

**PROBLEMS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH
LANGUAGE IN ONITSHA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA,
ANAMBRA STATE**

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Abstract

This study investigated problems of teaching and learning English language in Onitsha North Local Government Area. English is the dominant language in Nigeria and it has become almost a necessity for people to learn English language if they are to enter a global workforce. The teaching and learning of the English language, however, has not been so easy due to some difficulties experienced by the teachers and students. Descriptive survey research was adopted for the study. The area of the study was Onitsha North Local Government. The population consisted of 15 male teachers, 35 female teachers, 15 male students and 35 female students making it 100 teachers and students from public secondary schools. Purposive random sampling technique was used for the study. Two research questions guided the study. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers. Data collected were analysed using the mean rating. Results showed that English language teachers and students are facing numerous challenges such as inaccessibility to educational technologies, inadequate professional training and inability to write or speak the English language. The study, therefore, concluded that the challenges encountered by teachers and students of English language are caused by mother tongue interference and low interest to study a second language. Based on the findings, the study recommended, among others, that teachers should be acquainted with classroom management and utilise their skills in ensuring that students develop interest in learning the English language. This will enhance effective teaching and learning of the English language.

Keywords: English Language, teaching, learning, teachers, students

Background to the Study

Language is one of the most important things in the life of man, “it is an indispensable tool used for communication, transmission of culture and socialisation” (Udoye, 2019, p. 207). However, in the absence of language, signs and symbols are used, though they seldom communicate the exact meaning like language. Undoubtedly, language has a strong binding force of unifying different linguistic groups. Throughout the world, language is one of the important features that is used to distinguish people from others. In Nigeria, for example, there are many languages in use; this is as a result of different ethnic groups that make up Nigeria (Fatiloro, 2015). However, English is the central and official language in Nigeria (Amadi & Amadi, 2015).

More so, English language has gained worldwide recognition because it is not only the language of scientific, technical, political, educational and literary researches; it is also the

native tongue of the British Isles, the United States of America, parts of Canada, New Zealand and Australia. In addition, it is the second language of all former British colonies, including Nigeria, Gambia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, Uganda, Kenya (Nnamdi-Eruchalu, 2012). This is why English continues to “hold sway as the language of development in most developing nations of the world, and even in some developed nations where it is learned and used as a foreign language” (Muhammad, Ya'u, Aliyu & Hassan, 2018, p.10).

Also, English is useful in all spheres of life, particularly in the development of education in Nigeria. It is the language of instruction in all institutions of learning in Nigeria and it is only learned in schools where it is taught as a subject (Nwanyanwu, 2017). The English language is an end in itself for students because a student who does not attain a reasonable degree of competence in English language will not make any remarkable progress in his or her studies; hence, English is a vital medium of knowledge delivery in schools. Besides, millions of reading materials such as books, and journals are written in English; even newspaper articles and magazines discuss all the problems, events of this country, international issues and practices in English.

Furthermore, English language, as a second language in Nigeria has remained a very important tool for national development, diplomacy, international communication and other activities since the days of colonization. In addition, the early Christian missionaries introduced formal education in Nigeria. English was adopted as the official language by the colonial masters to facilitate communication (Akujobi & Chukwu, 2012). Gobir (2018) observes that Nigeria has benefitted immensely from the adoption of English as the official language; this has not only put Nigeria on the world map, it has also helped in modern education, and advancement in science and technology.

For effective communication, one needs to have a mastery of the five components of the language which include: grammar, composition, comprehension, orals which deal with speech, lexis and structure. A student, who has a good knowledge of English language commands respect (Umera-Okeke, 2019). Therefore, teachers at all levels of education must pay special attention to their teachings, so that students would emulate the correct form of pronunciation of words and grammatical constructions of sentences. Akujobi and Chukwu (2012) rightly pointed out that “learning the English language equips Nigerians to confidently meet other people from other English-speaking nations of the world for all transactions” (p.59).

However, the teaching of English as a foreign language in Nigeria always demands expertise for many reasons: socio-cultural, economic, psychological, philosophical, educational and pedagogic enlightenment. The knowledge of the above-mentioned factors will help the teacher to be productive in his work. Nevertheless, the job of teaching and learning, especially the English language comes with its difficulties. This sometimes makes some teachers quit their jobs while the prospective ones show no interest. This study, therefore, attempts to examine the challenges teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

Statement of the Problem

Gobir (2018) observed that Nigeria had greatly benefitted from adopting English as the official language. This, he noted, not only put Nigeria on the map, but also contributed to the advancement of science and technology in modern education. It was further demonstrated that the five language components which include grammar, composition, comprehension, orals,

lexis and structure must be mastered for effective communication. Several factors ranging from socio-cultural, pedagogical, economic, psychological, physiological and educational issues have been linked to problems of teaching English as a foreign language because it needs expertise. This condition has led some teachers to leave their jobs and those who remain show little interest. Therefore, the problem of the study is to find out the challenges that teachers and students face.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to find out the challenges facing the teaching and learning of English language in Anambra state. Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. Identify the challenges teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government Area.
2. Determine the effects of these challenges on the teachers' performance in the teaching of English language in senior secondary schools

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government Area?
2. What are the effects of these challenges on the teachers' performance in the teaching of English language in senior secondary schools?

Review of Related Literature

In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of studies on English language. Erdem and Tutkun (2016) carried out research on problems in English language teaching according to secondary school students. The goal of the research was to identify the problems faced by secondary school students in teaching and learning English and to evaluate the degree of difference in the perceptions of the problems of the students in this respect. The research population is 24,850 high school students in Sultanbeyli, Istanbul, while the survey size is 1,261 high school students. Among other things, Erdem and Tutkun (2016) discovered that "teachers get angry at the errors of students" (p.268) and there is no significant difference between the opinions of the students on the problems encountered in English teaching and learning in private or private secondary school, and the occupation and family income of the parents. The study by Erdem and Tutkun (2016) and the present study are related because both are trying to find out the challenges faced in the teaching and learning of English language. However, the two studies differ to an extent in that the present study dwells on the problems the teachers and students face in Onitsha North Local Government Area while, the study by Erdem and Tutkun (2016) is only interested in the problems of the students in learning the English language in Sultanbeyli, Istanbul.

Obiegbo (2016) examined the challenges of teaching English language in Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to examine some of the challenges the teacher faces in the classroom ranging from decline in reading culture, lack of adequate attention in the classrooms, cultural and psychological background of the learners, poor motivation of the teachers, lack of exposure to modern teaching methods and teachers' inadequacy in teaching effectively. The findings of the study showed that problems such as mother tongue interference, lack of reading culture, inadequate teaching and learning facilities, lack of instructional materials and

ineffective teaching are the major challenges of teaching English Language in Nigeria. The present study and that of Obiegbu (2016) share similarities as both works are based on finding the challenges in teaching of the English language. Nevertheless, there are some dissimilarities such as the fact that the present study dwells on problems that teachers and students of senior secondary schools face in the teaching and learning of English language in Onitsha North Local Government Area while the study by Obiegbu dwells on the challenges of teaching English language in Nigeria.

Similarly, Hossain, Nessa and Kafi (2015) examined the challenges of English language teaching at primary level schools in Bangladesh. The study explores the challenges of teaching English language in primary schools in the context of Bangladesh. Data were collected using interview, classroom observation and questionnaire. The results of the study revealed that students are weak in English language due to lack of skilled and trained teachers; who are trained in modern methods and inadequate teaching materials. The study by Hossain et al. (2015) and the present study are related in that both studies are interested in the problems faced in teaching the English language as a second language. The two studies, however, differ in some cases such as the fact that the present research covers teachers and students in Onitsha North Local Government Area while the research by Hossain et al. (2015) covers only primary schools in Bangladesh.

In a related study, Muhammad, Ya'u and Aliyu (2018) examined teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian Schools, its importance and challenges. The purpose of the study was to highlight the importance and challenges of teaching and learning English in Nigerian schools. They discovered that learner's perspective, teacher's attitude, language transfer, and lack of interest are the mitigating factors against effective teaching and learning of English in Nigeria. The study is insightful and it provides the basis for the present work. However, it is different from the present work because it looked at all the schools in Nigeria while the present work deals with secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

Finally, Akujobi and Chukwu (2012) investigated the challenges of effective English language teaching in Nigerian secondary schools. They discovered that poor attitude of students towards the study of English language, few teaching periods, lack of motivation and incentive, poor teaching method, mother tongue interference and inexperienced teachers are the challenges of teaching English language in Nigeria. The work is similar to the present work; however, it differs from the present work in theory and context.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on BF Skinner and Glasser's Classroom Management Theory. Classroom management theory shows the conditions in which learning best occurs; generally, this means structured environment, demonstration, observation, and classroom activities that focus on team work and behavioral management help the teacher to effectively carry out his/her work without much challenge arising. Classroom management theory is constantly evolving; two key theorists stand out when it comes to modern education. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, experts like B.F. Skinner, and William Glaser revolutionized the ways that teachers deliver education.

In Skinner's operant conditioning model, teachers strongly guide learner's behaviour to reach desired outcomes. Within the context of classroom management, behaviourism is firmly established in practice. While the Glasser choice model views the role of teachers as

helpers of those in their learning environment. The idea behind it is that all behaviour is an issue; teachers should merely serve to facilitate the making of good decisions and choices. According to Praveen & Alex (2017) understanding the theory lets educators identify their management strategies in the classroom and determine how to better handle students' experiences and reduce the obstacles they encounter in learning. This theory is very relevant in the present study as it provides ideas on how the challenges teachers and students face in teaching and learning can be ameliorated.

Methods

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey. This was chosen because it studied people's attitudes, belief system, opinions and other behavioural manifestations. The population of the study consisted of 35 female teachers and 15 male teachers; 35 female students and 15 male students from Onitsha North Local Government area making it 100 senior secondary school language teachers and students. Purposive random sampling technique was adopted. A self-developed structured questionnaire for data collection captioned "Problems of English Language Teaching and Learning (PELTL)" made up of 10 items was used. The questionnaire has sections A and B. Section A covers personal data of the respondents, while section B provides answers to the research questions raised for the items on a modified Likert type scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. Mean rating was used for data analysis. Items that attracted a mean rating of 2.5 and above were accepted.

Results

Research question 1: What are the challenges teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government Area?

Table I: Respondents' mean rating on the challenges facing teachers and students in the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools Onitsha North Local Government Area

| S/N | ITEMS DESCRIPTION | Σfx | \bar{x} | Decision |
|-----|--|-------------|-----------|----------|
| 1. | Some teachers and students find writing and speaking the English language difficult. | 358 | 3.6 | Agree |
| 2. | Students do not show interest in learning the second language. | 303 | 3.0 | Agree |
| 3. | Mother tongue influences the teaching and learning of English language. | 275 | 2.8 | Agree |

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|-------------------|--|-----|------------|--------------|
| 4. | Teachers do not have access to educational technologies for teaching and learning. | 282 | 2.8 | Agree |
| 5. | Lack of conducive environment for teaching and learning. | 315 | 3.2 | Agree |
| Grand Mean | | | 3.1 | Agree |

Table 1 above focused on the challenges teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of English language. Five items were presented to the respondents with the mean scores of 3.6, 3.0, 2.8, 2.8 and 3.2 respectively, all above the cut-off mean. The findings further show that the respondents accepted that there are challenges facing teachers in the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government Area.

Research question 2: What are the effects of these challenges on the teachers' performance in the teaching of English language in senior secondary schools?

Table II: respondents' mean rating on the effects of challenges on the teachers' performance in the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools

| S/N | ITEMS DESCRIPTION | Σfx | \bar{X} | Decision |
|-------------------|--|-------------|------------|--------------|
| 6. | The teachers lose interest in their work | 290 | 2.9 | Agree |
| 7. | There is a poor quality of teaching and learning of English language | 333 | 3.3 | Agree |
| 8. | The teachers do not make efforts to improve themselves | 301 | 3.0 | Agree |
| 9. | The teachers easily get annoyed at students when they make mistakes | 354 | 3.5 | Agree |
| 10. | The teachers cannot compete favourably with their counterparts in developed countries. | 301 | 3.0 | Agree |
| Grand Mean | | | 3.1 | Agree |

Table II above revealed the effects of the challenges on teachers' performance in the teaching of English language in senior secondary. It reveals that items 6,7,8,9 and 10 have the mean scores of 2.9, 3.3, 3.0, 3.5 and 3.0 respectively, all above the cut-off mean. This shows that the respondents accepted that there are challenges teachers face, and these challenges have effects

on their performance in the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools.

Findings

1. The challenges teachers and students face in teaching and learning the English language include difficulties in writing and speaking the English language, lack of interest, mother tongue interference, inaccessibility to educational technologies for effective teaching and learning and unconducive environment.
2. The effects of the challenges on teachers' performance in the teaching and learning of English are loss of interest in professional improvement, inadequate teaching and annoyance at the students when they make mistakes and teachers' inability to compete with counterparts in developed countries.

Discussion

The study revealed the challenges teachers and students face in teaching and learning the English language namely: difficulties on the part of teachers and students to write and speak the English language, lack of interest, mother tongue interference, unconducive environment, and inaccessibility to educational technologies for effective teaching and learning. The findings agree with the earlier findings of Obiegbo (2016); Akujiobi and Chukwu (2012) who noted that mother tongue interference and lack of students' interest are the major factors affecting the teaching and learning of English language in the areas where it is used as a second language. Teachers of English language who want to succeed in their jobs would need to enlighten the students on the problems of mother tongue interference and other basic educational skills. This is in line with Glasser's choice model which noted that teachers strongly guide learners to reach desired performance level. Eighty per cent of what the student becomes in the future can be shaped by a teacher. Apparently, it can be deduced that, here, the duty of an English language teacher does not stop at teaching the language, it includes making the learners learn and appreciate the language.

Also revealed were the effects of the challenges on the teachers' performance in the teaching of English language in senior secondary schools, they are mainly: loss of interest in professional improvement, annoyance at the students when they make mistakes and teachers' inability to compete with counterparts in developed countries. Such influences certainly make the teaching of the English language cumbersome to the teachers. The findings are supported by Erdem and Tutkun (2016); Muhammad et al. (2018) earlier findings that teachers get angry at students when they make mistakes which is among the problems teaching and learning of the English language faces. It suffices to say that a teacher who wants to inculcate knowledge in the student must learn behavioural management as proposed by Classroom Management Theory. Behavioural management helps the teacher to effectively carry out his/her work without many challenges. Behavioural management is one of the standards that should qualify one as a teacher. Nigerian public secondary school is poised unendingly with teachers' low professional standards which affect their abilities for personal modification, production, innovation and social placement. These problems are caused by the challenges the teachers face within and outside the school.

Conclusion

This study has tried to draw attention to the challenges teachers and students face in the teaching and learning of the English language. The study examined various factors that hinder the teaching and learning of the English language. It was discovered that some factors such as constant use of mother tongue in communication by students, inaccessibility to educational technologies for teaching and learning of the English language, unconducive environment for teaching and learning, students' low interest in learning the English language, and others were largely responsible for ineffective teaching and learning of the English language in secondary schools in Onitsha North Local Government Area. Based on the above, it is therefore concluded that the challenges facing teachers and students, especially those at the basic level of education are a national issue as the problems arising from such challenges affect the nation's educational development

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings:

- i. Government should provide adequate funds; train English language teachers and provide adequate facilities for learning. This will help reduce the challenges that teachers face in their jobs.
- ii. Teachers should be acquainted with classroom management and utilise the skills in ensuring that the students find interest in learning the English language. The skills will make their jobs easier and make the students concentrate and learn fast.

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