



**ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS
IN ISOKO NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF DELTA STATE:
PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS**

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ABSTRACT: *This paper studied the problems of teaching and learning English as a second language in junior school certificate examination in Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State. The study sought to establish the extent to which students in Junior Secondary School and teachers should value English as the language of instruction. The framework adopted is the behaviorist theory of bilingualism. The simple percentage method of data analysis was employed to analyze data. The population comprised students in junior secondary schools in Ozoro precisely the students of Opute Grammar School, Ozoro and Heroes Group of Schools, Ozoro both in Delta State of Nigeria. The sample size was 100, and the instrument for data collection was the questionnaire which was tested and retested on some other students to ensure that it was reliable. It was found out that the majority of the students consider the English language a difficult subject because of their inability to understand every aspect, which the English language entails. It was also found out among others that the level of infiltration of mother tongue into the respondents' English is very high. This research recommended that good reading habits should be developed in the students and also well-equipped libraries should be provided in the schools and communities in order to improve better performance in their study of English language. It concluded that the problems of teaching and learning English as a second language is as a result of the impact of mother's tongue, inadequate textbooks, poor language background and lack of professional growth and development of teachers. If these discovered factors are not checked there will be a drastic decline in standard of education.*

KEYWORDS: English language, Teaching, Learning, First Language, Second language, Bilingualism, Interference.



THE BACKGROUND

This paper makes an attempt to understand the problems of teaching and learning English as a second language in the background of various sociocultural factors. One of such problems might be due to the impact of mother tongue on the English language. The use of mother tongue, while teaching and learning English has been an issue of debate. Most teachers feel that the use of L₁ should be minimized and they feel guilty if they use it a lot. Against the use of L₁ is the general assumption that English should be learned through English just as you learn your mother tongue using your mother tongue. But the idea that the learner should learn English like a native speaker of English, or try to “think in English” is an inappropriate and unachievable aim. The importance of English language acquisition as a stepping-stone for proficiency in other school subjects cannot be over-emphasized. Knowledge is important both for educational, economical and national development of a country.

The importance of English language as a school subject derives mainly from its utilitarian value to the larger Nigerian society. English is the official language of administration and commerce. It is the major language of science. Above all, Salami (2002) had emphasized the importance of the use of English language in improving communication among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. He further highlighted the need for improving the quality of spoken and written English language among school children. However, one of the current educational problems of public interest is that of poor level of achievement especially in public examinations (Kolawole, 1998; Kolawole & Dele, 2002). Mishin (2019) sees English as a language of wider communication (LWC). According to Potter, Simeon and Crystal (2023), English originated in England and it is the dominant language of the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, Ireland, New Zealand and various Island nations in the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean.

When teaching beginners English, this usually means drilling the students (making) them listen and repeat the language structure several times after you and then having them practice it individually or with other students. Teach.com (2023) proposes that teaching English as a second language is a high-demand subject of instruction that continues to experience growth in schools across the country. On the other hand, learning a new language can be difficult at any age but this is especially true with studying English. Despite the many benefits of learning English, it is complex and difficult to learn. Learning a language does not always mean being fluent. Language learning can lead to different levels of proficiency that may serve individuals at different levels of study or career.

As Adebileje and Akinola (2020) put it, language is an instrument of thought which binds human society together in communication and linguistic groups. Sapir (1921) defines it as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires utilizing voluntarily produced symbols. Aiyabola (2012), describes language as a human vocal noise or the graphic representation of that noise used systematically and conventionally by a group of people in a community. Although several studies have been carried out on the subject of English as a second language in Nigeria, little attention has been accorded to teaching and learning processes for the English language in Nigeria (Adebileje & Akinola, 2020; Banjo, 2016; Akindele & Adegbite, 2009). On this premise, the present study attempts to examine the problems of teaching and learning English as a second language from the perspective of a theoretical framework.



In recognition of the importance of the English language for enhancing educational attainment as well as for improving communication ability of citizens, the government had made the subject a core subject (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2004). It is also compulsory for students to have credit in the English language before entering the university. This also explains why many parents go off their ways to see that their children pass at credit level or above credit in English language, hence the current trend of registering and re-registering of students in miracle centers is becoming rampant and this is quite worrisome as most parents do not allow their children undergo the process of passing English language examinations genuinely.

The Problem

The Nigerian government recognizes the multilingual nature of Nigeria and shows that it is anxious for development. Thus, provision is made for their use in the two most important documents that spell out national life, namely the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and National Policy on Education. These provisions for languages in the constitution and in National Policy on Education presupposes that they are in active use in homes and in communities. English is the exclusive medium of instruction at the junior and senior levels of secondary school education. However, performance of students in English language examinations such as junior school certificate examination, West Africa Examination and National Examination is alarming. In this vein, it becomes very imperative to find out whether the problems associated with teaching and learning of English as a second language has any bearing on the use of mother tongue among English as second language students and English language proficiency and academic achievement. One of the current educational problems of public interest is that of poor level of achievement especially in public examinations (Kolawole, 1998; Kolawole & Dele, 2002). This problem of underachievement among school children has persisted in many subject areas such as mathematics, English and science (Ivowi, Okebukola & Oladotun, 1992; Falayajo, 1997). This poor level of achievement in many subject areas may be due to poor foundation in English language at the primary school level. There are also several research reports which support the view that language inefficiency invariably leads to poor academic performance (Ayodele, 1988; Falayajo, 1997). No wonder today, according to Iroegbu (2006), much emphasis is placed on the passing of English language at credit or distinction level in addition to other subjects to enable any candidate gain admission into any Nigerian Higher Institution of learning or be placed well in a good white collar job. It is on this backdrop that the problems of teaching and learning English as a second language will be investigated in order to find out whether the level of performance of students in the language is a result of mother tongue interference or a problem of teaching method.

Research Questions

The following research questions are raised:

- a. Does mother tongue interference have an influence on the spoken and written English of secondary school students?
- b. Do the methods of teaching have any impact on the performance of students in the English language?



- c. To what extent would the influence of students' parents explain the impact of their mother tongue on the English language??
- d. Does the learning environment have any impact on the acquisition of English as a second language?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Several scholars have addressed the core problems of communicative competence in the use of English language as L₂ and its use as the main language of instruction in Nigeria's education delivery process. It is unfortunate that most school leavers (apart from the product of elite private schools) do not possess the required competence, cognitive and communication functions. Statistics released by the West African Examination Council show that less than ten percent of secondary school leavers pass in the English language at credit level. At the tertiary level of education, students have so much difficulty with their communicative skills in English that they cannot function effectively in the academic use of English (Okoro, 2000). There is no doubt that there are a great variety of functions of English in Nigeria. For example, it is extensively used in both the electronic and print media, in the judiciary, the police, the armed forces, legislative et cetera and as a lingua franca in political mobilization, ethical orientation and population education. This confirms the entrenchment of English as the dominant official language of Nigeria. The crux of the problem bothers on the quality of English that is taught and used in the school system. The concern being expressed in informal educational circles is the extent to which the variety and quality of English being learned and used in the school system can serve in achieving Nigeria's educational goals and objectives.

The mother tongue however is part of the Nigerian culture; it conveys or transmits culture and itself in subjects to culturally conditioned attitudes and beliefs (Awoniyi, 1975). It is important to study the problems and on the basis of what will be found out, recommend solution(s) to reduce the problems if they cannot be totally eradicated. Bamgbose (1991) and Robbinson (1996) explain that the success of a mother tongue instruction policy depends on people's attitudes towards a language developed, it is necessary to consider the social and political history of a nation since such historical forces play a significant role. This, the colonial and the post-colonial languages and educational policies obviously provide a solid basis of the explanation of attitudes towards African languages and English L₂ (Ngugi, 1986; Bamgbose, 1991; Roycampbell, 1996; Adegbija, 1994; Robinon, 1996).

Robinson (1996) and Granvill et al. (1998) state that colonial language policies either adopted the use of English from the first grade or only used indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary school. Post-colonial language policies have maintained the status quo, thus perpetuating the existence of an elite group, which is characterized by relatively high economic status, high educational level and high competence in English. Therefore, African nations could be reported to remain as prisoners of the past since they are so overwhelmed by established practices to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to break away from them (Bamgbose, 1991).



Principles of Teaching-Learning

A good teacher will ever be willing to learn as learning may or may not be pursued in a conscious manner but we all seek to improve our knowledge of the environment. Effective teaching is a process through which knowledge is advanced. For teaching to be effective, learning must take place. The steps of effective teaching include:

- i. Choosing the learning objectives and
- ii. Providing a discovery experience that helps the learner understand the need for the skill.

The following basic principles are usually emphasized in teaching learning situation:

1. LSRW (listening, speaking, reading and writing) should be emphasized in teaching learning situations as separate facets of vocabulary development. Vocabulary should be developed in isolation in the class setting.
2. In learning, activities involving any of the language arts of grammar – handwriting, spelling, punctuation and content might be stressed in isolation in teaching learning situations.
3. Reading instruction may be divided into the following categories: phonic instruction and other word recognition techniques, comprehension of content and oral reading.

Diverse purposes in reading may also be stressed in elementary school. These purposes include:

- a. Reading to acquire facts
- b. Gaining a sequence of ideas
- c. Reading to follow directions
- d. Reading critically and creatively
- e. Acquiring main ideas and generalizations.

Research on Teaching

Educational research has had a long history of examining teaching based on student achievement – the so-called process product research paradigm (Britten, 1985; Erickson, 1986). Under this paradigm, teaching has been studied from an outside observer's perspective in terms of quantifiable behaviors and activities that are associated with learning outcomes (Freeman, 1996; Richard, 1998; Shulman, 1987).



Methods of Teaching English

Adebileje and Akinola (2020) state that different teaching methods are premised on or derived from the various language theories of teaching or learning process. Each method has a different focus or priority in practical terms in the classroom. The principal methods as identified by Taylor (2020) include:

1. Grammar Translation method – the classical method
2. Direct method – discovering the importance of speaking.
3. Audio-lingual method – the first modern methodology.
4. Humanistic approaches – a range of holistic methods applied to language learning.
5. Communicative language teaching – the current standard method
6. Principled eclecticism – fitting the method to the method.

Teaching and Learning English as a Second Language (ESL) in Nigeria.

As explained by Adebileje (2013, 2014, 2017), studies have shown that the majority of the ESL learners, most importantly, in public schools cannot competently express themselves in English. But it is not so in privately owned schools, which suggests that the methods of teaching could be faulty in public schools. It is apparent that without communicative competence in English, opportunities for a better life remain elusive, and the poverty of young graduates deepens abysmally despite being educated. One major cause of this incompetence is due to improper English language teaching by unqualified teachers (Opoola & Fatiloro, 2014). Adebileje states further that if it is not well taught, it certainly cannot be correctly learnt and competently used by learners. For years now, results of secondary school students in English in public examinations in Nigeria have been persistently poor.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework which informed this study is the communicative theory. Littlewood (1981) in Adebileje (2020:4) describes communicative theory as a language teaching approach that “pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language combining these into a more fully communicative view”. Canale (1983) further explains that the dominant principles of the theory of communicative competence involve an unpredictable and creative social interaction which occurs in discourse that has socio-cultural context. The approach features the two parts or aspects of the language to teach and how to teach them. Here the teacher teaches linguistic features, meanings, and functions and how to apply them in real communication in real life. The learner is inspired to communicate in the target language, for instance, to write an application letter, etc. the theory is authentic rather than synthetic, as the teacher shall not interrupt the process. Canale and Swain (1980) also state that the teaching of a theory comprises the grammatical, sociolinguistic discourse, and strategic competence. It also consists of the identification of the learner’s communication needs, learners interests in the L2 system; the provision of realistic and meaningful communicative competence, as well as the provision of adequate information and practice of the experience required in L2 situations. The communicative theory is said to be the most scientific of all the language teaching theories.



RESEARCH METHODS

The study is a survey research design to examine the problems of teaching and learning English as a second language in Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State. The target population is the junior secondary school students of Opute Grammar School, Ozoro and Heroes Group of Schools, Ozoro. The respondents (100) were randomly selected across diverse religious and socio-economic backgrounds.

Instrumentation

Mother tongue effect on English language scale (MTEES) was a self reported scale that was to elicit information on how mother tongue influence English language performance of students in junior secondary certificate examinations. The questionnaires consist of a total number of twenty (20) items. Using the test retest reliability method, the alpha coefficient of the test was 0.78. Data collected was analyzed using simple percentages.

RESULTS

Hypotheses I:

There is no significant interference of mother tongue on the written and spoken English of secondary school students in Isoko North Local Government Area: Observation from table 1 shows that 75% admit that their mother tongue hinders their interest in English language while 25% did not agree that mother tongue hinders interest in English language.

Table 1: The responses on if mother tongue hinders respondents interest in English as a subject

Respondents	Yes	No	Undecided	Total
100	75	25	-	100
Percentage	75.0	25.0	0.0	100.0

Hypothesis II: There is a significant impact of teaching methods on academic performance of students in English. Ninety percent (90%) of the respondents agreed that English language can be improved with good methods of teaching while 10% disagreed (see table 2 below):

Table 2: The responses of respondents on the belief that their English language can be improved with good teaching methods

Respondents	Yes	No	Undecided	Total
100	90	10	-	100
Percentage	90.0	10.0	-	100.0



Hypothesis 3: There is no relevant impact of students' parents on the level of performance of students in English.

Table 3 shows that 80% of respondents' parents do not interact with them (students) at home in English language while only 20% of respondents' parents interact in English language.

Table 3: Percentage of respondents whose parents interact in English Language at home

Respondents	Yes	No	Undecided	Total
100	75	25	-	100
Percentage	75.0	25.0	0.0	100.0

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant influence of the environment on acquisition of English as a second language.

Table 4 indicates that 90% of respondents feel comfortable in the environment, most speak English language fluently while 10% do not feel comfortable because of their inability to meet up with how fluent their friends are:

Table 4: Percentage of Students who feel Comfortable in the midst of friends who speak English fluently

Respondents	Yes	No	Undecided	Total
100	10	90	-	100
Percentage	10.0	90.0	-	100.0

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant impact on performance of students' inability to purchase their English textbooks.

Table 5 shows that 70% of students are not able to purchase their English textbooks, only 30% have English textbooks. This is represented in table 5 below:

Respondents	Yes	No	Undecided	Total
100	30	70	-	100
Percentage	30.0	70.0	-	100.0

CONCLUSION

Our findings revealed that the problems of teaching and learning English as a second language is an impact of mother tongue on students' poor academic performance in English language in Junior School Certificate Examination. Aside from that, there are other factors contributing to students' poor performance in the English language. These factors are poor methods of teaching, inability to purchase English textbooks, language background and lack of professional growth and development of teachers. On the whole, the performance of students in the English language is not improving and if the factors that are responsible are not tackled on time it will cause a drastic decline in the standard of education. From our research findings, the research hypotheses were able to answer the research questions guiding



this study. However, null hypothesis should be rejected while alternate hypothesis accepted as our findings did not support the null hypothesis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This study recommends that:

1. Having discovered that the use of mother tongue in school contributes or influences students' performance in English, English should be used as a medium of communication within and outside the classroom. Both teachers and students should endeavor to improve their proficiency level of the language.
2. Teachers need to adopt proper teaching methods and approaches like the communicative or eclectic approach to second language teaching and learning.
3. Appropriate instructional materials should be utilized to complement teachers' knowledge.
4. Good reading habits and use of libraries should be inculcated in the students.
5. Schools should organize debate and essay competitions among students within and outside the schools.
6. Well-equipped libraries should be put in place where there is none.
7. Teachers must continually update knowledge within their discipline and make their teaching more effective.
8. Above all, the government should put in some effort to check and curb increasing rates of examination malpractices in our schools. Teachers and students and even external invigilators are aiding and abetting examination malpractices. Machineries should be put in place to strictly monitor examinations in schools to prevent drastic decline in the standard of education in Nigeria.

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