

English Language Teaching and Learning in English as a Second Language (ESL) Society: Challenges and Prospect for National Development

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Abstract

English Language has become the lingua franca in so many societies all over the world. Thus, this research paper is based on the investigation of the status of English language vis-a-vis its teaching and learning in (ESL) society. Its teaching and learning in such society were x-rayed with the view of finding out the challenges through the analysis of our data (West African Examinations Council's results). Reasons why users (students) of the language perform poorly/unsatisfactorily in its assessment, compared to their performances in other subjects at the certificate level were also revealed through this research work. The validity of WAEC records justifies its choice for this work and it gives an insight into the actual performance of the users of the language, hence its veracity. Working within the Linguistic framework, this study considers the Sociolinguistic approach in the interpretation of the data. Our basic findings show that the English Language plays some significant roles in any ESL society and learning the language is not without its numerous challenges. This paper concludes that English language teaching and learning in non-native speakers' society has some challenges despite its crucial place. Besides, the performance of nonnative speakers/users as seen in our data, the prospects of English Language in ESL society cannot be overestimated in terms of its indispensability for national development. Thus, the would-be teachers in schools should be adequately trained and well equipped with necessary and modern trends in the subject. Good reading materials should also be made available and affordable for the students.

Key words: English language, second language, society, challenges, prospects.

1. Introduction

Linguistic discussion on the English Language cannot be discussed without reasonable references to its origin and subsequent developments over the years. The Language has developed with its users all over the world. It is advancing toward becoming the global lingua franca because proficiency in the standard

English is becoming a fashionable linguistic adventure. Bauer (2002:19) maintained that the English Language as well as other sister languages like German, Dutch and Friesian are products of a West Germanic Proto-language. He further stated that "at the time of Elizabeth I (1553-1603), there were at most (7) seven million speakers of English. It increased drastically to some (350) three hundred and fifty million during

the time of Elizabeth II (1926). He concluded his thought by stating that:

This huge expansion cannot be attributed to any Great merit in English Language as such. Rather it must be attributed to historical development, many of them accidental, by which England (and later Britain) gained a huge empire and then Britain and its former colonies gained influence far beyond the boundaries of that empire (13).

It is obvious from his submission that around 1553, English ships were trading with Africa, (mostly West Africa) thus, the contact with Nigeria as the most populous country in Africa. Empirical pieces of evidence show that the English Language came to Nigeria through the above-mentioned source. This is confirmed in the word of Banjo (1995), he asserted that:

Between the 16th and 17th Centuries, English has been in every way a foreign language in Nigeria but, by the close of the 18th century, certain consequences of the presence of the language in the area had already established themselves and were to remain recognizable even to the present time (203).

Needed to be added here is the fact that Nigeria is a heterogeneous and multilingual nation, with about 400 indigenous languages being spoken in the country. According to Ugorji (2010), "Nigerian indigenous languages are roughly associated with different ethnic nationalities. The three major languages: Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba are assigned the status of national languages". He averred further that these languages appear quite dominant by their large number of speakers and cover vast geographical areas; spanning several states of the federation. Igbo is spoken in the Eastern states, Yoruba in Western states and Hausa in Northern states. He stated still that the English language assumed the status of an official

language; a status that subsists to date unchallenged and uncontroverted. It developed into a lingua franca among the educated class across the country and also into an undeclared national language.

At this juncture, it is not unnecessary to ask; what is an ESL Society? In this context and for this research purpose, ESL is used as a second language after the mother tongue. Nigeria, as a society is a very good example of this usage. Available pieces of evidence speak for this fact, and even the constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria gives credence to this undisputed status. Nigeria is a society where there exist, as earlier stated, more than 400 indigenous languages excluding English, thus the English language is not spoken natively. Corroborating this fact, Awonusi (1989) stated that English as a second language in Nigeria and that retaining British RP as a model for Nigeria is not realistic because it is being taught as a second language and foreign language in Nigeria. It is obvious at this juncture that there are challenges in the teaching and learning of the language in Nigeria. Thus, the motivation to venture into this study is inevitable.

2. Objectives of the Study

The main objectives of the research study are to:

- i. identify the main causes of poor usage of the English language among users of the language in Nigeria.
- ii. find out the causes of poor academic performance of students in the English language in (WAEC) English Second Language (ESL) society (Nigeria).
- iii. find out ways of improving the teaching and learning of the English language in Nigeria for national development.

iv. evaluation of students' performances in May/June examination results as a basis for apposite recommendations.

Furthermore, the teaching and learning of the English language as a school subject in Nigeria is rooted in her constitution and the provisions of national policy on education. Thus, it is expedient to state here that the reason for the pedagogic quest is geared toward working out ways of the challenges being faced in its teaching and learning.

3. Methodology

For this research work, the data for this study were downloaded from the website of WAEC and some national newspapers. The research study covered a lifetime period of five years. It runs from 2015 to 2019. This period was selected on the basis that it covers a lifetime assessment period of half a decade. Thus, we have May/June 2015, May/June 2016, May/June 2017, May/June 2018 and May/June 2019. It should be noted that the number of students who always sit for the May/June session is much higher than the November/December session. Hence, the choice of May/June examination results for empirical and logical interpretation. We consider it expedient to present the said results as the basis for our discussion. Furthermore, recommendations were based on the selected five years May/June WAEC results.

4. Theoretical framework

The relationship between language and society remains a mystery to date. A society exists because it has its fabric which is its language. Human society will be boring if not lifeless without a language, thus, the choice of sociolinguistics for this work. This view was corroborated by Charka (1989) that language and society are so intertwined that it is impossible to understand one without the other. Further still,

Wardhaugh (2006) averred that sociolinguistics is concerned with investigating the relationship between language and society to give a better understanding of the structure of language. He stated further that sociolinguistic investigation is called quantitative sociolinguistics, which must be statistically sound. Investigator must employ proper statistical procedures in the treatment of the data. The theory asserts that what is being described is accurately "named" i.e. the research process has accurately represented a phenomenon that is recognisable to the scientific community being addressed (156). This sociolinguistic approach is called the dependent variable and it is apt for this work. It exposes what happens to language when we examine it at different levels of its usage, thus, the justification for this theoretical background for this work. Our data (WAEC results) will be examined and interpreted bearing in mind the social roles of the English language in a non-English speaking society.

5. Review of Literature Perspectives

Language and language use have attracted some research works. Also, the English language in non-English speaking countries has well been given much scholarly attention by researchers globally. A lot of inquiries from researchers in the field of sociolinguistics and the English language have surfaced among scholars. To this end, it is expedient to examine some of these previous works which are related to this work in one way or the other.

Olu-Busari (2014) investigated the state of the English language in Nigeria and Namibia. The paper compared the state of the English language in these two Africa Countries and identifies some challenges affecting the teaching and learning of the language. She submitted that teachers' education should include strategies in second

language acquisition and learning as well as the language art of reading, speaking, listening and writing. Our work concentrates on the English language in Nigeria and national development.

The work of Muhammad et al (2018) examined teaching and learning the English language in Nigerian schools. They looked at the importance of the English language as the official language of communication in Nigeria. They examined the useful strategies the teachers and learners of the English language in Nigerian schools may adopt for its simplicity. They concluded that both teachers and learners have roles to play in overcoming these challenges. Our work takes another critical dimension by looking at those challenges and prospects for National development.

Another scholar that looked at English language teaching in Nigeria is Njoku (2017). She examined the state of the English language in Nigeria Educational system concerning human development and opined that language is the most frequently used and the most highly developed form of human communication. She asserted further that “No matter how expertly, learning experiences are selected and organized, the ultimate objective of the teaching, learning exercise would not be achieved if the language of instruction is unfamiliar to the learner” (211). She submitted that the knowledge, skill and expertise gained through education are only made possible by the language through which they are acquired. This is similar to our study but it did not cover the ESL society in its scope.

Also, Tom-lawyer (2014) thought that the poor performance of Nigerian students in external English examinations has continued to be a source of worry to parents, educational stakeholders and the government. He examined the effectiveness of the educational curriculum of

the students about the academic achievement of the students. He submitted that teachers’ curriculum should be reviewed and enough learning facilities should be provided, besides the refurbishment of the school libraries. Also, this work left ESL society out of its coverage which this paper covers.

Further still, Nwanyanwu (2017) argued that effective teaching in an L2 (English as a second language) will promote learning skills that will be of benefit to effective teaching in a multicultural classroom. He suggested the need for a new type of teachers and training to develop the skill and confidence that teachers need for effective teaching and training in multicultural English second language classrooms. He submitted that effective teaching of English in Nigeria is an issue that needs great attention from planners and policy-makers in the educational sector, thus, the need for the adequate and proper professional training for teachers of English in Nigeria. Our work encapsulates national development in its scope.

No wonder, Akinkulere et al (2020) conducted a study on the teaching of sentences in English language in secondary schools through a speech act. This strategy was found practicable, appropriate and effective learning of sentences. In the same vein, Akinkulere et al (2021) examined strategies of improving students’ performance in the English language, through the application of performance to the teaching of English poetry. Literature being a significant aspect of the English language could enhance students’ general performance in both internal and external examinations. They found out that students’ performance improved significantly even at the higher education level which is also appropriate as a teaching strategy in other levels- primary and secondary.

Okonkwo (2016) examined the language of Education in Nigeria vis-a-vis the extent of implementation of the universal basic education policy. He asserted that the English language occupies a unique place in Nigeria Educational system because of its significant role and status in the country's national life (52). He submitted that some teachers in the urban areas use English as a medium of instruction at all levels as against some teachers in the rural areas who use the language of the immediate environment to teach at the lower basic schools. Our study uses the results of the national examination as our data against rural areas.

Khajloo (2013) investigated the problems of teaching and learning English for students as a second language. He observed that due to the deficiencies that exist in language teaching and despite the efforts of the teachers, the desired results are still not achievable. This is the more reason why concerted efforts must be geared towards effective teaching in our schools. Therefore, he submitted that with the advancement of science and technology, English is essential as an international language. This is similar to our study but ours includes national development.

Fatiloru (2015) also looked into the challenges of teaching the English language as a second language in a non-English speaking society. She observed that teaching and learning of English in Nigeria are faced with myriads of challenges ranging from government and individual's "lasses- faire" attitude of the students. In solving these challenges, she opined that English learners must be extensive readers and government must make available necessary facilities for effective teaching and learning. She submitted that both the teachers, the students and government must be ready to make desired changes towards achieving teaching and learning of the English

language in Nigeria. In addition to this, our study integrates national development into its scope.

6. Data Presentation and Analysis of Result

The data for this research work covered five years. This period represents a reasonable time age to observe and measure the observable progress of an individual or an institution. It overspreads between 2015 through 2019. It must be pointed out here that WAEC usually conducts two separate seasons of Examinations also known as private students and public students. The former comes up around November/December of every year while the latter is conducted around May/June of every year. The number of students who usually register and write the May /June session is always higher, it runs into millions while that of private students is not as high as the public students. To cover a range of many users of the language, thus, the justification for using the May/June (Public students' result) for our data analysis

In 2015, according to WAEC statistics, it shows that a total of 1,593,442 candidates sat for the examination. Only 616,370 candidates representing, 38.68% obtained credits in the English Language. For 2016, the WAEC result shows that 1,552, 758 students who sat for the May/June exam, 878,040 candidates, representing 52.97%, obtained credits in the English Language.

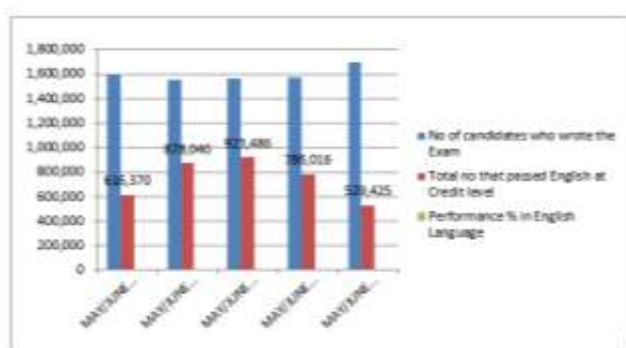
In 2017, WAEC has it that 1,559,162 candidates sat for the examination, 923,486 candidates, representing 59.22% obtained credits in the English Language. In 2018, according to WAEC release, 1,572,396 candidates sat for the May/June examination. The Head National office said that a total of 786,016 candidates, representing 49.98% of students who sat for the examination obtained credits in the English Language.

The breakdown of WAEC May/June 2019 result for Nigerians shows that 1,692,435 candidates sat for the examination, while candidates with credit pass in the English language declines to 31.28% as against 49.98% in 2018.

Table 1: Brief Summary Data in WAEC Results from 2015-2019.

Year of Examination	No of Candidates who wrote the Examination	Total No of Candidates who passed English at credit level	Performance % in English Language
2015	1,593,442	616,370	38.68%
2016	1,552,758	828,040	52.97%
2017	1,559,162	923,486	59.22%
2018	1,572,396	786,016	49.98%
2019	1,692,435	529,425	31.28%

Figure 1: Showing the percentage of performance at credit level in WAEC from 2015 to 2019.



From the data presented above, which covers a period of five years; from 2015 to 2019, it is obvious that in the 2015 May/June examination, only 38% of the total candidate passed at credit level in the English Language throughout Nigeria. In 2016, we observed that 52.97% passed at the credit level. This is a marginal improvement in the performance of the candidates from that of 2015. The examination body yet recorded another slight improvement in the performance of the students in 2017, with 59.22% who passed at credit level throughout the Country. But in 2018, WAEC records show that there was a drastic drop in the performance of the students in the English

language from 59.22% in 2017 to 49.98% in 2018. This significant drop calls for great concern among teachers of the English language in an ESL society like Nigeria. Yet, in 2019, the abysmal depths of failure recorded by WAEC should be of great interest to all stakeholders in the teaching and learning of the English language in any ESL society.

Worthy of note, from the data presented above, is the high level of unimpressive performance of students in the English language at the school leaving certificate level. This shows that there are some underlying factors responsible for this performance in our society.

7. The Challenges and Prospects for National Development

This consistent and unprecedented drop in academic performance of these students in the English language could not be unconnected with some predisposing factors which are peculiar to Nigeria, as an ESL Society. The challenges could not only be attributed to the teachers alone, but also the learners and the Society at large. From the data presented above, it is clear that users of the English language in any ESL society, like Nigeria, have challenges in learning and using the English language as a second language.

It has been established earlier that the English language plays significant roles in our society. The language is mostly taught in our schools after the users might have acquired their first language in their immediate environment. The challenges, from the learners' perspectives, can be traced to a lack of interest or enthusiasm on the part of the learners. The zeal and commitment in learning the language as a second language are lacking from the learners. Most of the learners think that the language is difficult to learn. It has even been observed that most learners (students) have not shown significant interest in learning it consciously. So, reading textbooks in the English language does not interest them. The perception of these users (students) of the language is really

affecting the teaching and learning of the language in our secondary schools as seen in our data.

The teachers' attitude is another fundamental challenge in the learning and teaching of the English language in our society. Most of our teachers first acquired their mother tongue which is Yoruba as the case may be in the South West, Igbo in the East and Hausa in the North. This will adversely influence their teaching in so many ways. It has been observed that some of these teachers may likely find some aspects of the language difficult to teach in classes. What they do, is to avoid such aspects as Phonetics and Phonology, Concord, Syntax and Semantics.

As rightly posited by Obiegbo (2016), she opined that difficulty in learning the English language included interference. This comes as a result of language contact or Mother Tongue interference (57). On the teachers of this language, they often speak in their mother-tongue i.e. they always communicate with their students within and outside the school hours in their first language.

Nwanyanwu (2017) noted that most teachers of ESL lack or have no basic teaching practice skills, sufficient exposure and mastery of the structure of the English language. Thus, some of them are ill-prepared to effectively teach the language at the secondary school level, and the resultant effect is the abysmal failure being recorded by their students in an external examination like WAEC. It must be pointed out at this juncture that any nation that desires development must invest to a considerable degree in its educational sector. We cannot talk of national development if an educational sector is neglected or those driving forces such as the teachers, teaching methodology, conducive learning environment and the students *inter alia* are not properly taken into consideration.

From our data presentation, it is evidently clear that the rate of failure among Secondary School

Students in the English language is alarming. Bearing in mind the fact that the English language is our lingua franca in Nigeria. Besides being a compulsory school subject in our schools, it is also a must pass, at credit level for admission seekers into higher institutions of learning in the Country. Another important point to be added here is the fact that the English language occupies a significant and enviable position in the life of any nation. It has assumed the status of an official language in Nigeria, and the national policy on education indicates this status instead of a language policy document. It developed into a lingua franca among the educated class across the country and also into an educated national language Banjo 1995, cited in Ugorji (2010).

The concept of national development in any nation cannot be attained without proper human capital development, especially among the productive category (youths). To this end, Ajayi and Afolabi (2009) cited in Orji (2013) averred that education is largely perceived in Nigeria as an indispensable tool that will not only assist the nation's social, political, moral, cultural and economic aspirations but also inculcate in individual knowledge, skill, dexterity, character and desirable value that will foster national development and self-actualization (315).

In the same direction, and as early pointed out, the level of investment in the educational sector by any nation, determines the level of national development for such a nation. This assertion justifies the need for any serious government to invest in the educational sector. It is obvious from the above that the official vehicle (English language) that drives this desired national development must be given the desired attention at the secondary school level.

8. Conclusion and Recommendations

Thus far, it is obvious from our research that the English language has come to stay in Nigeria as our lingua franca. Language is occupying a

significant place in our national life. This is discussed bearing in mind the unique nature of our society (an ESL) concerning the language situation in Nigeria. We have also seen how the language is being taught as a compulsory school subject in our schools vis-à-vis its place in teaching other school subjects. It becomes imperative from the data analysis that the high level of failure of students from this subject has shown that something fundamental is wrong with its teaching and learning among these students as shown in their performance in external national examination (WAEC) results.

Again from our data analysis, we notice that the percentage of failure in the English language among the school certificate learners in their public examination is high. This is not unconnected with its teaching and learning. It is on this premise that three principal factors were examined: i.e. the society, the teachers and the learners among other militating factors. Regardless of the gloomy picture of the state of English language teaching and learning in our society and its resultant effects as shown in the high level of failure among our secondary school students, this research work ventures into finding lasting solutions to these problems.

Our societal perception of the teaching and learning of the English language should be positive. We should see the language as a symbol of national integration, not just a school subject that must be passed at credit level. If we see the language as a transforming agent for national development then its teaching and learning would be held in high esteem. As observed early, the language enhances social, international and more importantly one's academic attainment in life. Thorough and effective teaching and learning of the language will inadvertently improve an individual's social status and indirectly national development.

English language teachers should be properly trained on the rudiments of the language as a

school subject. This training should include but not be limited to regular professional seminars, workshops and conferences, the teachers should encourage their students to use the language even after school hours to make them better users of the language. They should as well speak to their students in the English language always. Besides, in-job training for English language teachers should be encouraged. This will go a long way in making them become experts and professionals in the act of teaching the language.

In addition, teachers should make frantic efforts to pay more attention to some difficult areas, bearing in mind the fact that these learners have acquired their first languages and learning a second language may not be an easy task. Naturally, there would be language interference i.e. the first language interfering with the learning of the second language. Interference could be more noticeable in the areas of semantics, phonetics, grammar and syntax. Hence, conscious efforts should be geared towards focusing more attention on those aforementioned challenges, so that the students would be helped in overcoming this academic faux pas.

The learners of the English language in an ESL society too have a significant role to play in this context. Their interest in learning the language after their first language is of paramount importance here. They are the direct recipients of the whole teaching and learning process. In addition, they are the end-users of the language in the larger society and the ones who will make the necessary and desired drives forwards sustainable national development.

Needed to be emphasized at this juncture is the fact that reading good English materials will enhance the learning process in the students who are learning the English language as a second language. Developing good reading habits will not only make them good speakers but also good writers in the language. Invariably, it will equip

them for future efficient human capital development. Apart from their interest, the learners' concentration in the classroom during the teaching process is another important area that should be looked into. Muhammad et al (2018) corroborated this view when they opined that when students do not concentrate, teaching and learning can't be effective and concentration depends on these factors: fatigue and insomnia, environment and family problems (11). Thus, it is important to harp on those things that could arouse and sustain the interest of the students in the process of teaching and learning of English language in an ESL society.

It is obvious from our findings so far that the English language has come to stay in Nigeria as an official language. Again, the undeniable role of the English language cannot be overemphasized concerning national development. Still, challenges are being faced in the teaching and learning of the language in Nigeria. This paper has also shown the effects of such challenges against National Development if drastic actions are not taken by the concerned individual, government, agencies, parents and the students at large. It is also important to reinstate here that the alarming rate of failure in the language in ESL society could be attributed to those factors discussed above. In addition, drastic measures should be taken by concerned government agencies to assist with this academic gap in the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria (ESL society) to propel the much desired National Development.

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