
**TEACHING ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: A DECADAL
COMPARISON OF LISTENING AND SPEAKING SKILLS IN THE USE OF
ENGLISH TEXTS IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES.**

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ABSTRACT: *The compliance rates of Use of English texts to COMSKIP benchmark (listening and speaking skills) in five Nigerian universities in 2005 and 2015 were evaluated using the criterion-referenced assessment and systematic observation as design and instrument respectively. The result showed that for listening skill in 2005 the average compliance rates for the institutions were 0, 0.4, 0.2, 0 and 0.4 for NAU, UNN, FUTO, IMSU and ESUT respectively while for listening skill in 2015 they were 0.4, 2.6, 0, 0 and 0.4 for NAU, UNN, FUTO, IMSU and ESUT respectively. For speaking skill in 2005, the average compliance rates for the institutions were 1, 3.4, 0, 0 and 1 for NAU, UNN, FUTO, IMSU and ESUT respectively. For the speaking skill in 2015, the compliance rates were 1, 1.2, 0, 0 and 0.2 for NAU, UNN, FUTO, IMSU and ESUT respectively. Important recommendations were made.*

KEYWORDS: Communication skill project (COMSKIP), National Universities Commission, English for Academic Purposes, Use of English texts, Listening skill, Speaking Skill.

INTRODUCTION

The English language is Nigeria's official language and the medium of instruction at both the secondary and tertiary institutions. There has been a constant worry over the quality of the use of English language for university students in English Language Teaching (ELT). The method of teaching English language is no longer adequate for the demands of their academic programmes.

The insufficient English language communication skills hinder the flow of ideas and concepts in the individual disciplines and give the impression that the students' educations are deficient. There is the need to inculcate learner autonomy in pedagogical approaches to the teaching of the English Language.

LITERATURE/ THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

According to Holec (1985), Learner Autonomy is defined as 'the ability to take charge of one's own learning'. Crabbe (2001) postulated that Learner Autonomy is justified on ideological, psychological and economic grounds. Ideological in the sense that the learner has the right to choose as far as practicable, psychological in the sense that learners feel motivated when they have a sense of responsibility for their learning, and economic because the contemporary society cannot cater for the growing number of students and the continuously increasing amount of information available. It has been shown that operating education as a profit making venture due to high demands has necessitated the provision of extensive options at the lowest cost.

However, Cuban had shown that using medium alone without careful planning and training of both teachers and learners might not bring the expected results (n.p.).

According to Fox et al, Learner Autonomy is not innate and learners need to be trained on how to become autonomous (n.p.).

Pedagogical tasks designed on the basis of real academic and business responsibilities that learners will have to face in their future careers would increase their awareness regarding the suitability of the course and further improve their linguistic confidence and performance when these needs arise (Dornyei, 2001).

The use of English programme is mandatory in all Nigerian Universities. These programmes are designed to improve the acquisition of the four language skills of listening, speaking reading and writing, study skills and the Basic English Grammar in English for Academic Purposes. Panel Rankin at Ohio University found out that 'Adults spend about 70% of their day time hours in communicative activities. 45% is devoted to listening, 30% to speaking, 16% to reading and 9% to writing.' (1998)

Also Larry Barker estimates 'the time spent on listening in some classroom settings to run from 50% to 100%.' (1971). The role of the English language has a second language status and also is the nation's medium of instruction. The English language is the medium of intellectual transformation, occupational and social mobility and the crystallization of national consciousness (Marzrui, 1966).

It was instituted as the language of education, law, government and administration; this led to the desire to master the English language in Nigeria Universities. It then became mandatory to teach students who could effectively and efficiently relate with other people in English and this was the reason for the superior position of the language in the National Universities Commission (NUC) syllables. The English language is the language of instruction throughout the University system.

The (COMSKIP) is an acronym for Communication Skills Project. This is a project co-sponsored by the National Universities Commission (NUC) of the Federal Government of Nigeria and the Overseas Development Administration (ODA) of the British Government.

The aim of the project is to improve the communication skills in English of students in Nigeria Universities in order to increase the effectiveness of manpower development and technology transfer through undergraduate education

The varied COMSKIP projects cover language skills and pedagogical issues, needs analysis of English for Academic purposes (EAP). Tests and evaluation, EAP syllables design and to follow EAP syllables implementation: materials and methods.

The Communication Skills Project (COMSKIP) was designed to address the inadequacies in the English language communication skills of students of Nigeria Universities. Some of the initial efforts of the Communication Skills Project (COMSKIP) include: Reviewing current approaches to the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programmes appropriate for the Nigerian context.

Specifying and devising methods of managing large classes and familiarizing the particular parts with the most recent techniques and materials for developing language skills. Competence

in the English language is very vital for students of other faculties as it affects their level of academic progress; hence the communication skills project is vigorously trying to solve the linguistic inadequacy of students in Nigeria Universities by seeing to the improvement of the teaching of the use of English.

The Communication Skills Project (COMSKIP) sees to the involvement of students in the learning process, and this stimulates communication in the target language. It encourages the use of needs analysis to determine the various needs of the students.

Nunan asserts that, 'The data resulting from evaluation assist us in deciding whether a course needs to be modified or altered in any way so that objectives may be achieved more effectively. If certain learners are not achieving the goals and objectives set for a course, it is necessary to determine why this is so...' (1989).

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is now gaining ground in many Universities of the developing countries due to the activities of the British council, Overseas Development Administration (ODA) and Common Wealth International Cooperation in Higher Education (CICHE). The old General Purpose English at the tertiary and University levels which has no relationship with the student's academic departments is now being replaced by English for Specific Purposes (ESP), hence the birth of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). If the newly developed ESP/EAP programmes of the developing world will yield the desired result, their status and need must be greatly enhanced.

People want to use English for specific communicative purposes. The learner's needs must be found out and the environment of operation put into consideration before structuring the curriculum.

Such programmes are provided generally in the freshman year and are both remedial and developmental in conception. They are normally available for all students in science and art based faculties and are run concurrently with the standard academic courses.

Adama (1998) asserts that, 'There exists in English, more than half a million technical and scientific terms, that the same language is the medium of eighty percent of the information stored in world computers.'

It therefore follows that the use of English classes are useful for the study of the technical language, report writing and scientific writing.

There is a close relationship between competence in the English language and the performance of students in their parent departments/faculties such as Management Sciences, Law, Medicine, Engineering, and Natural Sciences.

Most failures recorded in these various departments are really failures in English. It therefore becomes pertinent that attention and efforts should be concentrated on how to improve the Use of English courses in Universities.

Some Use of English textbooks do not meet the demands of the students' academic programmes because the students' needs in their various departments were not analyzed before courses were designed.

Consequently, the students were introduced to literatures and vocabulary not in line with their field of study. Based on the above context, this study was designed to explore how the use of

English textbooks for the year 2005 and 2015 vary from the recommended National Universities Commission (NUC) and the Communication Skills Project (COMSKIP) syllabus on Listening and Speaking Skills in order to examine how effectively the skills were considered in all the use of English texts of the sampled universities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The COMSKIP benchmark for the Use of English Texts for the year 2005 and 2015 of five universities in the south- east of Nigeria was evaluated for compliance.

The Listening Skill was considered under the following parameters:

L1= Identifying & understanding the information content of a lecture.

L2= Attentive listening, understanding descriptive signals, accurate interpretation of Sign-posts.

L3= Understanding an oral discourse of various grammatical patterns and content:

- a. Understanding words and their meanings.
- b. Understand sentences and discourse.

L4= i) Critical listening

- ii) Understanding the different sides of a point of view'
- iii) Differentiating facts from opinion.
- iv) Using evidence to support viewpoints.
- v) Avoiding logical fallacies.

L5= Understanding cause and effect, using symptoms and clinical tests results to make inferences and conclusions. Writing and taking notes. Reading and understanding medical texts.

The levels of compliance were graded 0-5 as follows:

0 =Non Compliance.

1=Slight Compliance

2=Moderate Compliance

3=Good

4=Very Good

5=Excellent

The Speaking skills were also considered under the following parameters:

S1= Participating actively in interactive speech situation e.g. dialogues, debates

produced indifferent accents and at varying speeds.

S2= Making a public speech.

S3= Legal arguments (discipline specific)

a) Language forms, formulaic expressions

and appropriate register e.g. My Lord, My learned colleague.

Adequate use of legalese “put it to you that ...” my client is not guilty with reason!

b) Discourse Markers

Introducing, narrating, exemplifying, rhetorical questioning, summarizing, evaluating, refuting & affirming.

S4= Explaining an experiment and result. Students should be able to explain in

accurate, concise and coherent manner, experiments and results using appropriate language.

S5= Explaining concepts and issues.

The levels of compliance were also graded 0-5 as follows:

0 =Non Compliance.

1=Slight Compliance

2=Moderate Compliance

3=Good

4=Very Good

5=Excellent

The Use of English texts for the five sampled universities were assessed using the highlighted parameters and the results were appropriately recorded.

RESULTS/FINDINGS**Table 1**

S/N	COMSKIP Benchmark	Universities					Average Compliance For Parameters
		NAU	UNN	FUTO	IMSU	ESUT	
1.	L1	0	1	1	0	2	0.8
2.	L2	0	0	0	0	0	0
3	L3	0	0	0	0	0	0
4	L4	0	1	0	0	0	0.2
5.	L5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average Compliance For Institutions		0	0.4	0.2	0	0.4	

Table showing the listening skill for 2005

L1= Identifying & understanding the information content of a lecture.

L2= Attentive listening, understanding descriptive signals, accurate interpretation of Sign-posts.

L3=Understanding an oral discourse of various grammatical patterns and content:

- a. Understanding words and their meanings.
- b. Understand sentences and discourse.

L4= i) Critical listening

ii) Understanding the different sides of a point of view'

iii) Differentiating facts from opinion.

iv) Using evidence to support viewpoints.

v) Avoiding logical fallacies.

L5= Understanding cause and effect, using symptoms and clinical tests results to make inferences and conclusions. Writing and taking notes. Reading and understanding medical texts.

KEYS - 0 =Non Compliance.
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Table 2

S/N	COMSKIP Benchmark	Universities					Average Compliance For Parameters
		NAU	UNN	FUTO	IMSU	ESUT	
1.	L1	2	3	0	0	2	1.4
2.	L2	0	3	0	0	0	0.6
3	L3	0	3	0	0	0	0.6
4	L4	0	4	0	0	0	0.8
5.	L5	0	0	0	0	0	0
Average Compliance For Institutions		0.4	2.6	0	0	0.4	

Table showing the listening skill for 2015

L1= Identifying & understanding the information content of a lecture.

L2= Attentive listening, understanding descriptive signals, accurate interpretation of Sign-posts.

L3=Understanding an oral discourse of various grammatical patterns and content:

- a. Understanding words and their meanings.
- b. Understanding sentences and discourse.

L4= i) Critical listening

- ii) Understanding the different sides of a point of view
- iii) Differentiating facts from opinion.
- iv) Using evidence to support viewpoints.
- v) Avoiding logical fallacies.

L5= Understanding cause and effect, using symptoms and clinical tests results to make inferences and conclusions. Writing and taking notes. Reading and understand medical texts.

KEYS - 0 =Non Compliance.
 1=Slight Compliance
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 3=Good
 4=Very Good
 5=Excellent

Table 3

S/N	COMSKIP Benchmark	Universities					Average Compliance for Parameters
		NAU	UNN	FUTO	IMSU	ESUT	
1.	S1	0	0	0	0	0	0
2.	S2	5	5	0	0	5	3
3.	S3	0	4	0	0	0	0.8
4.	S4	0	4	0	0	0	0.8
5.	S5	0	3	0	0	0	0.6
Average Compliance For Institutions		1	3.4	0	0	1	

Table showing the speaking skill for 2005

S1= Participating actively in interactive speech situation e.g. dialogues, debates produced indifferent accents and at varying speeds.

S2= Making a public speech

S3= Legal arguments (discipline specific)

a) Language forms formulaic expressions and appropriate register e.g. My Lord, My learned colleague.

Adequate use of legalese “put it to you that ...” my client is not guilty with reason!

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KEYS - 0 =Non Compliance.
 1=Slight Compliance
 2=Moderate Compliance
 3=Good
 4=Very Good
 5=Excellent

Table 4

S/N	COMSKIP Benchmark	Universities					Average Compliance For Parameters
		NAU	UNN	FUTO	IMSU	ESUT	
1.	S1	1	2	0	0	0	0.6
2.	S2	2	3	0	0	1	1.2

3.	S3	0	0	0	0	0	0
4.	S4	0	0	0	0	0	0
5.	S5	2	1	0	0	0	0.6
Average Compliance For Institutions		1	1.2	0	0	0.2	

Table showing the speaking skill for 2015

S1= Participating actively in interactive speech situation e.g. dialogues, debates produced indifferent accents and at varying speeds.

S2= Making a public speech

S3= Legal arguments (discipline specific)

a) Language forms formulaic expressions and appropriate register e.g. My Lord, My learned colleague.

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DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

COMSKIP benchmark for the Use of English Texts of five Universities in the South- east of Nigeria was evaluated for compliance for 2005 and 2015. The institutions comprised of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka (NAU), University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN), Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO), Imo State University, Owerri (IMSU) and Enugu State University of Technology, Enugu (ESUT).

The result of the Listening Skill in 2005 showed that Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Imo State University, Owerri had no compliance (0) to identifying and understanding the information content of a lecture. University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Federal University of Technology, Owerri, had a slight compliance (1) in L1, while Enugu State University of Technology, Enugu had a moderate compliance (2) in L1 parameter. For Attentive Listening,

Understanding Descriptive Signals, Accurate Interpretation of Sign Posts (L2) and (L3) all the universities had no compliance (0). For (L4) parameter, all the universities had no compliance except the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, which recorded slight compliance (L1). All the universities recorded no compliance for L5 parameter.

To assess the Listening Skill in 2015, university of Nigeria, Nsukka recorded a good (3) compliance for L1, while Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and Enugu State University of Technology, Enugu recorded a moderate compliance (2) each for L1 parameter. Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University, Owerri recorded No (0) compliance for L1. For L2 parameter, all institutions had zero (0) compliance except university of Nigeria, Nsukka which had moderate compliance (3). Also all institutions recorded zero (0) compliance for L3 parameter except University of Nigeria, Nsukka which recorded moderate (3) compliance. For L4 parameter, all institutions had zero (0) compliance except University of Nigeria, Nsukka which scored very good (4). Compliance for L5 parameter, all institutions recorded a zero (0) compliance.

The study showed that for Speaking Skills in 2005, all institutions scored zero (0) compliance for S1 parameter. For S2 parameter, all institutions scored excellent (5) compliance except Federal University of Technology, Owerri and Imo State University, Owerri, which scored zero (0) compliance. All institutions recorded zero (0) compliance in S3 parameter except university of Nigeria, which recorded very good (4) compliance. For S4 parameter, the compliance rates were identical with S3 parameter: All institutions scored zero (0) compliance in S5 except university of Nigeria, which recorded moderate (3) compliance.

The Speaking Skills for 2015 showed that for S1 parameter, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and University of Nigeria, Nsukka recorded slight (1) and moderate (2) compliances respectively, while every other institution had zero (0) compliance for S2 parameter, NAU, UNN and ESUT recorded moderate (2), good (3) and slight (1) compliances respectively, while FUTO and IMSU recorded zero (0) compliance. For S3 and S4 parameters, all institutions scored zero (0) compliance. For S5 parameter, all institutions recorded zero (0) compliance except NAU and UNN which recorded moderate (2) and slight (1) compliances respectively.

For listening skill in 2005, L1 parameter had the highest average compliance of 0.8 (between none and slight compliance) followed by L4 parameter which had an average compliance of 0.2. For listening skill in 2015, L1 parameter also had the highest average compliance of 1.4 (which is between slight and moderate compliance) followed by L4 parameter which had an average compliance of 0.8. The result showed that for listening skill in both years, identifying and understanding the information content of a lecture (L1) had the highest average compliance.

For speaking skill in 2005, S2 parameter had the highest average compliance of 3 (Good compliance) followed by S3 and S4 which recorded an average compliance of 0.8 each. For speaking skill in 2015, the result showed that S2 parameter had the highest average compliance of 1.2 (between slight and moderate compliance) followed by S1 and S5 parameters which recorded an average compliance of 0.6 each. This implies that most of the sampled institutions were more compliant to S2 parameter which involves making a public speech.

IMPLICATION TO RESEARCH AND PRACTICE:

1. The use of English text should be subject specific, English can no longer be taught for no obvious reason.
2. More English teachers should be trained as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) teachers i.e., to help in designing courses for students.
3. The use of English textbooks should be structured using the English for Academic Purposes Syllabus.
4. The use of English text should adequately incorporate the listening skill, which is very vital for the learning of all subjects.
5. The speaking skill should be given a noble place in the use of English text, with special attention paid to the Faculties of Law and Medicine and the Management Sciences, whose need of this skill cannot be over-emphasized.
6. Every use of English text should have a grammar section where the common errors in English should be taught; to help students acquire a communicative competence.
7. The teachers of English should avail themselves of every opportunity to attend conferences in order to enhance their knowledge and competence of the language. The University Management should be encouraged to fund attendance to conferences.

CONCLUSION

The study showed that the overall average compliance of the sampled institutions to the COMSKIP Project was below average. Some Institutions recorded a higher compliance in some years and a poorer compliance in other years in the varied parameters. The Listening Skill recorded a higher compliance in 2015 in the L1 parameter with the highest average compliance of 1.4, compared to 2005 where it recorded an average compliance is 0.8 in the same parameter.

The Speaking Skill recorded more average compliance (3) in 2005 in the S2 parameter as compared to 2015 where it recorded an average compliance of 1.2 in the S2 parameter.

Teaching English for no obvious reason to the learner can no longer be viewed as a best practice in the teaching and learning of the English Language. Learner autonomy has to be considered in structuring the curriculum for the learner in the teaching of this very important universal Language. Teaching English for Academic Purposes empowers the learner for a more practical use of the Language for his/her personal academic and occupational need after leaving the training institutions. The COMSKIP Project was structured for this very academic purpose in order to empower the learner for an overall performance.

Future Research: Further research should be conducted on the overall compliance to reading and writing skills by other Nigerian universities. It is also important to comparatively investigate the learning outcomes of conventional English teaching and teaching English for academic purposes, in order to form an empirical basis for the preference of one over the other.

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