
FACTORS MILITATING AGAINST QUALITY ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

English language occupies an important role in the realization of the education goals and objectives in Nigeria. It is the second language of the Nigerian people, as well as the language of instruction. Notwithstanding, many factors impede quality English language teaching and learning in our colleges. The study identifies and examines some of the major factors that the teaching and learning English encounter; and subsequently proffers some favourable outcomes that could enhance the teaching and learning of English in our colleges. The study identifies the factors that hinder quality English language teaching and learning: teacher competence, disruption of academic calendar, multilingual issues, grammar-driven method, large class sizes, inadequate laboratory equipment/ instructional materials, inadequate and funding of education generally. The study recommends improved quality teaching and learning; and competence in English: encourage teacher professional development, provision of well-equipped language laboratories, and use of instructional materials. The lecturers through the use of group projects and activity-based instructions in the classroom can achieve standard and effective English teaching and learning.

Keywords: English as second language, English language teaching and learning, Quality.

The important implications of English as a second language in Nigeria, more especially as it relates to instructional goals cannot be ignored. It is obvious that all those whose responsibility it is to ensure effective teaching and

learning of English do not take it for granted. As a second language, English plays so many important roles in Nigeria. It is the language of communication between, and among people from different linguistic backgrounds. The mass media, government and judiciary carry out all official duties using the English language, even, for business transactions. Relationship with the outside world is made possible through the use of English Language; specifically, the social media. It is the language of education and virtual learning. Therefore, English plays the vital role of nation building in Nigeria, and enables the nation to engage in global trade and investments. English has so far proven to be the most popularly used language in the world during this COVID-19 pandemic. Through the use of English, information about coronavirus was made known to the world. I wonder what would have happened if covid-19 does not understand the English language! Many countries of the world including Nigeria would have had very big issues communicating to their people. English also plays a huge role of curtailing the menace of insecurity through dissemination of information. The English language roles mentioned above enable the language to develop and expand its characteristics features, some of which serve to differentiate it from the English used in other parts of the world especially in its native environment.

Problems of Teaching and Learning English Language

As Nigerians, we do have problems in learning and using it in ways acceptable and intelligible to other users in different parts of the world. Ahmad (2008) agree that the condition of learning English at secondary level is worse and there is need to address these problems on priority bases. Such problems are particularly the concerns of those involved in the teaching and learning, of which we all belong to. This means that what we teach should not only be nationally acceptable but must be internationally intelligible (Oyetunde&Moudumogu, 2002). The learners have few opportunities to absorb the language from the environment. Westwood (2006), reported that learning difficulties of the students were due to the lack of innate or cognitive abilities, perceptual impairment, and learning disability, deficiencies in memory or poor motivation. At the tertiary level of education, students have so much difficulty with their communication skills in English which affect their academic use of English. The concern being expressed in informed educational circles is the extent to which the variety and quality of English learned and used in the school system can serve in achieving Nigeria's educational goals and objectives. English language being a compulsory subject and medium of instruction means that students are expected to be more skilled in the use of English language and

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perform well in external examinations. But, the traditional method of teaching (Grammar Translation) commonly used by the public schools do not give room for pragmatism. It is dogmatic and does not give room to use and practice the English language in and outside the classroom. The teacher assumes the position of someone who has all the knowledge and there is no communication in the class. It is always teacher-centred! The features are dull classrooms, no tasks and activities, pairing or grouping students. In a primary class, the teacher holds a long cane, chants and the learners repeat in chorus while in the secondary class, refers students to a comprehension passage which is used to teach the grammatical structure, vocabulary and meaning (Eshiet, 2012).

Teachers are accused for teaching for exams at the expense of use of English, and a good grade in WAEC and NECO English examination, which is not a reflection of students' competence in the language. The reason for the poor performances cannot be far-fetched, because teachers of today teach for assessments which follows the pattern of anticipated examination questions. A testing and teaching system that emphasizes the coupon-filling multiple-choice exercise in grammar, including the attendant guess-work, promotes knowledge about the language and not of the language. Tests of lessons on oral English that place a premium on recognition to the neglect of production skills will turn out students who may understand when spoken to but may not be able to respond intelligibly and intelligently (Alexander, 2014). What about the miracle centres where students pay huge sums of money for exam malpractice? Thereby presenting magic 'A' results that are not defensible! It is very obvious from the foregoing that there is problem. A large number of students fail their semester exams because they cannot even interpret the questions given. Who is to be blamed? So many factors have been put forward as the reasons for poor communication among students. These are inadequate preparation and qualification of teachers, the examination system, poor methodology, insecurity and lack of commitment on the part of the government. It is assumed only those who have professional training in English teaching should be the one whose competence and proficiency in all language skills are in good measure, especially in spoken and written English. It is also expected that the English language teachers possess good knowledge of current trends in the use and theoretical aspects of English. For that reason, the proficiency level by students at the end of secondary school, as well as the high quality of their spoken and written English, reflected a positive disposition to the teaching and learning of English. Having the paper qualification to teach English and not having at all have caused many problems for most students. In addition, the security situation

and the COVI-19 pandemic on the other hand, created panic for both teachers and students. Thereby promoting ineffective teaching and learning of the English language, as well as disruption of academic calendar. For example, schools were closed down in the 2020 academic year, at some point as a result of kidnapping and Boko haram terrorism! This paper therefore, scrutinizes some major factors affecting the quality of English language teaching and learning in colleges of education in Nigeria.

Factors Affecting Effective English Language Teaching

English became the official language of Nigeria when all its regions were amalgamated as one political entity at the beginning of the 20th Century. Alexander (2014) opine that the quality of English teaching and learning from this time till about the 1980s was remarkably characterized by adequate competence on the part of teachers and learners alike. This is partly because of the high premium placed on the language as a result of its utility value, as well as the opportunities it provided as a window to the world and to white collar jobs. It also served as a vehicle of inter-ethnic and cross-cultural communication in a multilingual setting in Nigeria. English was also mastered by its users in the mass media, in the conduct of government administration, in commerce and in social interactions, particularly among an expanding middle class who use it as a lingua franca (Akeredolu-Ale, 2007). The acquisition of good English was taken seriously as a result of the linguistic and social functions vested in it. There was also a corresponding high level of motivation to learn and attain proficiency in the language, especially among students at all levels of the educational system. There has however been a gradual decline in the quality of English teaching and learning in the last 30 years and the situation has deteriorated so much that it has become a major national concern, especially with the failure rate recorded in the last decade in English and other subjects in the Secondary School Certificate Examination. Despite the important roles of English language in Nigeria, teaching and learning English as a second language is saddled with a lot of problems. These range from the variety of English, concept of Interference, pedagogical competence, lack of incentives to teachers of English and others. We discuss them as follows:

The Issue of Varieties of English

One of the problems of English in Nigeria is a decision on which variety or varieties of the language should our students or the people learn; and should our teachers to teach. English is the mother-tongue of people in England, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. It is also the

mother-tongue of South African whites. In both native and non-native environments all over the world, the English language has acquired different characteristic features. The type of English spoken and used for daily purposes in those places is not exactly the same in its characteristic features for native speakers of the English language. These characteristic features differ from place to another, and led to the development of varieties of English in those places, including Nigeria. The development of the varieties is an inevitable phenomenon particularly in the circumstances of English language being learnt and used as native or first language. Apart from a variety of English needed for every day communication, whether oral or written, in the context of English as a second language, there is English which is appropriate to the various professions and other occupations. For example, the English used by medical doctors to discuss health related issues is wide world. Secondary students have to learn and use the varieties appropriate to English studies, science, government and economics. These linguistic requirements of these varieties pose additional burden for the students and for the teacher of English to take care of. Akujobi and Chukwu (2012) asserted that, second language learners experience overwhelming challenges in learning the second language and these challenges are due to the differences between the forms and meaning of English and those of the native language. The British Standard English is the model taught but the learners still have the problem of being exposed to the American English, hence confronted with both Standards during internal and external examinations.

Pedagogical Competence

There are two aspects of professional competences. They are the knowledge of the subject to be taught, and the other is the ability to teach it in a way to bring about learning outcomes on the part of the students. Some teachers are not competent enough to teach the different components of English because they lack mastery of subject of matter. Others rely solely on the textbooks and reading of comprehension passages. Through it, they identify difficult words and answer questions from the passage read. Talking about ‘knowing that’ which is propositional knowledge or theory and knowing how- pedagogical skills. Students find it easy to identify a teacher who lacks knowledge of the subject and will never be happy with his lessons. But can forgive the teacher’s inability to master the art of teaching but find the knowledge of subject completely inexcusable (Bisong, 2005). At whatever level, a teacher should show mastery of the subject taught. A qualified and competent English teacher

should be able to teach both oral and written language at primary and secondary school levels. A teacher should aim at being an authority in his field of study!

Competency skill is not just about teaching. It involves the teachers' skill to use instructional materials appropriately in the classroom. Materials include textbooks and non- textual products meant for the learning and teaching of English. They include instructional aids such as chalkboard, charts, and audio-visual equipment. Many teachers may not use some audio-visual instructional aids because they lack the Know- how. Other problems of teaching English as a second language are poor teaching methods, insufficient time allotment, large class size and unqualified teaching staff.

Teacher Competence and Qualification

It is well known fact that the academic qualifications, knowledge of the subject matters, competence and skill of the performance of students especially in semester examinations shows the level of academic achievement of students. However, the experience of the lecturer is significant at impacting the students' academic achievement in English. For a lecturer to manage his class efficiently for English language learning, he needs to be qualified, systematic and enthusiastic. The most important factor in improving students' achievement in English language is by employing seasoned qualified teachers in all schools which means that a language teacher needs to qualify for the job, as well as have the knowledge of what he has to teach and how to teach it (Abe &Adu, 2013). Formal education, knowledge, pedagogy studies, certification, licensing, and professional development determine the quality and qualification of the competency of a teacher. Teachers constitute the most important part of the school system, with the English language teacher serving as model for students, particularly in oral production. The more trained a teacher is, the more efficient knowledge will be impacted to the students. Ability to speak fluently without teaching qualification does not make one good English teacher. It is worrisome that many of the English teachers today, are not good models for their students because they lack the confidence in the language.

The quality of education of any nation could be determined by the quality of her teachers. No wonder policy investment on quality of teachers is related to the improvement in the students' performance. Specifically, the measurement of teacher's preparation and certification are correlated with students' achievement in English. Obi-Okoye (2018) opined that a teacher qualification is one of a number of academic and professional degree that enable a person to become a registered teacher in primary and secondary schools. Such qualification includes but are not limited to post Graduate Diploma in Education

(PGDE), and Nigeria certificate in Education (NCE). Professionally qualified lecturers in this paper, are those who obtained professional training that gave them professional knowledge and skills, techniques, aptitude as different from the general education and had degrees like B.Ed., B.SC, Ed, M. Ed. and so on. investigated the influence of teachers' qualification on academic performance and found that teachers experience was highly significant on students' academic achievement in English language. While non-qualification and non-professional teachers in the teaching profession is killing the profession because they are not really professionals but people looking for greener pastures. There are still many teachers who are not even trained at all teaching the English, and some who jumped into the profession because there was no job. Sometimes those who are trained and are ready to teach were not even employed especially by the local and state ministries of education who prefer to employ teachers who are unqualified and pay them cheaper. For example, the English language teachers at the primary school level and junior secondary are not usually specialist teachers of English, they receive general training for teaching all subjects. There was no special training or competence given to those who teach English. Based on the above, the decline of English standards has been solely blamed on the qualification and inadequate preparation of teachers. The general opinion is that Nigerian teachers do not have mastery of content and methodology.

Littlewood, (2007) also shares the same opinion that teachers do not have enough confidence to conduct any communication activity in schools because they do not consider themselves proficient to engage with the students in communication according to their needs.

Qualification means the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent person determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to a given standard. In order to be regarded as a qualified teacher, one must have satisfactorily completed an approved course of initial training or have a special qualification approved and certificated, in the alternative a course of training leading to registration or certification. The importance of the qualification of the English teacher in the teaching and learning process cannot be ignored. This is because in the language learning situation the teacher is more than just a subject teacher. The role changes from that mentioned above to that of a facilitator, an explainer, observer, involver and a councillor, therefore, the general teaching skills, special training, application of theory and linguistic principles apply to the teaching learning classes. It should however be noted that techniques themselves cannot compensate for poor language proficiency, though they definitely enhance the

effectiveness of the teacher's needs to have a high degree of mastery of English language, in addition to his professional techniques of teaching. How well-prepared are the ESL teachers in Nigeria for effective implementation of ESL programmes in terms of giving ESL learners the much needed communicative competence in the international standard variety of the English language? The objectives of teachers training can perhaps be approached more practically from the point of view of desired qualities of the output, that is, the teacher of English as a second language. This means that the application of educational objectives and language (ESL) education in particular, is very crucial for optimal professional competence because these insights inform practice. There cannot be effective practice without a knowledge of the underlying principles. These include, for example, knowledge of educational objectives and application of learning theories including theory of curriculum and instruction, variety of teaching learner-centeredness. The need for teachers of English as a second language is highly demanding which entails further education and expertise in the subject. Teachers need to master the theoretical bases of classroom practices and linguistic insights in order to enhance their operation in them as well as their productivity, student learning and communicative competence in English as a second language (Obi-Okoye, 2008).

Inadequate Instructional Materials

For purposeful learning which enables students to retain what was learned and used, the teacher is required to provide necessary materials to the class for effective teaching. This is because qualification of the teacher is not the only factor affecting effective teaching but also the use of instructional materials. Considering the learning problems of English language in our schools and how students use English language in various internal and external examinations, it has become increasingly necessary that materials and other aids should be used by teachers for the teaching of English and for any other subject. The use of instructional materials has a major impact on the activity of language teaching. This is because students are eager to learn vocabulary with the assistance of visual materials, and that the use of visual materials enhances the students' ability and opportunity to use language to express their ideas and feelings. The use of visual materials enhances students' ability and opportunity to use language to express their ideas and feelings. However, teachers rarely use visual materials such as cards, charts, and real objects in teaching, despite the majority of teachers and students admitting that visual materials help students learn language effectively. Teacher's use of audio-visual aids helps students to

understand lessons more and improves their English language skills, such as pronunciation skills or conversational skills, through listening to native speakers. In addition, the use of audio-visual materials also helps to make classroom activities more interesting and helps the students to remember the lessons longer. Similarly, textbooks, workbooks, dictionaries, chalkboards, and posters are dominant in English classrooms, whereas modern media such as audio and video, programmed texts, language laboratories, flashcards, computers, magazines, and newspapers are rarely used. Teachers rarely use visual materials such as cards, charts, and real objects in teaching, despite the majority of lecturers and students admitting that visual materials help students learn language effectively. Teacher's use of audio-visual aids helps students to understand lessons more and improve their English language skills, such as pronunciation skills or conversational skills, through listening to native speakers (Omajuwa, 2005; Onukaogu, 2002). Instructional materials make lessons authentic and the use of language laboratory contribute immensely to language teaching. Language laboratory provides the students with good articulation of sounds. Frequently, the only material used by many English teachers is a single textbook. Neither innovative material nor new trends in the teaching of English is incorporated into lesson plan. No wonder then, many students have problem in learning English or passing their external examinations. The different kinds of authentic objects which can be used in a communicative language teaching class to support communicative activities from language-based realia are signs, magazines, and newspapers, graphic and visual sources like maps, pictures, symbols, graphs, and charts. Truly, the purpose of organising materials and equipment in the classroom is to enable the children to understand what they learn and so be able to apply their knowledge to solving their problems in life. Nonetheless, only qualified English teachers that understand the usefulness of instructional materials in tasks and activities should be allowed to use the materials for the promotion of effective communicative language classroom and the achievement of learning outcomes.

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate government funding for the education sector of the country since the late 1980s has produced ripple effects in the educational system at all levels. First, it compromised the quality of teaching and learning in all institutions: Colleges of education where teachers are trained, tertiary institutions awarding diplomas and certificates such as the Polytechnic and technical schools and most of all, universities. Secondly, it led to a brain drain

with many qualified and competent teachers, especially at the university level, leaving for greener pastures outside of the country. This means that a less qualified and competent set of people took over the training and teaching of students, especially at tertiary level. Consequently, the quality of graduates and teachers produced became less desirable.

In addition, education became commercialized in the country as parents were no longer satisfied with the performance of public schools. This led to further complications as the more competent teachers in the public schools took up appointments in the private ones for financial reasons. Public schools became the only alternative for students from poor socio-economic backgrounds and these students were also left with teachers who have lost their own motivation to teach and to perform at their best as they try to make ends meet by engaging in other activities that will earn them more money. Moreover, a lack of funding meant that the school system was no longer being monitored or supervised by standards organizations invested with the responsibility of doing so. According to Jeyifo (2011) the lack of government funding for education is one of the major issues of confronting the education system. Specifically, language education is the chief medium of communication. Without language we cannot imagine a civilized human society. In addition, the traditions, myths, and religions of every human society are encoded in their languages. Both teachers and students need to be aware of the complexity of the process of English language learning at school, outside the school and the high involvement of non-linguistic factors, as much as the linguistic factors, and thereby plan the learning activities accordingly to facilitate learning

Interference

Mother tongue is the native or first language a person acquires and the L2 is his or her second or non –native language but not in all cases. There are people whose first language is not native. Such persons can be regarded as asymmetrical bilinguals. Thus, a Nigerian can have first language to be English instead of Ibo, if she was born in Edo. In Nigeria today there is high level of interference amongst English Language teachers and students. English language was adopted as an official language and lingua franca to solve the problem of multilingualism and language variety in the nation. Interference of L1 can affect the teaching and learning of English language greatly because a teacher whose first language (L1) Yoruba or is most likely to mispronounce some words due to differences in orthography and phonological differences. Many Nigerian languages do not have the dental fricatives /θ/ and /β/. Because of this, there is a tendency to substitute /t/ for /θ/ and /d/ for /β/ at regular conversation level

which leads to commotion between words like ‘tin’ and ‘thin’, ‘tank’ and ‘thank’ by Igbo speakers of the English – ‘there’ and ‘dare’, ‘day’ and ‘the’. Likewise, the absence of /s/ in majority of Nigerian languages may result in the substitution of /s/ for /z/ found among the Yoruba speakers. Again, there may be difficulty in pronouncing the following the words; check, teach, for beginners because of the absence of affricates in Nigerian languages. These examples greatly affect the teaching and learning of English.

Environmental Influence

The environment also impacts on the quality of teaching and learning. Most of the students in public schools especially in pre-primary to secondary school come from home environments where they are not exposed to English language. Their only contact with the language remains therefore within the school system. This makes it difficult for them to achieve the desired proficiency considering also that the quality of teaching has been compromised. The impact of environment on English language learning by indicating that a child who grew up where English language is the language of communication will have an advantage over others who grew up in remote environments and whose parents do not have enough means to send them to private schools. The environment of teaching and learning in a multilingual society also affects English language proficiency. Apart from interference phenomenon manifested at all levels of language in the areas of phonology, morphology, lexis, syntax and semantics, students are also vulnerable to deviant forms within and outside the school environment. In some cases, the deviant forms are transferred and perpetuated by their own teachers -who ought to know best.

Nigerian society at large has also become permissive, with corruption permeating many institutions. This makes it less desirable to uphold other standards in almost all areas of life. Both teachers and students and education inspectors have become complacent and no longer pay attention to quality or correctness. The school system became paralyzed, sometimes for more than six months due to incessant strikes as a result of teachers’ demands. In addition, school enrolment exploded beyond what the system could adequately cater for. This meant that less attention is being given to learners especially in compulsory and important subjects like English. Some schools also lack infrastructure such as classrooms, furniture and teaching materials. The social and moral decadence in Nigerian society has also found its way into the school system. This meant that schools no longer serve the purpose of instilling the right moral attitude to life and education through discipline and guidance. As Adesulu (2019) rightly

observed cultism, prostitution, armed robbery, kidnapping, security as well as examinations malpractice, are now part of school life.

Insecurity

The security interest of any nation should include but not limited to safety of life and properties, economic, physiological social and mental well-being and even the mere freedom to pursue the attainment of legitimate objectives without hindrance. So national security will mean all things done to eliminate distractions and abuses of safety so as to create an environment free, safe and convenient enough to attract investments, developments and growth. The following indices have been identified the presenter as the security challenges confronting English language teaching and learning in Nigeria: corruption, crime and terrorism, Boko Haram insurgency, militancy, banditry and herdsmen/farmers crisis, unemployment, poor education and university systems, environment degradation, lack of infrastructure, gender discrimination, road accident and poor economy.

COVID-19

Over the last one year, the COVID-19 pandemic has created many challenges for English language teachers, students, and parents as they transitioned into home-based learning, and academic calendar. During the first phase, children on the higher end of the socio-economic spectrum experienced less disruption to their learning because their private schools are well-equipped with ICT infrastructure and they can afford remote learning resources at home. The majority that were left struggling are the students from vulnerable and disadvantaged backgrounds, who do not have access to computers and other devices outside school. In many cases, these children live in communities with poor or non-existent internet connectivity and unreliable power supply. Starting the school year late or interrupting it completely disrupts the lives of many children, their parents, and teachers (Saavedra (2020). Many children do not have desks, books, internet connectivity, a laptop at home, or supportive parents. Others do! Teaching and learning English during COVID-19 has its problems such as social distancing where there are limited space in the classroom. This has practically made it impossible to teach and observe the COVID-19 guidelines in the English classroom, including other factors mentioned earlier.

Conclusion

The role of English in future careers and education has been identified as very important in Nigeria. Classroom instructions, therefore should be explained clearly to the students so as to help them develop positive attitudes to the learning of English at school. There is need of identifying the total number of all individuals at the levels of educational system who are teaching without English language teaching qualification to enable government make informed and realistic decision for teacher professionalism. This will lead to the achievement of the policy standard. Finally, there is need for the teachers of English to adopt new instructional technological tools which are learner-centred, and become familiar with modern methods of teaching English, instead of continuous use of the grammar-driven approach.

Recommendations

The development of a nation in terms of its political, technology, economic, religion and cultural values solely relies on the quality of education available to the people. Nigerian government should take strong steps in employing teachers with professional qualifications at higher level to teach English language at the colleges of education.

Nigerian government should encourage English language teaching through incentives and worthwhile allowances. For example, teaching practice allowances should be paid promptly, with their salary structures in conformity with their qualifications and teaching experiences.

In-service English lecturers who do not have the required qualifications should undergo trainings such as workshops for teaching methodologies; enrol for PGDE programme and masters for effective implementation of the English language skills.

Students should be encouraged to read as much as possible in English, particularly for their own pleasure. Reading for pleasure should also be facilitated and encouraged particularly in the school environment.

Both teachers and students need to be aware of the complexity of the process of English language learning at school, outside the school and the high involvement of non-linguistic factors, as much as the linguistic factors, and thereby plan the learning activities accordingly to facilitate learning

The classes at the federal government schools are overcrowded. Students do not have space to do activities in the class, thereby making individual

attention very difficult to achieve. The federal government of Nigeria should provide adequate classroom and renovate the existing ones.

The government should also provide adequate funding for the education to run smoothly for all subjects, specifically for teaching and learning English at the college level. For example, provision of language laboratory, smart boards and other modern technology for effective classroom teaching and learning.

On the issue of security, there is a need for the security agencies, especially the police and the civil defense organizations to dispatch officers and men of their organizations to their individual states of origin. This will enable these security personnel to engage and interact with people in English and indigenous languages. It will also enhance proper investigation that would stop or reduce crime rate and incessant killings.

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