



MANAGING THE CHALLENGES OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) IN NIGERIA IN A DIGITAL ERA

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Abstract

English language teaching and learning is faced with myriads of challenges. This paper examines these challenges of English as a Second Language (ESL) in Nigeria and proposes strategies for managing these problems. There is no gainsaying the fact that English language has become a Nigerian language. However, despite being the official language, English poses significant difficulties for Nigerians, impacting education, communication, and economic development as it is not the first language of Nigerians. Therefore, Nigerians are not the native speakers of the English language. The learning of a language involves a complete set of interlocking features most of which have implications to several problems of learning English language. The study reviews existing literature on ESL in Nigeria, identifying key issues such as linguistic interference, inadequate teacher training, cultural differences, and inadequate instructional materials among others. To solve these and many other problems, the paper opines that English learners must be extensive readers; teachers must reward efforts of learners so as to motivate their struggle to acquire the language skills; government as a matter of priority should make available necessary facilities that will empower teaching and learning of English and also, school management should arouse the interest of English learners by providing relevant equipment and facilities for effective English teaching and learning.

Keywords: English Language, Second language, Bilingualism, Communication, Challenges

Introduction

English is the official language of Nigeria, yet it remains a second language for many citizens. The country's linguistic diversity, with over 250 ethnic groups, poses challenges for ESL learners (Afolayan, 2013). Effective management of ESL problems is crucial for Nigeria's socio-economic development. Most Nigerians find it difficult to grasp, write, and read English language correctly. Not just the speaking and writing, statistics also show that a lot of students fail the English language in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) yearly (Akinbode, 2006).

For many Nigerians, English language is far from being the language learnt after the mother tongue. In the Northern states of Nigeria, which are predominantly muslims, many of them are made to learn Hausa and Arabic not their mother tongue, while in the Southern states, many, especially those along the linguistic border of Edo, Cross River, Delta and so on learn Edo, Efik, Igbo, Urhobo, Yoruba along with or soon after their mother tongue (Oluike, 2013). However, the extent of the demand and desire to learn English is conditioned by several factors, among



which are levels of participation in modern structure and the importance attached to the learning of English.

According to Afolayan (2013), English as a second language (ESL) can be regarded as both a variety of English. ESL describes the form of English which exists in a place where the language is learned and used widely in addition to the first language or mother tongue. In this situation, English exists with other language(s). This is therefore, a bilingual or multilingual situation. The situation will have some implications on the form of the English language, since the mother tongue will influence the language in one way or the other. This type of influence is termed mother tongue interference and it can manifest in areas of phonology, semantics and grammar. In other words, ESL as a variety will be expected to differ somewhat from EMT (that is, English as Mother Tongue). That is to say that the English language in Nigeria will exhibit some peculiarities in the aspects of phonology (pronunciation), lexis, semantics and grammar. This is so because the situation in which English is used in Nigeria is not the same with that of Britain or any other place where the language is used as a first language (L1) or mother tongue.

The Problems of English as a Second Language(ESL) in Nigeria **Linguistic Interference**

Linguistic interference, also known as language interference or language transfer, occurs when speakers or learners of a language are influenced by another language they know. Mother tongue influence affects pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Learners of English as a second language experience mother tongue interference phenomenon which deals with problems a learner encounters when he transfers the acquired in his native or indigenous language (L1) to his second language (L2) (Asade, 2000). There are more than five hundred different languages spoken in Nigeria. These languages are nothing in any way close or have anything common to English. Since most learners develop in their early years speaking their native language, by the time they start to learn English, they have problem with pronunciation and use of language. The mother tongue comes with accent and so, this accent often interferes with word pronunciation. For instance, the Igbo language has 36 alphabets while the English language has 26. Some alphabets in Igbo can be used interchangeably in words and still retain their meaning. But this is not so in English alphabets. In Igbo language, /r/ and /l/ are Igbo alphabets which could be used interchangeably in the following words:

Joy – Anuri annuli

Water – Mmiri Mmili

Tongue – Ire Ile

Breast – Ara Ala

Mercy – Ebere Ebele

/R/ and /l/ are used in these words and still retain its meaning. Look at /r/ and /l/ in English words:

Road – Load

Rice – Lice

Rest – Lest

Break – Bleak

Wrist – Wlist

Brain – Blain and so on.



It could be noticed that some of the English words where /r/ and /l/ are used interchangeably are meaningless such as wlist and blain, while other words mean different things, for example: road and load. Therefore, when the native speakers of Igbo language speak English language, they transfer the acquired skills in their native or indigenous language (L1) to his second language (L2).

Inadequate Teacher Training

Teachers lack specialized training in ESL methodologies. Pupils/students who pass-through schools for efficient learning are faced with the problem of unqualified English teachers with good command of the language. Many communities are English language learners. They cannot determine who is a good English teacher and who is not. Whatever the teacher says, whether correct or incorrect will be taken as correct by the learners. This is a big problem and has led to a lot of confusion among learners ^because different teachers tell them different things. One of the main causes of this problem is the difficulty teachers have translating from their native language. For instance, the word “cup” is pronounced by different teachers as either /Kap/, /kop/ or with a vowel sound that does not exist in English. The sound /[^]/ as in /k[^]p/ cup does not exist in the sound system of Nigerian languages. Even teachers sometimes have problem pronouncing it. Again, some teachers use vernacular while teaching in schools. As a result, the teaching and learning of English in most schools are affected negatively.

Limited Resources

Insufficient materials, technology, and infrastructure hinder language learning in several ways:

Insufficient Materials:

Limited access to textbooks, workbooks, and study guides, outdated or irrelevant materials, lack of multimedia resources such as audio, video and podcasts among others are challenges in the areas of materials.

Insufficient Technology:

Learners of English also face challenges in this area with regards to: limited computer or device access, slow internet connectivity or unreliable networks, outdated software or language learning platforms, limited access to online resources such as language exchange websites, inability to utilize digital tools for language practice like language exchange apps.

Insufficient Infrastructure

This has to do with inadequate classroom facilities or equipment, Limited library or resource centre access, insufficient language laboratories or audio-visual equipment, lack of language learning spaces such as conversation rooms.

Cultural Factors

Cultural differences significantly impact language learning, influencing: communication styles, language usage, learning preferences, cognitive processes, and social interactions. As a result,



there are challenges in pragmatic differences, such as, turn-talking, interrupting; vocabulary acquisition, example idiomatic expressions; grammar and syntax understanding, pronunciation and intonation; learning styles and strategies and so on.

Students Psychological Problem

A very important challenge confronting learners of English as a second language is students' fearful attitude towards the use of English especially in the presence of a competent user. Achebein Danladi (2013) says "it was humiliating to have to speak to ones countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that language. They would naturally assume that one had no language of one's own". Speaking English requires a measure of confidence and readiness. However, if a speaker feels inadequate to speak it, it may lead to incoherence and incorrect expressions. This discussion between an undergraduate and his lecturer is apt:

Student: Goodmorning, ma.

Lecturer: Morning (with derision). At 2:00pm?

Student: Sorry ma, good afternoon.

Lecturer: Can I help you?

Student: Yes ma. My GNS 001 work?

Lecturer: Your GNS 001 work or mark? What about it?

Student: It is find ma.

Lecturer: Found or missing?

Student: My classmates informs me of the missing score, ma.

Lecturer: Have you forgotten your concord rules?

Student: Yes ma, I don't ma.

Lecturer: I'm afraid I have a class now; come back same time tomorrow.

Student: O.k. ma.

The dialogue clearly indicates a psychologically disturbed student and its consequences on his expressions. Oluwole (2007) and Danladi (2013) opine that it is from a number of continuous assessments and examinations conducted for the students over the years that a number of errors and deviant forms in language use have been noticed. According to him, such errors among others include:

- A poor knowledge of tenses and sequence of tenses
- Weakness in concord
- Winding constructions due to illogical thinking
- Wrong use of prepositions
- Direct translations from mother tongue thought process to English
- Inability to apply appropriate reading speed and reading material and so on.

Solutions to the Problems Facing English language as a Second Language in Nigeria

To address the issues, the process of teaching and learning English needs to be reevaluated. Szynalski (2014) asserts that all English language learners aspire to be proficient speakers of the language. The prospect of being able to speak English fluently excites them. They typically don't



give a damn about the actual process of learning, though. The majority of students view studying English as a chore—something they must do even when they don't want to. They don't find learning English enjoyable. The majority of students dislike learning English even though they would like to speak it fluently. This issue needs to be resolved because proficient English speaking is impossible without giving it the time and effort it requires in reading, writing, studying, and other areas. Without complete dedication to the language, it is impossible to grasp its complexities. In essence, English language learners need to read since doing so enhances their writing, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and reading comprehension. Szynalski (2014) recommended the following for English language learners: read English sentences and consider their structure; pick up new vocabulary from dictionaries; compose proper English sentences using dictionaries, grammar manuals, and the Internet; and practise pronouncing English words and sounds.

According to August & Shanahan (2006), for effective mastery of English, the learners are expected to comprehend the following:

- a. Native language literacy: To them, when native language oral and written skills are effectively leveraged, oral and written literacy knowledge and abilities can transfer to the acquisition of English literacy, accelerating the learning time.
- b. Similarity of native language to English: The more closely the student's native language and English are related, the more students can apply knowledge of similarities in vocabulary and grammar in the two languages to learning foundational literacy skills in English, such as spelling of familiar words or determination of where a sentence starts and ends.

According to Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2007), a rich and stimulating language environment during the early years and beyond is essential to the development of verbal and intellectual skills necessary for language learning. Kannan (2009) asserted that composition writing is a difficult skill to acquire, and recommended therefore, that teachers must use a variety of methods for teaching English Language. Ellis and Tomlison (2001) recommended basic skills of spelling, punctuation, linguistic skills and convention of style to teach learners so that they can write essays proficiently. Reyner (2009) ascertained that many good teachers are adaptive rather than rigid in their approach to teaching children and only loosely base their instruction on a given method. In Nigeria, the teaching and learning of English is majorly done through the use of textbooks, dictionaries, chalkboards, workbooks and posters. Most schools lack modern technological devices like audio and video tapes, language laboratories, e textbooks, flash cards, internet facilities, newspapers etc. Thus as a nation, there is need to confront this issue so as to empower the teaching and learning of English. Kolawole (2009) equally stated that the teaching of English language is bedeviled with many problems such as inadequate period of teaching, method of teaching and lack of adequate and useful resources. To solve the problem, Oluikpe (2013) advocated the use of methods such as guided controlled and free writing techniques in essay writing.



Conclusion and Recommendations

In addition to highlighting the Problems faced by English language learners and users, the study offers methods for managing and overcoming these difficulties. In essence, it will only be feasible to teach and learn English effectively if both the learner and the teacher show that they are willing to make the necessary sacrifices. Thus, it is recommended that:

1. English language learners should be voracious readers.
2. Teachers must recognize students' efforts in order to encourage them to persevere in learning the language.
3. The government should prioritize providing the infrastructure required to support English instruction and learning.
4. By giving their children the necessary resources and creating surroundings that are favourable for learning and studying, parents can spark their children's enthusiasm.

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