
NIGERIAN LEARNERS AND THE GLOBAL LANGUAGE: IMPEDIMENTS IN PURSUE OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL)

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ABSTRACT: *This paper looks at the advent of English language in Nigeria, its role, and importance as well to the Nigerians and the country at large. It dwells on some of the factors hampering the Nigerian learners in learning the language despite its global acceptance as second language, social and economic value. Such factors include: mother tongue influence, overcrowding in classrooms, lack of qualified and sufficient English language teachers and technological advancement among others. The paper therefore suggests that English language classes should be reduced to the right teacher-learner ratio, more competent and adequate English language teachers should be recruited, English language teachers should possess and utilize the skills of modern hi-tech resources in teaching the language.*

KEYWORDS: Nigerian Learners, Global Language, English as a Second Language

INTRODUCTION

English language originally came up in the then England. The language was initially spoken by the Celts, Anglos, Saxons and Jutes. It has spread all over the world today. It has extended to all the nooks and crannies of the globe as a result of the Great Britain's expansion, colonization, American power in the global socio-economic and political affairs, and the language is still furthering because of the science and technological advancement and literature written in the language (Tsakuwa, 2015a).

English is used by people in almost all the countries of the world, and it has a different status or roles which it plays in every country. Basically, English serves as second language, official language and language of international communication in many countries. It helps in global socio-economic and political development and relationships. Babatunde (2002) sees English as the "first geographically global" language. The language has been recognized as the World Language ever since. Jowitt (2008:1) affirms the global acceptance and of English language and its dominance in the modern internet communications as follows:

It is almost as much of a cliché to point to English language as a linguistic correlate of globalization: at no earlier time in history has any one of the world's

languages been so much taught and learned, and so widely used around the world as English is today. Its predominance is, again, strikingly demonstrated by the internet: it is estimated that at least eighty percent of all internet communications are now expressed in English. English easily outstrips all competitors for the role of international language; ...although Chinese can claim to have more speakers than English, it hardly has an international role.

English as a Second Language (ESL), Advent and Role of English in Nigeria

The term *second language* (L2) is used to describe any language that learners learn after they have acquired a first language (L1), which mostly happens to be their mother tongue (MT) or native language (NL). The language which they learn is also referred to as a foreign language (FL) or target language (TL) in some contexts. In Nigerian context, English is considered as a Second Language (ESL). Nigeria is a multilingual nation, and has about 500 different languages, and the major languages are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. In fact, Fatiloro (2015) shows that Nigeria is among “the 22 most linguistically diverse countries in the world. and has about 510 living languages”. Besides English, other languages like French, Arabic, German and Chinese are now being taught in Nigeria (Tsakuwa 2015a; Fatiloro, 2015; Nwanyanwu, 2017).

Nigeria was colonized by The Great Britain. British English is one of the strong legacies left behind by the colonial masters in the country after independence. Since its inception in Nigeria, English has been in use as the language of inter-ethnic communication among Nigerians of different ethnic groups. It is used as official language by the government. It is the language of socio-political friendship among Nigerian learners. English is also the language of instruction in Nigerian schools, the language of national and international communication and business transactions to the Nigerian learners. In the face of the important roles which English plays in Nigeria, and the world at large, the Nigerian learners of the language find themselves in the midst of obstacles and, encounter a series of problems that hinder them from smooth English language learning and usage (Fatiloro, 2015). Such problems are discussed below.

Mother Tongue Influence

Mother tongue influence is one of the foremost obstacles that impede Nigerian learners' pursuance of English language in the country. Sa'ad, & Usman (2014) cite Usman (2012) believing that Nigerian students are encircled by a multifaceted linguistic situation that makes them to learn their mother tongue first before any other language. As they grow up, they have to have a good command of the English language as well (Tsakuwa, 2018). Nigerian Policy on Education (NPE) stresses the use of the language of the immediate environment in instruction at the lower level (1, 2 and 3) of primary education, and use of the language of the immediate environment and English language at the upper level (4, 5 and 6) of primary education. This policy as argued by (Sa'ad & Usman, 2014). to contribute immensely in poor of English language learning right from primary school level and its effects extend to secondary school.

The problem of the Nigerian learners' mother tongue interference in English language learning manifests in the learners' English in transfer of the acquired skills in their native language (L1) to the English second language (L2). which can be syntactic (grammatical), phonological (mispronunciation), semantic or morphological. According to (Tsakuwa, 2010), syntactically, the Nigerian learners of English can say: *Ahmad he went to market. (Ahmad ya tafi kasuwa in Hausa language). This is direct transfer from Hausa language to English. In an attempt to express indigenous respectful, as in Fatiloro (2015), a Nigerian English learner can say: *They (referring to one person like father) arrived yesterday. (Won ti de lana in Yoruba Language). Phonetically, Nigerian learners of English as a second language find it difficult to pronounce certain English sounds this is because the sounds are not in their native languages. Examples many students substitute dental sounds /θ/ in thin, this and /ð/ with /t/ and /d/ or /z/ respectively. Semantically, there is misuse of words like: My father is an academician. Instead of My father is an academic.

Insufficient English Language Teachers

Scholars, like Christopher (2008) and Sa'ad & Usman (2014) outcry that there are no sufficient English language teachers in the Nigerian schools. It is apparent that in many schools, one can find that English language teachers are not more than three. In most instances they are two, one for junior classes and the other for senior ones. In fact, Sa'ad & Usman (2014:2) observe that "in some schools other subject teachers are forced to teach English language". This is because either there are no English teachers, or the teachers are not enough. Fatiloro (2015:2) reports there is "shortage of specialist teachers in English". In this situation, the learners don't learn the accurately, and perform poorly its examination.

Lack of Qualified English Language Teachers

A very apparent issue related to the above one, and hamper the learners in learning the language, and perhaps development of education in the country, is the presence of unqualified English language teachers. Adedokun (2011) argues that Nigerian schools employ poorly trained and untrained English language teachers to teach the language to Nigerian learners. Thus, today in Nigeria, there are teachers, who teach English especially at primary and secondary school levels but, are not professionally trained or qualified to teach the language. Darling-Hammond (2000) reveals that there is a strong connection between the training, which teachers received, and their academic performance in their subject areas.

At times, it is argued that most ESL teachers have no good mastery of the language in Nigeria, and some English teachers have the knowledge of the language, but they don't have skills of imparting the knowledge to the learners. This is because they lack professional training in teaching the language. They don't employ proper techniques/methods of teaching and evaluating the learners (Nwanyanwu, 2017). It could be argued out that competence in English language can only be developed by the learners through the application of appropriate methods by professionally trained and competent English language teachers.

Learners' Self-perception in Learning the Language

Many English language learners have poor self-perception about themselves in learning and using the language. According to (Timothy, 2018:3), Nigerian learners of English “have fearful attitude towards the use and usage of English especially in the presence of a competent user.” Mostly in Nigerian public schools, learners perceive themselves as incompetent of speaking English well; thus, they feel shy in both learning and communicating in the language. They think that English is difficult, and they don't want make mistake in it. In fact, some even believe that English proficiency and good performance academically are meant for some special students or those that attend private schools or have good background at home. This kind of viewing causes the learners to have poor academic performance (Matazu, 2013) to the Nigerian learners of English.

Learners' Inattention in Learning English Language

Educationalists, especially language teachers show much worries about the skill of Nigerian learners in English language. Yusuf (2005) argues that the incompetency of Nigerian learners in English is caused mainly by the poor attention they exhibit towards learning and using the language. A lot of learners don't always pay due attention to the rules that govern the language usage in both written and spoken aspects. It is also observed that students don't study English personally as they study other school subjects. They don't learn English with all sense of pleasure and zeal (Timothy, 2018; Muhammad, Ya'u, Aliyu & Hassan, 2018). They don't practise English pronunciation and essay writing mostly. They don't make significant effort to learn new words. And even when they make mistakes, and are corrected, they often say “It is not my language after all”. This is because they consider the language as not theirs (Sa'ad & Usman, 2014), and such greatly affects their learning of the language. Their attitude to English language, schooling and education to some extent, is not quite encouraging.

English Varieties to be Learnt and Used

In the world today, the English language people use is Modern English; it is not like the Old English or the Middle English. And of course, there a number of varieties of this Modern English language used by different people across the continents and countries. As in Tsakuwa (2015a), these include British English, American English, Australian English, Indian English, Ghanaian English and Nigerian English among others. Each of these Englishes is considered to be *Standard English* especially in its own domain. Though the British and American varieties are considered to be more Standardized Englishes globally, therefore each of them is called Standard English (British Standard English and American Standard English respectively).

Nigerian learners have three different varieties of Standard English to learn and use, which are to some extent confusing to the learners. This is because; Nigeria adopts the use of British English in the country officially. However, the American's expansion and influence in the global politics, economy, academic circle, science, technology and entertainment among others have forced the Nigerian learners to also learn and use American variety of English, and even sit for its

examination in the form of TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), (Timothy, 2018). Still, the same learners have to learn and use, even informally, the Nigerian variety of English. Across these three varieties, there are numerous linguistic points, which are variants phonetically, grammatically, lexically, semantically and culturally. Learning and using such varieties become herculean to the Nigerian learners as English becomes a more global language and a sound means of communication across the nations (Igboanusi, 2002).

Class Overpopulation

It is well known in Nigerian schools that learners are congested in their classes and they find it difficult to learn English language properly (Sa'ad & Usman, 2014; Nwanyanwu, 2017). The Nigerian National Policy on Education (2004) provides that for effective teaching and learning in classes at primary school level teacher-learner ration should be 1:35 while at secondary school level, it should be 1:40 but, it is mostly found that, averagely, teacher-learner ration is 1:60 and 1:100 in the primary and secondary schools respectively even during English lessons. This ugly congestion deprives the Nigerian learners to learn the language accurately and does not allow the teachers to employ appropriate methods in teaching the learners.

Unconducive Learning Environment

The learning environment here means the availability and suitability of the school building, furniture and other important things like electricity, internet service etc. that can enhance the learning of the language in the classrooms. In some schools, especially public schools, some classes are not properly roofed, thus water links into the classes during rainy season.

One can find that many schools have no seats (Sa'ad & Usman, 2014); therefore, learners sit on the bare floor, stones or broken chairs. Outside-the-classrooms, in most cases, students make no effort to speak good English; this is because the environment doesn't encourage them to do so always. Many people prefer speaking in their mother tongue. These environmental problems, of course, reduce learner's ability to learn English in its right manner despite its global importance.

Lack of Language Laboratory

Timothy (2018) observes that there is dearth of basic equipment for teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria. One can hardly see any language laboratory in Nigerian primary or secondary schools. English language laboratory can help learners to know the English speech sounds correctly and it can help them to practicalise what they learn with regard to the sound system of the language. Since Nigerian learners live in a second language learning environment, they supposed to have language laboratory in their schools so that they can have or be exposed to a native-like or first language learning environment. This can help them to develop some communicative skills which could be intelligible at the national and international levels during communication in the language.

Lack of Functional Library

Another challenging issue to Nigerian child in learning English language is absence of functional library in the schools. Despite the significance of library in schooling and language learning, it is observed that many schools have no library, those that have it; one can see that the library is not functional. In fact, Matazu (2013) argues that libraries in schools today in Nigeria have been turned into “spider houses”. This is because they are not judiciously used. The learners are not allowed to use the libraries, or the materials in them are outdated.

Technological Advancement across the Globe

In the changing world of today, Nigerian child lives in the era of Information and Communication Technology (ICT), where radio, television, hand-sets, ipad, computer and internet among others have revolutionalized language learning (Irene, 2002). English language could be learnt through these modern technological gadgets and resources without any geographical barrier. However, most of the Nigerian schools have no such things mentioned above at the disposal of the Nigerian learners to learn the language Sa’ad & Usman (2014), even in the places where there are computers for instance, electricity is not constant, or the internet service is not available or strong for the learners to get access to internet programme packages for learning the language like: Computer Instructed Learning (CIL), Computer Assisted Language Learning, (CALL) etc. These computer-internet programmes provide handy learning materials to the learners to develop themselves in all the language skills (Yusuf, 2005). In this regard, Timothy (2018:4) puts that 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.”

Suggestions for Proper Learning of English as a Second Language in Nigeria

Above are some of the factors deterring the Nigerian learners in the learning English language. Looking at the indispensable nature of language in boosting the education sector of Nigeria, the language should be learnt accurately for smooth development of the learners and educational system of the nation (Fakeye, 2012).

With this, the language learners should understand that differs from their mother tongue syntactically, phonetically and semantically, and the language teachers should help the learners to get the differences clearly. There is need for the Nigerian public and private schools to recruit only qualified English language teachers, and the teachers should be sufficient to cater for the child’s language needs. This because, Ogbonnaya (2007) argues out that, students, who are taught by trained or qualified teachers perform better in academics than those taught by non-trained or qualified teachers. The English language teachers, who are not trained professionally, should be trained perhaps in workshops, seminars or symposiums to equip them with the basic pedagogical skills in teaching the language in the modern global methods.

Parents and teachers should encourage Nigerian learners to develop positive self-perception about themselves. This can help them to develop confidence and competence in learning and communicating in English at national and global levels. Learners of English Language should be careful and ensure the use of the right materials for learning the language. They must make deliberate and conscious effort to learn the language even without teacher. The students must develop good attitude, and be reading to improve their English language skills (Timothy, 2018)

There is also need for amicable and sound arrangement to properly expose the Nigerian learners in learning the three varieties of British, American and Nigerian Englishes in the schools. Classes should be convenient to both the English teacher and the learners. Proper teacher-learners ration should be adapted in the classes so that the teacher can teach effectively and evaluate the learners properly. Government should ensure that schools have constant electricity and internet service networks. These can help the learners to learn English language diligently. There is also need for provision of sufficient seats in the schools. The presence of conducive and stimulating language learning environment during the learners' the early years, and beyond should be ensured by the government this is because it indispensable in the development of logical language skills (Aduwa-Ogiegbaen & Iyamu, 2006 in Timothy, 2018).

To help Nigerian learners pursue English language accurately, the learners need to be exposed to modern language laboratory so as to gain the language skills and use them competently at level of global intelligibility. Also, in assisting the learners to develop thier language proficiency, libraries should be built in the schools. The libraries should be stocked with well edited books, journal, magazines e.t.c. and other learning facilities. The libraries should remain functional and up to date at the global standard. And Timothy (2018) suggests that at the government should encourage the teaching and learning of English through the modern technologies.

CONCLUSION

The above discussed impediments are just few out of many problems of learning English. Measures to be taken in tackling the issues raised are employing of qualified English language teachers, supplying and using modern learning facilities, motivating the Nigerian learners to learn and practice the English language better.

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