

ENGLISH STUDIES DURING COVID-19 ERA IN NIGERIA: CHALLENGES AND EFFECTS

Dr. Martina Chioma Uche

Department of English Language and Literature
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Email: mc.uche@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

This paper, English studies in the covid-19 Era considers the challenges of English studies during Covid-19 Era in Nigeria. Covid-19 Era was a time when the world in general and Africans in particular were indoors. People were advised to stay in their homes in order not to come in contact with the pandemic. This has led to everything standing still. In order to carry out this study, the researcher discusses the major terms, language, the challenges of English studies in the covid-19 era, the effects the challenges had on English studies. The importance of English studies, and the benefits of English Language Degree to Nigerians. This article adopted a qualitative descriptive method. The findings show that English Language studies was affected during the covid-19 era. The paper recommends that people should keep away from anything that will ever make covid-19 to come back in Nigeria so that English studies will not be disturbed.

Keywords: English Studies, Covid 19, Language

Introduction

The news of Covid-19 began to spread in Nigeria in the year 2019, but it became so severe in the year 2020. No one anticipated the way the pandemic spread in the entire world in a very short period. Coronavirus disease has paralyzed, to a greater extent, the life in many countries causing thousands of deaths and about seven million infections. This made the scientific community to be on alert by conducting studies on the virus, the disease it produces, the situation it creates, and the population it attacks from different perspectives. The most vulnerable to coronavirus are children who do not understand what is happening and who, along with the concern and frustration of their elders, may present risk factors such as anxiety and traumatic stress disorders.

Similarly, according to Roy et al., (2020) “80% of people over 18 have shown the need for attention to their mental health as a result of the anxiety and stress experienced during the pandemic”. Consequently, Forte et al., (2020) agree with this idea, stating that the “pandemic has caused stress, psychological discomfort, sleep disorders and instability among others in a part of the populations. There have been many studies that have sought to analyze the impact of this pandemic from different perspectives. However, this study will pay attention to how it has affected the English studies.

English studies is an academic discipline taught in primary, secondary and post-secondary education in English. It may also explore the production and analysis of texts created in English. English studies include the study of literature (especially novels, plays, short stories and poetry, the majority of which comes from Britain, the United States and Ireland (although English literature from any country may be studied, and local or national literature is usually emphasized in any given topic. English studies in the Covid-19 Era was difficult. This is because everyone; pupils, students from both secondary and tertiary institutions, teachers and lecturers were all at home because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Since it was paramount that everyone should be indoors, it means that nothing moved; market, schools, churches, clubs and so on. In this situation, English studies was hampered.

Our language is central to everything we do, and it, more than any other characteristic, distinguishes us from other living creatures. Since we cannot function without our language, it becomes important we learn more about language. There are new discoveries and changes in language study which affect us and our place in the society. In appreciating the complexities of the medium through which we all communicate, we understand more fully our humanity. To understand our humanity therefore, we must understand the language that makes us human. The study of language, then, is a very practical pursuit which everyone needs to practice in. Therefore, there is need to train the English teachers in the public schools how new language discoveries can benefit people.

Problem Statement

This article investigated the challenges that English studies faced during Covid-19 and the effects of the challenges on the students. It is assumed that if these challenges are not exposed, they are likely to occur again if Covid-19 is to begin again. Exposing the challenges will help to increase our understanding and commitment toward the upliftment of English studies in Nigeria.

Aims and Objectives

The focus of this article is to examine the challenges faced by English studies during Covid-19 and the effects of the challenges to the students in Nigeria. This is done by:

1. Determining when Covid-19 started in Nigeria.
2. Identifying the challenges that English studies faced during Covid-19.
3. To ascertain the effects of the challenges on the students.
4. And to state the benefits of English studies to Nigerians.

Conceptual Clarification

In this article, there is need for conceptual clarification on major terms used. This will give a better understanding and insight of the terms. The terms are English studies, Covid-19, Era.

English Studies

English studies deal with the term English from the point of view of studying English as a language, as a culture and literature to arrive at the point when English was created. English studies is arguably the archetypal humanities subject in the anglophone world, steeping its students in the English language forum. English is a West Germanic language originally spoken by the inhabitants of early medieval England. It is used in many varieties throughout the world. It started in Anglo-saxon England. It is originally from Anglo-Frisian and old saxon dialects. It is now a global language. There are about three hundred and seventy-five million native speakers (people who use it as their first language) in the world.

Covid-19

Covid-19 is a pandemic that affected the whole world in the year 2020, though rumors of it started in 2019. It was referred to as “a global health emergency” (Nwokocha, 137). This pandemic spread so fast that the world felt its impact. For example, many people were killed by the attack. From the report of the World Health Organization (WHO), African Region as at 18th April 2020, 45 out of 47-member states were reported 2019 Covid cases (Uyoga et al., qtd in Nwokocha, 137). The pandemic has continued to spread in some areas till today.

Language

According to O’Grady and Archibald (455), “Language is central to how we deal with other people and the way we use language says a lot about us”. It is at the heart of all things human. It is a part of the social structure of our communities. In the same vein, Crystal defines language as the “the concrete act of speaking, writing or signing in a given situation” (265). This means that in language, we speak, write and sign. Adedimeji opines that “languages are born, they grow and develop, they change and shift and they have families and social relations” (194). This relationship and Siamese twinship inform Adedimeji’s contention that “man is language and language is man”. Our language changes to “meet the needs of people” (McCallum, Strong, Thoburn and Williams, 86).

Language according to Cook (19) is “a human phenomenon which cannot be subclassified so neatly as the natural phenomenon of the scientist”. The facts of language include its sounds, forms, and syntactic agreement. From these specific facts, we formulate general rules which describe how a specific language is actually used. In addition, a linguist can observe the facts of a language for the purpose of describing its historical development. Its regional and social difference, its relationship with other languages, its application to other fields, particularly education. In language and usually in the field of English, scholars are primarily interested in effective written or spoken communication, the literary critic also makes value judgements about the worth and effectiveness of the language. All these combines to show that language is a vehicle that helps in our day to-day activities.

We communicate in language through speech. Furthermore, the normal person, young or old, has a similar interest in the marvelous machine that enables him to accomplish an even more important objective-communication. According to Pie (5) “that machine is language spoken, written, gestural, symbolic”. This language permits a person to place his thoughts at the disposal of another. Language

precedes, accompanies and follows practically all human endeavor. Without language, ninety-nine percent of human activity would cease. Language-spoken, written-lies at the very heart of our thinking, our communications, our actions. According to Goad (11), “speech is the highest of the faculties of man and the one that distinguishes him from animals”. To speech, man owes the power of cooperation with his fellows, which gives him dominion over physically stronger creatures. It enables him to transmit, not only warnings and desires, but also ideas, orders, and designs. Animals though have language, they cannot use the way man does, this is because they “think alike” each according to its kind reacts in a similar way to the same external stimulations. They understand one another without speech, other than certain cries. But human individuality and individual needs are the parents of language. For words not only convey the ideas of one man to another; they enable him to formulate them clearly for himself and so build up an independent mind by the links of their associations of his memory.

The role of the individual as a working, studying, playing creature is determined to an enormous degree by his practical awareness of language use. The normal use of language is characteristically innovative. We construct sentences that are entirely new to us. This accounts for the creative aspect of language use. Similarly, language is seen as a kind of latent structure in the human mind, developed and fixed by exposure to specific linguistic experiences. Consequently, meanings are created, modified, developed and changed when we use language. These meanings accordingly to Uche (223) are the result of interpretative procedures employed by people within the context of interaction in language use.

Challenges faced by English Studies during Covid-19 Era in Nigeria

Covid-19 brought with it some challenges that affected English studies during Covid-19 era in Nigeria. Some of the challenges are: There was no high-quality learning from English studies, this is because students, teachers, lecturers were at home as it was commanded that everybody should be indoors. This means that no form of teacher-lecturer-student participation in learning. Similarly, new methods of learning that would have been introduced into the English studies was not made available, therefore, the students’ opportunity to learn new methods in English studies was denied. In the same vein, the pandemic affected the reading and writing of the English studies courses. The level of academic English that is foundational to educational success was reduced. Reports on academic progress on English studies was hampered or brought to a standstill. This is because lecturers were all indoors, no one goes to school to monitor any academic program. At the same time, the workload of English studies to be taught became so much after the Covid-19 due to the fact that what is supposed to be taught was carried over to this year. Consequently, there was much work to be done from the lecturers and teachers alike in order to help many students or pupils get back on track for academic excellence. Still yet, during Covid-19, instructional and learning time of the English studies was reduced, this also impedes students’ performance. According to Yen and Mohammad, “there was lack of vocabulary knowledge from the students” (1223-1230). However, educators and families who could support English language studies were no more able to come to the aid of the ELS class. This posed a very big challenge to the learners in the sense that they were unable to get help from people any longer.

Consequently, e-learning was underutilized because Covid-19 pandemic forced the entire world to rely on it for education. The highest barriers to e-learning were insufficient/unstable internet connectivity, inadequate computer labs, lack of computers/laptops and technical problems. Distance learning was introduced, we all know that this distance learning did not work well because learners could not effectively interact with teachers during virtual classes of English studies. E-learning negatively influenced learners’ performances and learning outcomes. This is because many people in the country could not cope with it due to power failure in Nigeria. The EEDC hardly allow power to be stable, so there is no how distance learning could be effective without the use of electricity. Again, during this covid-19 era, there was fear all over the world, fear of contagion, fear of each other, fear that we may not survive. This fear of the pandemic left students and college struggling. Students faced financial challenges because their parents were only trying to make food available for them. There was no money in circulation as to give them pocket money that would help them to purchase books on English studies.

The Effects of the Challenges of English Studies on the Students

During covid-19, because of the closure of schools, students sat passively in their homes and listened to the e-learning from the internet. At the same time the e-learning has made it difficult for them to speak or utter words appropriately because they are tentative, hesitant and fearful of making mistakes, they lacked adequate vocabulary and practice, making it difficult for them to converse fluently in English. This is one of the worst form of learning that one can receive because they had nothing to ask or add they only received it passively without any interaction from their teachers, so no great impact was made in their academic knowledge. Learners suffered network problem thereby lacking high-quality English studies learning choices. Stay at home also disrupted daily routines and physically isolated citizens from people and places that were part of their lives. Most students had some psychological problems which include anxiety, fear of the unknown, loneliness and sadness. This resulted in many of them smoking dangerous drugs in order to keep themselves happy, but automatically they were putting themselves into another realm of problem which may affect them in the future. Some ladies were impregnated as a result of idleness, many died in the process. Some of the students who would have been in the school learning joined arm robbery, and kidnapping of people in order to make money and so on.

However, students become uninterested in subjects because of the negative shifts of attitude toward education in Nigeria. Similarly, there was sluggish cross-border movement of students, this made it difficult for those who school outside their environment to find it difficult to cope. The teachers on the other hand were unprepared for online teaching. There was also inadequate online education for practical learning. However, the impact was so severe for disadvantaged children families.

The Importance of English Studies

English studies is very important in Nigeria. This is because it is the language of the masses. It is for communication, communication here may be written or vocal. In addition, knowing English increases one's chances of getting a good job in a multinational company within one's home country or far finding work abroad. It is also the language of international communication, the media, and the internet. Learning English is also important for socializing and entertaining. It also helps to produce students with the skills and insight needed to engage with and interpret a wide variety of texts including films and other materials.

Benefits of English Studies Degree to Nigerians

The primary purpose of English Language Degree to Nigerians is to understand and explore the way in which English language has evolved and developed over time to become usable in the society. English studies cover a wide variety of Degree courses that investigate the production of texts in the English language of which, there is the opportunity to grab them. In English studies, the Bachelor's Degree trains professionals to be specialized in their field of knowledge with a solid basis of knowledge of English language. English language studies consider the history and present the status of the language. Study of the English is an important tool for the study of literature. Therefore, literature can be an important source of evidence for the study of the language across cultures, regions, nations and time. English language studies also enable second language learners to improve their awareness, understanding and use of English language in social and academic setting (www.timeshighereducation.com).

Furthermore, English studies can help one to see things from a different perspective or get a deeper understanding of another culture. It makes one a better listener and gives health benefits as studies have shown that people who speak two or more languages have more active mind. English studies helps one to explore English and American literary traditions. It develops one's ability as a reader and interpreter of literature. Similarly, it makes one to understand the role of critical perspective and enhances one's pleasure in the enjoyment of literature, improves one ability as a writer and editor (www.lynchburg.edu/academics).

Discussion of Findings

From the above discussion, it is evident that English studies had challenges during Covid-19 era. This is because some of the challenges were highlighted in this article.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that:

1. People should keep away from anything that can bring back Covid-19 in Nigeria so that English studies will not be disturbed.
2. People should go for Covid-19 vaccine in order to be safe.
3. Nigeria academics, intellectuals or professors should be committed to help the learners of language achieve excellence so as to advance English studies forward.
4. There is also need to uphold standards and values in English studies.

Conclusion

The strict lockdown regulations that have been implemented during the covid-19 pandemic, have broad implications for English studies. Stay at home orders have disrupted daily routines of education. This condition had much psychological effects, distress and thinking around Nigerian people. Education was generally hit hard and English studies in particular was affected.

Covid-19 pandemic affected English studies negatively in varying degrees in Nigeria. For example, beginning from the day the lockdown started, no student went to school, this put a stop to the knowledge that the students would have acquired. There was no formal education between the students and their teachers/lecturers, of course making them to forget most of the things they have previously studied because an adage says “practice makes perfect”, the researcher believes that the lock down made them not to practice anything because everybody was afraid of the unknown. At the same time, the distance learning did not reach so many students who have no phones, television or radio in their homes. This made them to miss out entirely any learning going on.

Similarly, many did not come out for fear of contacting covid-19. There was financial challenge. People were just struggling to see food on their table then. So, nobody or parents was interested in anything education. This caused denial of access to quality education especially on English studies. In the same vein, some who were quarantined, died. So many people were kidnapped then, some boys joined armed robbery, many joined different cult groups. All these were as a result of being idle because an “idle mind is the devils workshop”. Therefore, the researcher’s recommendations are useful for future studies that seek to expand information about English Studies.

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