium development which teachers of English Language envision for pre-service teachers in Colleges of Education through the acquisition of competences in language and communication will continue to be a mirage if these challenges identified in the teaching and learning of English Language are not properly handled. Failures in the main language medium of education is a predictive index of failure in the educational system of Colleges of Education. Unless pre-service teachers in Colleges of Education attain a high level of proficiency in English Language, they remain on the verge of being excluded from the world's scholarship and national development-oriented education. Nigeria may, in the future, need interpreters to make her voice heard at international meetings. It is expedient, therefore, that the hands of all stakeholders in education be on deck to assuage these challenges and enhance the prospects of teaching and learning English Language in Colleges of Education.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made to ameliorate the challenges and improve the prospects of teaching and learning English language in Delta State Colleges of Education:

1. The teachers of English Language in Colleges of Education should speak good English language in their interaction with the learners whether outside or inside the classroom in order to inculcate the habit of the correct usage of English Language in the students;
2. School managers should lay emphasis on the importance of English Language in the students' handbook;
3. School managers should give students and teachers orientation on the need to be serious and improve on their spoken and written English because of the important role English Language plays in national and international communication;
4. The use of dictionary and other relevant materials/textbooks should be made compulsory by educational managers for effective teaching and learning of English language in Colleges of Education. In other words, English Language teachers should not be penalised for compelling learners to buy books that can promote their spoken and written English;
5. The school management should set in motion, a motivational scheme in form of prize awards for the best student in English Language for each academic session in order to boost the morale of other students in learning English Language;

6. Government agencies should fully support the Colleges o Education through adequate budgetary allocations and finances for the purchase of qualitative textbooks for the College libraries in order to aid the teaching and learning of English Language;
7. There should be regular English Language professional teachers' development seminars and workshops. Regular workshops will give teachers of English Language the opportunities to meet, discuss and exchange views with their colleagues;
8. Education managers should prioritise the training and retraining of English Language teachers under the staff development scheme because of the importance of the lingua franca in economic and national development;
9. Educational managers should liase with government and non-governmental organization for the provision of requisite learning materials in the Colleges' English Language laboratories.

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