

CHALLENGES OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN THE FACE OF MOBILE PHONES/ SOCIAL MEDIA IN THIRD WORLD SOCIETIES: FOCUS ON NIGERIA

Gbaden Jacob Chiakaan, Ph.D
Department of Mass Communication,
Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia,
Nasarawa State.

Shema'u Abubakar Umar
Department of General Studies,
Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia,
Nasarawa State.

And

Juliana Sibeï Shammah
Department of General Studies,
Nasarawa State Polytechnic, Lafia,
Nasarawa State.

Abstract

English language is officially recognised and spoken in Nigeria. This language, therefore, happens to be a medium of instruction in our schools from primary to tertiary. Being a foreign language that is imposed on the multi-lingua Nigeria and other Third world countries in Africa for the sake of achieving national unity and integration, the task of teaching the language has become very herculean but necessary. This task becomes even more difficult and challenging in the current globalised world which is the fundamental product of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The ICT has given birth to mobile phones and other electronic media; these media provide a platform upon which the internet and interactive media operate. With this development, people sit in any part of the world and share ideas with others in near and far places. Students, particularly in tertiary institutions, do not only have resource materials available for research but they also have a means of interacting with others and catching fun for entertainment. As good as this situation appears, it constitutes a serious threat to the teaching and learning of English Language in Nigeria and

other developing countries. This paper, dwelling on one of the active media paradigms of magic bullet, has, therefore, discussed the challenges mobile phones and social media pose to the effective teaching and learning of English language in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The paper has recommended that a serious campaign should be carried out by school authorities and parents or guardians to educate students in tertiary institutions about the dangers of overuse and reliance on mobile phones and social media in and outside the classroom.

Keywords: English Language, Mobile Phones, Social Media, Tertiary Institutions, and Nigeria.

English language is becoming an important tool in the hands of its users and gaining more popularity in the world with or without the consent of its native speakers. The acceptability and proficiency of English language has led to so many advancements in the world among which include the social media. Nneka and Omeje (2013:39) noted that English is an international language and widely used in all the countries of the world. In fact, to make the best of globalisation, one has to be able to speak English fluently. This means that English language is not just peculiar to a particular country, thus it is becoming the language of the world despite serious struggles in ensuring that native languages prevail and are preserved. Some of these native languages are gradually going into extinction because of lack of speakers, who for so many reasons have abandoned their languages and embraced the English language due to its flexibility, comfortability and openness. Graddol (2000:31) opined that English is the language of trade and computer and is increasingly a necessity for job placements. Yen (2008:30) also posited that English proficiency is central in an understanding of the world because English is the main language of science and technology, which brings about development. English language assumes the spot of global most used and influenced language. The importance of English to Nigeria as a multi-Lingua society cannot even be overemphasised. Pointing out the motive for the adoption of the language in Nigeria as lingua franca, Chiakaan and Bulus (2015:140) posited that:

...Three languages considered major have been identified with these regions. These are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo referred to as Northern, Western and Eastern regional languages. Incidentally, in all these regions, there exist other languages that are spoken by others whose origin has nothing to do with the major ones. Some of these people cannot even understand or speak the major ones in their areas. One fundamental problem in particular, is disagreement due to political and social competitions among people of the three regions concerning which language can be adopted as official language of communication. It, therefore, becomes difficult to decide on which one can be adopted nationally...

But English language is not only the language of communication in Nigeria, it has become the rallying point of Nigerians. The language integrates and promotes peaceful coexistence among Nigerians.

In schools, it is the main medium of instruction. There is no subject that is taught and learned without the involvement of English language. This implies that the study and mastery of English language is very fundamental to the Nigerian student in tertiary institution. Mastering this language becomes very essential as in it lies the survival, unity, future and development of the country.

Unfortunately, it appears that the technological advancement in information and communication, instead of being a total blessing to the study and learning of English language to the Nigerian students and others in multi-lingua Third world societies is not. The invention of mobile phones and other electronic media leading to students access to interactive media, even though to some extent, facilitates the studying and learning of English language, pose a serious challenge to the teaching and learning of the language in schools at the same time. This is the crux of this paper.

Conceptual Clarifications English Language

The multi lingual nature of Nigeria has given rise to the acceptance of English language, not only as a second language but also as an official language in the country. In Nigeria, English language is a symbol of unity, it is the medium of instruction in our schools, it is the language of government and administration. English is now the world's most important language and it is estimated to be spoken by one in five of the world's population. It is the language of international commerce, popular culture, and the internet and holds an unassailable position among the world's major languages not in terms of the number of speakers but in terms of domain of use and international spread. English language is a global language because of its function all over the world. No wonder Leiper (1998) in Nneka and Omeje (2013:9) said English is:

a language that most people will acknowledge is sweeping the planet's physical, economic, cultural and cyber space...It is a language the young in the developing world, the formal world, and the world yearning for democracy feel compelled to learn. Unlike any other in history, English is an increasingly classless language. Perhaps, it is because it is the language of digital world. In any case English encompasses more than just a convenient means of communication among the global denizens. It is an ideological movement – even by accident.

The roles and positions of English are growing very fast and it will continue to increase because of its uses in the world. Power (2005:77) as cited in Abubakar (2014:25) argued that English language is an instrument of globalisation. English contributes to the globalisation trend. The contribution of English language to the success of the world of science and technology in this regard, is indisputable. Crystal

(1997 in Abubakar (2014:18) stated that “most of the scientific, technological and academic information in the world is expressed in English and over 80% of all information stored in electronic retrieval system is in English.” This is an evidence of the importance of English language in the current worldwide globalisation process. It explains why English language is now tagged the lingua franca of the world.

Tertiary Institutions

Tertiary institutions, also known as higher institutions, are formal settings where students who have completed secondary education seek further knowledge. The National Open University (NOUN) in (2004) as cited in Chiakaan (2016:24) referred to tertiary institutions of learning as education at a higher level. The module acknowledges The Association of African Universities thus:

The Association of African Universities (AAU) Working Group on Higher Education recommends that higher education should include tertiary institutions other than universities. In addition, at the second African Union (AU) meeting of experts, higher education was described as including all post secondary education including universities, polytechnics and technical colleges, teachers training institutions, institutions for medical training and agriculture (and other fields) distance education centres and research centres and institutes with the possibility of expanding to include other forms of post secondary education.

Folarin (1998) in Chiakaan (2016:3) reiterated that:

A higher institution of learning such as a university, polytechnic, or college of education may be put into the category of organisations usually classified as “complex organisations.” As a matter of fact, there must be very few organisations which can be ascribed greater complexity than a full-fledged higher institution of learning...

The higher institutions of learning are considered complex because of the nature of their establishment. They may comprise of different competent departments and units, with a working human labour capacity from diverse cultures, trainings and backgrounds. These collections of staff are administrative or academic, not to mention the calibre of students that they accommodate. Folarin (1998) in Chiakaan (2016:20) added that they “harbour a large concentration of social non-conformists... whether one is thinking of students, or of teaching and non- teaching staff.” These higher institutions of learning are recognised by law. They admit on regular basis and are either fully or partially accredited by a body set up in this regard, which offers degree or diploma or National Certificate of Education (NCE) on a non-profit platform (The US Legal Code, 1992).

Social Media/Mobile Phones

The emergence of Social Media has presented to us the new age of technology. This is the period that people, especially the youths spend most of their

time on Social Media Technology (SMT). Mobile phone is a common instrument that can be seen in every hand especially in the hands of students. To be frank, students have the latest mobile phones. As they are inquisitive in nature, they become experts in operating various functions of the mobile. Wikipedia defined mobile phone as “a portable telephone that can make and receive calls over a radio frequency link while the user is moving within a telephone service area.” Dlamini, Naibe and Muchenwa (2015: 105) have said that “generation of users is known by many names, for example, generation Y, avant-garde and the millennials.” Elmore (2011:41) has termed them the “screenagers” while Gary (2008:67) referred to them as “digital natives.” In this information age, Social Media Sites (SMS) seem to be growing in popularity rapidly (Pempek, Yermolayeva and Calvert, 2008:22). The SMT active group spends so much time engaged on electronic gadgets that Drry (2008:31) estimated it to be not less than eight hours a day. Similarly, Sheldon (2008:53) estimated that more than 50% of college students go on a social networking site several times a day.

The Wikipedia’s definition of social media is that they are “computer-mediated technologies that allow the creating and sharing of information, ideas, career interests and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks.” This explains why Andreas Kaplan and Micheal Haenlein as cited in Ganiyu and Akinreti (2011:118) defined social media as “a group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundation of Web 2.0 that allow the creation and exchange user-generated content.” Ganiyu and Akinreti (2011:119) have gone ahead to explain Web 2.0 by referring to it as the “functional built into websites that allows people to more easily put their web, makes it possible for users who, in this regard, are the sender and the receiver, to create and exchange information with immediacy.” Dlamini, Naibe and Muchewa (2015:107) further noted that “Social Media Technology (SMT) denotes to web-based and mobile applications that permit individuals and groups to craft, engage and share either the existing web-related content or the created content (e-mails included).” SMT, therefore, creates virtual social space that aids and encourages various interactions among persons of the world: global networking. Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter and Mei-Chen (2007)’s study found that because of so many people having busy lives or having friends and relatives in the diaspora, these sites have helped to keep contact with those individuals that students rarely saw. The social networking is so much in use that the current debate is no longer on whether social networking should play a role in education but has shifted to what social networking tools work best and how to deploy them (Digital Directions, June 16, 2010) as cited in Dlamini et al, 2015).

Types of Social Media

Social media or networks are numerous; they range from You Tube, Face book, Twitter, Skpe, to We Chat, WhatsApp, Instagram, LinkedIn, ToGo, Imo etc.

There are quite a number of utilized social network sites; they can be grouped in line with the services they provide, for instance, consumer review platforms including Yelp, the micro-blogging sites such as the twitter. Social network has been defined by Ellison and Boyd (2007:105) as “public web based service that gives room to individuals to construct profiles, identify other users and display user connections, operating within these connections as well as read and react to postings made by other users on the site as well as send and receive messages either privately or publicly.” Using the social network facility, Dryy (2008:37) noted that “individuals can send private messages, may write on other user’s walls, can organize social activities and keep informed about other user’s activities they choose to share.” It should be noted that users have the ability to choose and control the information they would like to share publicly with others. Tufekci (2008:19) suggested that users may choose the following items: pictures, favourite movies, books and birthday, relationship status and locations. Due to fast changes in social media, it is difficult to point out which might be termed the most commonly used Social Networking Sites. However, Dlamini et al (2015) suggested that it is the face book which Harvard (2011:29) proposed that more than 90% of college students have their profiles on it.

Advantages of Social Media to Students

In spite of the so many ills associated with Social media like ungodly exposure of students to pornography, easy access to vital information that can tarnish the reputation of an individual or group, blackmail and extortion from the public, the social media are a blessing on the other hand where properly used. Students can wisely use them to do their assignments and research on given topics for projects and presentations. They can be used for marketing purposes that is students that are into buying and selling or those that have special skills or talents; the essence of reliving precious moments with loved ones can be achieved through constant connection with each other. In other words, it helps to build and maintain long term relationships that students had right from primary school. A lot of students enrol for online classes to improve their skills, knowledge and to further their education. The acquisition and proficiency in the use of social media gives the student a sense of accomplishment to compete with global challenges. Effective use of social media provides opportunities for achieving set targets by students. Students can also use it to improve their spoken English by building their vocabulary.

Challenges of Teaching English Language in the Face of Mobile Phones and Social Media

English language as a basic course of study has encountered many problems in its teaching and learning. One of the major challenges is in the English Language itself. This is a main challenge in the teaching and learning of English. Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009: 27) noted that “English is a second language (L2) in Nigeria, and has its

own characteristics which make its learning and teaching very problematic to both tutors and students. The problem of mother tongue or language contact which comes as a result of interference or language contact is recognizable in phonology, semantics, syntax and vocabulary. This is why majority of students who have English language as an elective course shy away from the Use of English. The mind blowing interference of mobile phones and social media into their lives (students) however, has complicated the already painstaking issue of tackling the teaching and learning of English language.

The acquisition of mobile phones makes social media easily accessible to its users. Mobile phones are the fastest growing technology now because they are affordable, depending on what one is acquiring them for; they are indeed everywhere including classrooms. Teachers across disciplines are now in a very serious competition with a host of electronic stimuli for students’ attention. The question is: Can students concentrate with the same intensity while using their mobile phones to either send text messages, chat, tweet or just socialise on social media while classes are going on? The truth is that students who engage in social media activities with their mobile phones while classes are going on, recall less about classroom activity or content than those who do not. The mobile phone poses a huge distraction to both the student and the teacher. The teacher is forced to discontinue lessons and attend to the student whose phone rings in class or who seems lost with his/her head buried in his phone, which signals that he/she is not paying any attention to the lesson, that means that valued time is being wasted.

Another challenge is that those students who use mobile phones in class take poor quality notes, detracting from another cognitive process by which students integrate new materials. Their over-indulgence in using their mobile phones to update their status on social media, show their new look, reply a post, tweet their current location and so on, weighs them down. They sometimes develop complex problems and engage in all sorts of activities to acquire smart phones that can enable them do what their classmates and peers are doing.

Over dependence or use of social media by the students is another issue of concern. This is where they heavily depend on the net for each and every class activity they are given. That is due to the unending accessibility to the net, they gain instant access to answers which they sometimes download and submit thereby amounting to plagiarism. The students spend much time on social media which mostly yields no positive result at the end. They no longer want to read proper print materials like text books written by renowned scholars; they prefer to Google with their mobile phones and get instant answers, since with data bundles, browsing is almost free. Because of their lack of priority and inability to know that there should be limit to their usage of mobile phones on social media, they ignore or do not even know that social media are undermining their capacity for independent study and enhancing their poor grammar.

Apart from copying information directly from websites for assignments given to them without reading them properly to verify if the source is legitimate, they are also so carried away with abbreviations and symbols they use during chatting that they implore same in serious formal settings like classroom and in academic exercises like their C.A or exams. They use words and sentences like; 'r u ok' for 'are you alright', 'r u dia' for 'are you there', 'gr8' for 'great', 'OMG' Oh my God', 'lol' for 'laugh out loud', 'ws chkng dem plz' for 'was checking them please', 'aswear' for 'I swear', 'b4' for 'before', 'nyt' for 'night', 'im dwn wit fiva' for 'I am down with fever', 'pics' for 'pictures', 'pple' for 'people'. Such twisted media language are too numerous to mention.

Students' obsession with mobile phones and social media has another disadvantage of hindering adequate spelling skills; it encourages plagiarism to a large extent and highly disrupts classroom communication and concentration. The inexcusable media language or text message language that they invented and are holding in very high esteem, continue to find its way in their formal academic activities which is unacceptable since it is not proper English language.

Restricting the use of mobile phones in school is another major challenge. Higher institutions have serious issues concerning the use of mobile phones during school hours. Teachers frown at their usage in class, they sometimes seize the phones, send students out of their classes for distracting lessons, refuse students permission to excuse themselves to receive calls and so on, but majority of the students do not adhere to simple instructions from their teachers during classes to switch their phones off, put them on silent or simply do not come to class with them. They are so addicted to the screens of their phones that they cannot ignore a text message for an hour or two, or a phone call during classes. The mobile phone continues to be a prime channel of social interaction and communication during school hours, completely enslaving students that they cannot comply to any rule regarding mobile phone usage in school.

Mobile phones and social media have reduced students to robots. A group of students can be found in a room together, and instead talking to each other by exchanging glances, sharing laughs, seeing each other's expression and bonding together which naturally promotes friendship and togetherness, they are chatting to each other via social media, their heads buried in their phones; no exchange of emotions. They do not set targets for themselves where their academic pursuit is concerned. They do not prioritise and differentiate between studying time and leisure time. However, little did they know that social media is quite time consuming in the sense that it can be used inappropriately and the content may be inappropriate, therefore, consuming so much valued time that could be used wisely.

Theoretical Framework

This paper has adopted the magic bullet theory. The magic bullet theory bears different names. Folarin (1997) in Chiakaan (2014:110) referred to it as the instinctive

S-R theory. It also has other names such as the hypodermic needle theory, the transmission belt theory and the mechanistic stimulus-response theory. This theory considers the audience of mass communication as irrational because their thoughts and behaviour are completely caused by media messages. According to the theory, the audience of mass media respond to media messages without thinking about the effects such messages can have on them. For instance, if the media direct them to dance, they can dance, if it is to run, whether they like it or not, they can run, they are incapable of taking independent decisions and actions. The magic bullet theory looks at the audience of mass media as being passive. Sambé (2014:215) posited that the receiver, in this regard, “is a very naive person and anything the media feed him, he takes.”

Media messages, on this note, are equated to bullets. Bullets when they are released from the barrel of a gun, they cause an irresistible reaction in the human body they penetrate. The magic bullet theory suggests direct influence of mass media on an audience by “shooting” or injecting it with appropriate messages desired to trigger a required response. The way students in tertiary institutions are carried away by the new communication technology suggests a direct relationship between this theory and this discourse.

Conclusion

The most important things in a students’ life include studying, learning good habits and gaining good knowledge to become a person with outstanding moral character for the betterment of his society. But today, as we see in various studies, this optimal learning process is seriously jeopardised by students becoming entrapped by the ploys of social media. Students neglect their studies by spending so much time on social media and phones rather than studying or interacting with people in person. Actively and frequently participating in social media can negatively affect their academic performance or hamper their journey to future careers. Most students get too involved in social media which can lead to an addiction that inculcates bad habits. Students prefer to chat for hours with friends and strangers online, and this leads to a waste of time that could have been used for studying, playing or learning new skills.

Recommendations

Based on what has been discussed in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- 1. Advising against over use of mobile phones and social media:** Lecturers, parents or guardians have a big role to play in making students realise the dangers of using mobile phones while lectures are on. They should not only be advised but warned against over relying on social media and the net for assignments, projects and other school (formal) activities. Seminars and conferences can be organised from time to time to enlighten students in this regard by managements of tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

2. **Regulating use of mobile phones:** It is necessary for school authorities to develop regulations over the use of mobile phones during school hours, especially for tertiary institutions. Students should also get the choice to spend time socializing in an effective way. It should not distract their academic activities and they should know that social media create visual world that drastically differs from reality. They should also develop the cognitive and intuitive ability to analyse how much time they want to spend on social media. They should be able to decide what really matters in their lives and how much of the visual life translate to real life for them.
3. **Seminars and conferences:** Since this has become a very serious problem affecting the learning behaviour of students in tertiary institutions generally, managements of tertiary institutions in Nigeria should embark on a very serious campaign against it. In this regard, seminars and conferences can be organised from time to time to enlighten students on how best they can use and benefit from these new media.

References

- Abubakar, H. A. (2014). "Challenges of Globalisation in Teaching of Use of English in Nigerian Polytechnics" in *Journal of Humanities and Social Science*. 19, 23-27.
- Ayodele, B. O. (2004). "National Language Policy in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects in Higher Education." *Journal of Educational Development (JONED)* 5, 85-91.
- Baym, N.K, Zhang, Y.B, Kunkel, A, Ledbetter, A, Mei-Chen, L. (2007)." Relational quality and media use in Interpersonal Relationships." *New Media and Society* 9 (5):735- 752
- Chiakaan, G. J. (2016). "An Evaluation of Public relations Practice by Selected T Institutions in Benue and Nasarawa States." *Unpublished PhD Thesis Submitted to the Postgraduate School, Benue State University, Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria.*
- Chiakaan, G. J. (2014). "Barriers/Issues/Challenges in the Application of the Social Media in the Local Government Administration in Nigeria." *A paper presented at Savannah Guest Inn for Directors of Social Services and Information Officers. Lafia, Nasarawa State.*

- Chiakaan, G. J. and Ahmad, J.I. (2014). *Mass Communication for Beginners in Nigeria*. Makurdi: Azaben Publishers.
- Dlamini, C., Naibe, F. and Muchenwa, S. (2015). “The Use of Social Media Technology in Universities: A Case of Solusi University Zimbabwe.” *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*. 7, 101-111.
- Drry, C. (2008). “The Relationship Between Face Book and Digital Technologies, Computers and Education.” *Journal of Media and Communication Studies*. 7, 37.
- Elmore, T. (2011). “Screenagers.” Retrieved May 15, 2027, from <http://growingleaders.com/blog/screenagers>.
- Ganiyu, M. and Akinreti, Q. (2011). *Multimedia Journalism: A Manual for Online and Multimedia Journalism in Africa*. Lagos: Emgee Pub. Ltd.
- Gary S (2008). “Research shows that internet is rewiring our brains.” Retrieved April 15,2017, from <http://newsroom.ucla.edu>.
- Graddol, D. (2000). *The Future of English?* London: British Council.
- Nneka,U. E. and Omeje, J. C. (2013). “Challenges in the Teaching of Use of English in Tertiary Institutions in a Globalising World” in *Journal of Law, Policy and Globalisations*. 19, 37-41.
- Onuigbo, S. M. and Eyisi, J. (2009). *English Language in Nigeria: Issues and Developments*. Calabar: Paclen Publishers.
- Pempek, T. A. Yermolayeva, Y.A. and Calvert, S.L. (2008). *College students' social networking experiences on facebook*. J. Appl. Dev. Psychol. 30(3):227-238.
- Power, C. (2005). “Not the queen’s English.” *Newsweek International* (Online) Available. Retrieved on May 15, 2027, from <http://www.Newsweekinternationaledition>.
- Sambe, J. A. (2014). *Introduction to Mass Communication Practice in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Sheldon P (2008). “Students favorite: Facebook and motives for its use.” *Southwestern Mass. Communication. Journal*. 23, 39-53.

The US Legal Code (1992). "Institute of Higher Education." Retrieved Feb. 21, 2014 from www.law.cornell/uscode/text.102.

Tufekci Z (2008). "Grooming, gossip, facebook, and myspace" *Inform. Commun. Soc.* 11(4):544-564.

Yen, C. (2008). "Globalisation and English language teaching and learning: challenges and trends." *A paper delivered at the International conference on English Education Held April 26 -27, 2008 at Shih Chien University Taipei, Taiwan R.O.C.* Retrieved March 24, 2017 from <http://afl.usc.edu>.