

The Challenges of Teaching English Language and Literature in Tertiary institutions in Nigeria

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Abstract

There are two fundamentally different ways of understanding teaching. The first sees teaching as an instructor-centered activity in which knowledge is transmitted from someone who has acquired that knowledge to a novice learner: Teaching as knowledge transmission. The second sees teaching as a learner centered activity in which the instructor ensures that learning is made possible for novice learners and supports, guides and encourages them in their active and independent creation of new knowledge: teaching assisted knowledge creation. Teaching is the activities involved in facilitating or educating to impart knowledge or skills to learners. For one to teach well, one must have mastered English language and literature in order to communicate well. Effective communication is made possible through English Language and Literature. It is really a fact that English language and Literature have made rapid and remarkable progress in the study of languages. As disciplines, they quickly gained recognition, popularity and acceptance in the country, Nigeria. This feat, however, could not escape distractions as it is confronted with certain challenges especially in Nigeria. This paper therefore, examines the challenges of teaching English language and literature in Nigeria. The article adopts a conceptual study method and was guided by three objectives which sought to know the status of English language and literature in Nigeria, the challenges that confront the teaching process and the effects of the challenges on the Nigerian learners. The paper adopts a qualitative descriptive method. The study also adopts the communicative competence theory propounded by Dell Hymes in 1966. The study finds out that teaching of the two disciplines had some challenges in Nigeria. Ways of improving the disciplines were recommended.

Keywords: Teaching, English language and literature, challenges, E-learning

Introduction

A pandemic disease is one that hits a wide geographical area and affects a large proportion of the population. This was what Nigerians witnessed in 2019. In other words, the pandemic began to spread very fast. It became so severe in the year 2020. No one expected the way the pandemic spread in the entire world in a very short period. It affected the whole world and was referred to as a “a global health emergency” (Nwokocha, 2020). The pandemic spread so fast that the world felt its impact. For example, many people who were affected by the pandemic died, others were killed because of one thing or the other. Everything was at a standstill: market, work, outing, and so many other things, especially the educational sector in general and the teaching of English language and literature in particular. From the World Health Organization, African Region as at 18th April 2020, 45 out of 47-member states were to be effected with the pandemic. It caused a great harm and danger, even, some people have not yet recovered from the shock till today. Some who lost their beloved ones are still mourning them.

The teaching of English language and literature is an academic exercise that takes place from the kindergarten to the tertiary institutions. These teachings explore the production and analysis of texts created in English language and literature. The reason for considering the two aspects is that literature is embedded in language and the two go *pari persu*. English language includes 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, local or national literature is usually emphasized in any given topic. The teaching of English language and literature in the tertiary institution was so difficult and faced so many challenges. 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 works, moves or takes place. In this situation, the teaching of English language and literature was stopped and had challenges.

An adage says “there is a time when we must firmly choose the course we will follow; or drift of events will make the decision”. In this period, the Nigerian teachers, lecturers or educators in general need to carefully but firmly choose the course to follow in the chosen career by re-designing programs in English language and literature towards realizing or actualizing their practical relevance in Nigeria. “He who has the advantage of being with people, has the challenge of transforming them” (Nwankwo, 1999). The teaching of English language and literature had so many challenges facing it during the pandemic era. No doubt, English language and literature in Nigeria, to a large extent have equipped learners with good knowledge of the main theories of principles and practices of language. The teaching of these disciplines has also developed, promoted and popularized Nigerians, giving them a surer means of breaking the monopoly of linguistic theorizing by the west.

Teaching is a good profession, many are in it while others see it as a waste of time because of the meagre salary that is being paid to either the teachers or lecturers. In the same vein, there are two ways to deal with students who show up for college without the requisite skills to benefit fully from their instruction. “the first is to ignore their problems and teach them with the attitude that they are on their own: if they cannot make it in class, that is just too bad!”. This attitude prevails too often among instructors; the results are high student dropout rates and wasted potential. The second option is to recognize the problem and deal with these students in constructive ways; teach them the learning skills and strategies necessary to reap the full benefit of their college learning experiences. On their other hand, instructors who are conscious of the duty want to prove that their job is a job of conscience and then go extra miles to improve their teaching method or adapt to anything that will improve their teaching. The pandemic brought with it some challenges that made the instructors to devise means of delivering their lectures to the students: e-learning.

Theoretical Studies

This paper adopts the theory of Communication Competence. Communicative competence theory was developed by Dell Hymes in (1966), as a reaction to Noam Chomsky’s (1965) linguistic competence which focused on correctness in grammar; that is, knowing and adhering to the rules of grammar. According to Hymes, having an accurate knowledge of the grammar rules of a language is not enough to make the learner competent in the use of that language for communication. The learner also needs communicative competence which entails knowing what to say, to whom, in what circumstances and how to say it. In other words, communicative competence refers to the language user’s grammatical knowledge of his language and as well as his social knowledge about how and when to use this language to accomplish specific communication goals. Communication competence is also helpful in learning the teaching of English language and literature because, it is one who is competent enough that will be able to handle the teaching process. The teacher also needs to be competent in the processes of the e-learning and the troubles that come with it.

Conceptual Clarification

In order to carry out this study, there is need for conceptual clarification on major terms used in this study as such will get a better understanding and insight of the terms. The terms have been listed in the key words.

Teaching

It is the largest profession in the world. In the 21st century, it was estimated that there were about eighty million (80 million) teachers throughout the world (<https://www.britannica.com>). An adage says “teachers are great, no controversy, if you can spell your name, thank your teacher, if you can’t, look for a good one”. This goes to say that teachers are really honoured.

English Language and Literature

Our language is central to everything we do, more than any other characteristic, distinguishes us from other living creatures. Since we cannot function without language, it is paramount we learn more about it. In English language and literature, there are new discoveries and changes in language study which affect us and our place in the society. We look at these two media as means through which we communicate, understand more fully our humanity. To understand our humanity therefore, we must understand the English language and literature that make us human. The study of the two disciplines then, is a very practical pursuit which everyone needs to practice. Therefore, there is need to train the teachers of these disciplines both in the public and private schools how new language discoveries can benefit the people.

Furthermore, literature is no doubt one of the greatest achievements of human thinking or knowledge, which assumes in a society, “a very powerful role in making and shaping the society which produces it” (Mkaanem, 2007).

Covid-19

This is a pandemic that brought abrupt problem to Nigeria in particular and the whole world in general. The impact was so serious that many people died of it. Some who stayed under quarantine also could not survive the shock. This brought fear all over the world. Then churches, markets and every other institution were closed. People were locked in the corners of their homes for fear of contagion. There was scarcity of food, and every other thing since nobody leaves the corners of his room. Some were even begging for food to eat, others praying to survive, some were busy kidnapping and stealing other people’s properties in order to make ends meet.

Challenges

It is an instigation intended to convince a person, group of persons to perform an action they otherwise would not. It may also mean the act of a sentry in halting a person or group of persons and demanding the countersign or by extension the action demanding a password. Challenge may also be a difficult task, especially on that person making the attempt to find an enjoyable position because of that difficulty. It is really a situation of being faced with something that needs great mental or physical effort in order to be done successfully and therefore tests a person’s ability. Finding a solution to this problem is one of the greatest challenges faced by scientists today. It is something new and difficult which requires great effort and determination.

Research Methodology

In other to obtain an in-depth and thorough information on the challenges of teaching English language and literature during Covid-19 in Nigeria, the study uses qualitative descriptive design method.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to:

1. Examine the status of English language and literature in Nigeria.
2. Examine the challenges of teaching English language and literature in Nigeria.
3. Examine the challenges faced by the Nigerian learners of English language and literature during in Nigeria

Status of English language and Literature in Nigeria

The researcher is of the opinion that English language and literature are very important disciplines that have come to stay. They have dominated every aspect of Nigeria’s live. For example, English language is an official language that cannot be toyed with. It is the language of law, commerce, businesses of all kinds, language of religion, advertisement, education and entertainment. According to Akindele and Adegbite (1999), “English language had been cultivated, redomesticated and indigenized in a socio-cultural milieu”. This means that the language has become our language and nothing can be done about it because we use it in our everyday interaction. At the same time, English language plays a unifying role in Nigeria because it is a multilingual nation of which if the language is not there, there will be a problem. Literature also is a discipline most cherished by many in Nigeria. Literature is written by

Nigerian citizens for readers, addressing Nigerian issues. It deals with the lifestyle, culture, history, custom and traditions of Nigerians in their various ethnic groups.

The challenges of teaching English language and Literature during covid-19

Teaching is the act of providing experience for learners so as to develop their knowledge. It is also the act of conveying information to others. As a result, it must face some challenges. The challenges include: inadequate teaching materials, which may hamper learning activities. Poverty level that may not allow instructors to have enough money to go for their lectures. Inappropriate preparation on the part of the instructor. This has caused a lot of problems. Some instructors go to the class unprepared and when they get there, they find it difficult to discharge their duties as required thereby inviting insult from the students. In the pandemic period, the challenges ranges from using e-learning method which most of the lecturers were not familiar with no money to help them buy data. According to studies conducted by Sevasci (2013), Idris and Salleh (2007), "high levels of anxiety were generated by the fear using online teaching". The educator's teaching technique, changed dramatically. Some as at that time have no money to feed not to talk of buying data to assess the online teaching. According to Yen and Mohammad (2020), "language and literature suffered in the hands of the teachers and instructors". Similarly," there was lack of self-confidence, nervousness, inhibition, fear and loss of hope in the Nigerian system.

Challenges faced by Learners of English language and literature during Covid-19 in Nigeria

In Nigeria especially during covid-19, learners of the English language and literature's "lack of confidence and communication through the virtual lessons has made it more difficult for learners to speak or utter the words appropriately" (Sayuti, Teh, Saimi, Baka, Dawami and Mohammad, 2020). Similarly, learners have difficulties expressing themselves because they are tentative, hesitant and fearful of making mistakes. They often lack adequate vocabulary and practice, making it difficult for them to converse fluently in the subjects in question.

At the same time, there was deprivation of language and literature contents. This has caused the learners to be anxious as they are unable to speak, even if they have anything to say, they are unable to do so because they are afraid of making grammatical mistakes and being laughed at by their peers. In the same vein, Hernandez and Florez (2020) opine that "e-learning limits peer interaction". Peer interaction in the English language and literature lesson were insufficient for learners to practice their skills. In the classroom, teachers and lecturers capture the attention of learners by engaging them in an interesting and enjoyable activities that encourage them to speak in the class, it is hard during online mode because not all learners get used to e-learning and "it is even tougher for teachers to get feedback from passive learners" (Kaur and Aziz, 2020). Adedoyin and Soykan (2020) emphasize in their study that "learners are often placed in circumstances where they have to learn languages and literature on their own during the pandemic". This led them to struggle to understand and overcome the challenge. This only made the learners to struggle to understand things on their own. Consequent upon the above, Sevasci (2013) and Idrus and Salleh (2007) say that "high level of anxiety generated by the fear of being evaluated, the educator's teaching technique and the learners' culture are all the challenges faced by learners of English language and literature.

In English language and literature, "learners' engagement is affected by psychological factors" (Sison and Bautista, 2021). A significant problem associated with e-learning is the lack of effective contact with educators. Learners feel "demotivated to learn in such circumstances because they are constantly confronted with a computer" (Toquero, 2020). They seldom have time to do the e-learning because it needs too much time for them to explore their interpretation of the subjects. Despite the fact that e-learning is a daunting task, it necessitates efforts such as recording, reading, memorizing and consuming online based learning media "especially for English oral presentation" (Simamora, 2020). This is a situation in which learners must adapt rapidly, "more especially, in an emergency learning situations like that of the time of the pandemic" (Pace, Pettit and Baker, 2020). For those who cannot adapt themselves because of poor interpretation towards subjects learned, especially English language and literature, they were unable to submit assignment on time due to poor internet coverage. Furthermore,

Aboaye, Yawson and Appiah (2020) are of the opinion that most “learners were unable to finish their assignment on time, because they were afraid of losing marks, and this increases the level of stress among the learners”.

However, without the assistance and support from friends, families, schools, government and policy makers in the midst of the pandemic, learners find e-learning to be tedious. According to Allam et al, (2020), this made the learners to “lose their interest and motivation to learn”. Some learners admit that they do not have comfortable learning atmosphere at home and the fact that they were forced to engage in household chores during lockdown, brings about negative impacts on their studies and leaving “them depressed and despondent” (Mishra Gupta, and Shree, 2020). Physical issues such as eye pressure, ear problems as a result of always using ear phone and too much focusing of their eyes on the computers. These are some of the common challenges among learners and made them feel uneasy throughout the learning process. In another development, learners are more motivated to participate in online teaching and learning when instructions provide prompt reaction and interaction with them. These are steps that lead to the anticipated teaching and learning outcomes.

Recommendations

The e-learning days have come to stay in Nigeria and Nigerians have now become familiar with the manner of digital products. In Nigeria today, many have gone digital. Lecturers are now teaching online. Therefore, the researcher recommends that:

1. The management and control of this sector will go a long way to determine its potential for the future of educational research activities in Nigeria.
2. The curriculum for teaching English language and literature should be designed with new ideas, studies and subjects that will add and expand the horizon of the learners’ knowledge.
3. Only earned progress and elevation in language and literature should be venerated and promoted in order to make for quality knowledge in the learners.
4. English language and literature must be taken as core courses by providing instruments that could make their study interesting.
5. There should be new orientation in handling these courses so that learners should be interested in taking them serious.
6. The government, corporate bodies and non-governmental organizations should join resources to bring into reality our endeavours towards e-learning improvement in the country.
7. Government should also intensify efforts at finding lasting solution to the epileptic power supply to the country.
8. Researchers/scholars should periodically update their knowledge on the ever-increasing e-learning method.

Conclusion

The study presents the challenges of teaching English language and literature in Nigeria during the pandemic era. This is mostly due to a problem that is circulating among the ESL learners around the world in which the majority of English learners fail to study. As a result, it is critical to recognize the obstacles English language and literature students experienced during the learning process. English educators can choose from a list of interventions used by other educators to see which ones might work in their own classroom. The findings of this study must be addressed to relevant authorities, such as institutions, administrative ministry of education, staff and policy makers especially on the challenges faced by learners during covid-19 pandemic. This is to ensure that they create a good strategy and put it into action for the efficacy of online teaching and learning, so that, no learner would be left out in utilizing the target language.

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