

The Study of Challenges Encountered In the Learning of General English by the Students in Tertiary Institutions

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ABSTRACT

English is a second language in Nigeria with numerous barriers. The barriers are traceable to grammatical incorrectness, inconsistent phonetic pronunciation and psychological hindrances such as speaking phobia and fear of harassment/ insult. There are also issues of deficiency of teaching methods and lack of daily practice which significantly affects acquisition. This study is supported by aspects of Animal Intelligence, the Theory of Use, Exercise and Practice as propounded by Edward L. Thorndike. The emphasis of this theory is a result that could be obtained from regular practice engineered by the readiness of the learners. The findings reveal that challenges the learners face in the use of General English or Communication in English is as a result of insufficient readiness and inadequate repetition of the use of English. Law of use, and readiness to learn. (Meaning storing and retrieval Items, weak teaching methods and mother tongue interference.) Finally, this paper recommends an enabling environment that will engender strategy reading and repetitive use of English. This paper calls for a renewed strength in terms of effective reading culture and regular speaking skills among the students of higher institutions.

KEYWORDS

Learning, Animal Intelligence, Challenges, Law of effect and General English

I. INTRODUCTION

English Language plays a vital role in the Nigerian Education industry. It is very important in every adult oriented academic effort. English is invaluable for learners at various levels of education. At the tertiary level, it becomes unarguable the only dominant language of communication. The relevance or importance of English to education in Nigeria cannot be swept under the carpet. As a language, it is one of the factors that determines the level of individual in Nigerian societies. The importance of English language is further stressed by Aleburu (2006) in Bamgbose and Cable (1978) with the illustration that: A language is

important because the people who speak it are important politically, economically, commercially, culturally and nationally. English, French and German are important languages because they are languages of important peoples, for this reason, they are studied outside the countries of their use.

It is a language that had existed before the independence and even after the independence of Nigeria. Its existence as an official language has been firmly registered. Aleburu, (2006) offers that "Today English occupies a very important place in the life of every educated Nigerian because it is the language that unites all the over 450 ethnic groups in Nigeria. English provides its speakers with numerous educational advantages. First, it affords the users more access to educational information since most books read in Nigerian learning institutions are written in English. Second, it provides instructional advantage, since English is the official language of instruction in post primary three levels Ojo and Ishola (2013) offer that "Status and role of the English Language in Nigeria are very high. English has been elevated to the status of a world language, while in Nigeria, it has assumed the status of language of instruction (especially in schools) science and technology, and key to educational advancement and prestigious employment. It is also the language of business, identity, religion and administration. This position of Salman and Ayoola signals seriousness that is usually attached to the teaching and learning of English language. English language teaching and learning are not only for academics but all routine activities of the stakeholders' lives. Among the functions of English language are: communication, records keeping, conveying of orders and information, self-expression, embodying and enable thought etc. (Alimi, 2010:4). Teachers of English language at Junior Secondary schools are not only for academics but guiding students on language ability and competence. In order to fit into the society. Alimi's position points at the academic role and guidance role. However, there are still some challenges faced by the learners of English especially in tertiary institutions.

Notably primary challenges of general English experienced by the learners are:* pronunciation and spelling (tonuge, tough / sit, seat / fit, feet / fair, fare, fear); grammatical rules and exceptions (with major areas such as tenses), vocabulary and idiom (homophones, homographs, hypomy [likely _homonym_]); psychological and environmental barriers (such as failure of our intent to practice regularly);

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This paper is centred on challenges encountered by students of tertiary institutions on the use of General English. Several studies have been conducted by scholars on challenges encountered by students of tertiary institutions on the use of General English. Hategekimana, Bihira, Ngendahayo and Ngurumana (2024) write on "Challenges of Learning English as a Second Language in Secondary Schools: Students' perceptions in Rwanda". They investigate and discover the challenges of learning English as a second language in secondary schools. It sought to investigate students' perceptions of their fluency in the English language, to find out students' perceived feelings when they are learning ability to talk about lessons in English, to investigate students' perceived feelings when they are learning English, to analyse students' perceived anxiety when they are learning English, and to analyse students' perceived embarrassment when they produce ungrammatical English

in class. This paper differs from this present study as it only focuses on perceptions of students in secondary schools.

Abukhadrah (2015) on "The Difficulties of Learning English as Perceived by a Group of International Students: A case study" investigates the cultural aspects of the target language considered as an essential part of second and foreign language learning. The focus of the paper is the challenges of learning English encountered by a group of international students while learning in an intensive English program at a large Midwestern American university. Abukhadrah ventures into the challenges of learners across various nations i.e. into multicultural Suryanto (2020)* in "Difficulties and Strategies in learning: An Analysis of Students from English and Non-English Education Department in Indonesia" opines that "Even though English Language is an international language, students still have many problems in learning language and one of the common problems is speaking. We can see it when they were asked to present in front of their classmates." The concern of Suryanto is speaking and more specifically communication where the aim of this paper is to navigate holistically the challenges encountered by the students/learners of tertiary institutions on the use of General English.

A. Purpose of the Study

The aim of this paper is to investigate the challenges encountered in the study of General English. Specifically, the study intends to:

Identify the relationship between the environment and the use of English by learners in tertiary institutions; - examine the impact of teachers of General English on the learners in tertiary institutions; and - identify the factors that hinder learning of General English by the learners in tertiary institutions.

B. Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

- What are the challenges observed in the relationship between the environment and the use of English by the learners in tertiary institutions?
- What are the challenges arising from the impact of the teachers of General English on the learners in tertiary institutions, and
- What are the factors that hinder learning of General English by the learners in tertiary institutions?

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is anchored on Thorndike's Law of Readiness and Law of Exercise. Thorndike submitted that learners must be biologically and mentally prepared to learn for a connection to form, and that repeated practice strengthens these connections, while lack of use or disuse weakens. There is Law of Readiness and law of exercise which are driven by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Aside from readiness and exercise, extrinsic motivation can be traceable to clapping of hands, reinforcement, marking of scripts as a way of encouraging

learning to excel. In all these, students in higher institutions are propelled by certain interests and hidden ambition which keep pushing them to succeed. English learning plays significant role in all these. Edward L. Thorndike (1874-1949) was a pioneering American psychologist who founded Connectionism and heavily influenced by behaviourism. Encyclopaedia Britannica In essence, Thorndike's "Law of Effect" is about behaviour followed by satisfying or pleasant consequences that are more likely repeated, while those followed by discomfort are less likely to recur. Next is the "Law of Exercise" which is about connections between stimuli and responses which are strengthened with repetition, practice, and use, and weakened when practice is discontinued and the third one "The Law of Readiness" which is about an organism that must be physically and mentally prepared to act or learn for the learning process to be effective Contribution of the theory The summary of this is to make the learner relate the use of General English or Communication in English to learning in tertiary institutions by ensuring the relevance of active engagement, repetition and rewarding appropriate behaviour in teaching and learning, thereby ensuring proficiency in English language. This theory, if inculcated, will assist learners with reading and vocabulary instruction.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several Nigerian authors have identified infrastructural decay, mother tongue interference, attitude of the learners, overcrowded classrooms, outdated methods of teaching, poor digital literacy and economic instability as challenges facing the learning of English. Udoeye and Ohiuturu (2022), investigated problems of teaching and learning English language in Onitsha North Local Government Area. The duo observe that learning English language has not been easy due to some difficulties experienced by the teachers and the students. The challenges identified are mother tongue interference, low interest to study a second language (students) and inadequate professional training (teachers) the submission of Udoeye and Ohiuturu are good testimony about challenges faced by learners of General English in tertiary institutions.

Okoyeukwu, Anya and Luka (2023) in "Challenges of Teaching and Learning of English Language as a Second Language in Enugu Education Zone of Enugu State" focused on the challenges of teaching and learning of English Language as a Second Language in secondary schools in Enugu Education Zone. The study revealed, among others that the dearth of specialist English Language teachers; inadequate instructional materials; teaching strategies adopted by teachers; and students mother tongues militate against the teaching of English. The paper recommended solutions to these highlighted challenges. The opinion of these authors of this paper is an indicator of hindrances facing the learners of General English in tertiary institutions especially Emmanuel Alayande University of Education.

V. METHODOLOGY RESEARCH DESIGN

This study adopted descriptive and qualitative research design **SAMPLING METHOD**

The qualitative research design presents a sample of one hundred and fifty students of Emmanuel Alayande University of Education, Oyo, Nigeria. The University has five faculties

and thirty students were used from each faculty, making a total of one hundred and fifty respondents Population

One hundred and fifty students were used for the study INSTRUMENTATION a questionnaire was prepared for this study. It has two sections. Section A provides items revealing bio-data of the learners while section B provides items seeking for information of challenges encountered by learners of English Language. The options of responses likert scale of Strongly Agree, Agreed, Strongly Disagree and Disagree were used

A. *Reliability of Instrument*

Experts in languages and related fields were consulted on items in the questionnaire in order to see that the items used were standard and dependable VALIDATION OF INSTRUMENT the items in the questionnaire were considered appropriate as a true reflection of subject at hand.

B. *Data Analysis*

Simple percentage Statistics were used for the findings and results presentation Administration of Instrument. The researcher personally administered the copies of the instrument and all the copies were retrieved

C. *Findings*

Relationship between the environment and the use of English by the learners/ students in tertiary institutions

Table 1: Relationship between the environment and the use of English by the learners/ students

S/N	ITEM	SD	A	SD	D
1.	My Lecturers use Code-mixing while teaching	98/66.6%	37/23.41%	08/5.3%	7/4.66%
2.	The major instrument of Communication in the Campus is English Language	125/83.33%	20/13.33%	3/2.2%	2/1.11
3.	In various social media platforms, English is used for communication	110/73.33%	31/20.66%	7/4.66%	2/1.1%
4.	Home factors have affected my learning of English	85/56.66%	42/28%	13/8.66%	10/6.66%
5.	Use of General English is largely restricted to the school environment	76/5.2%	26/16%	18/12%	30/20%

Table 1 presents that Lecturers in higher institutions are being very strategic to the learning of English. The responses are diverse as 98 respondents, 66.6% about 2/3 (two third) agree that their Lecturers use Code-mixing while teaching. 125 respondents or 83.33% strongly agree that English language is the major instrument of communication in the Campus. The situation is similar with about 73.33% evident in various social media. It is also revealed glaringly that home factors affect constitutes challenges to the learning of English in tertiary institutions. Some of these home factors are mother tongue, socio economic status and illiteracy on the part of the family or a majority of the family members. Effective use of English is limited to school as an item where grand total of strongly agree and agree is put at 76/52% and 26/16% Challenges arising from the impact of the teachers of general English on the learners in the tertiary institutions.

Table 2: showcases the revelation that the learners are always willing

S/N	Item	SD	A	SD	D
1.	I benefit a lot from the teaching of Communication/General English	90/60 %	35/23.33%	10/6.66%	15/10 %
2.	Communication in English learning has been strengthened by the teachers use of instructional materials during lectures	25/16.7%	32/21.3%	33/22 %	15/34 %
3.	I encounter confusion arising from faulty pronunciation, wrong use of tense, preposition error amongst others	75/50 %	27/18 %	33/22 %	15/10 %
4.	Certain teachers' use of English has positively influenced my learning with their display of mastery skills in English	85/56.60%	37/23.4%	23/15.33%	5/3.33 %
5.	I prefer the use of my mother tongue for learning to the use of General English	50/33.33%	40/26.77%	35/23.33%	25/16.66%

Table 2 showcases the revelation that the learners are always willing to learn as 90/60% 125 or 83% it is like our University teachers are equal. The response to item one in Table 2 also snowballs to item 2. Item 3 is a revelation of the interference of L2. A positive one is that the learners can identify the impact of few teachers whose use of English they find rewarding. The last item reveals interest and attitude as an appreciable number still want to be taught in school environment where the official language of communication. Due to scramble of several Indigenous languages Social Interactional Factors that hinder effective learning of General English among the Learners/Students in tertiary institutions.

Table 3: Social Interactional Factors have issue of instructional materials and non-lecturers of general English as leading issues

S/N	Item	SA	A	SD	D
1.	There is dearth or no use of instructional materials during the teaching of Communication in English	30/20 %	70/46.66 %	22/14 .66%	28/18.66%
2.	Lectures in my area of specialization commit few blunders in certain situations because they are not proficient in English	55/36.67%	69/43.33 %	18/12 %	12/8%

3.	Poor influencing coming from the language of immediate environment by my mother tongue/parents affect my learning of general English	110/73 .34%	30/20%	8/5.3 3%	02/1.3 3%
4.	Dominant use of Pidgin English and slangs also affect my learning of general English	10/6.6 6%	50/33.7 %	85/56 .7%	5/3.3
5.	There is inadequacy of facilities such as language laboratory, instructional materials, public address system etc.	80/53. 3%	45/30%	20/14 .6%	05/3.3 %

In Table 3 where Social Interactional Factors have issue of instructional materials and non-lecturers of general English as leading issues, the responses of students/learners are seriously alarming. It is evident that the use of instructional materials is very weak in the tertiary institutions especially in OAU the University. 30/20% and 70/46% totaling 100/66% more worrisome is that 55/36.66% and 65/43.34% totaling 120/80% of the lecturers who do not teach English make learning of General English more difficult. The influence of the language of immediate environment is another issue with negative impact of 93.34% of all respondents. 10/6.66% and 50/33.29% strongly agree and agree respectively to the dominant use of Pidgin English and Slangs. And to cap it all, the learners were unanimous in their responses that there were inadequacy of facilities.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Weak Reading Culture may be a kind of challenge especially when the learners find reading practice to be a challenge as a result of lack of interest, limited vocabulary, weak background about the language often traceable to socio-economic factors. Some other common challenge as observed at PAUED, Oyo, Nigeria are inconsistent spelling. Here are two some identified spellings of "Repeater": repeata, ripita, ripieta, repiter, repeta, ripeata, repeita.

There is also the inconsistent pronunciation especially from the interference of the mother tongue (coming from various dialects) and effect of poor teaching (arising from bad pronunciation of the teacher). So, in effect, pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary challenges are the barriers learners of English face.

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