



USING ENGLISH LANGUAGE AS A MEANS FOR ENHANCING LEARNERS' COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS

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Abstract

This paper explores how English language could be as a means for enhancing learners' communicative skills. English language is an official language in Nigeria and it is used in virtually in all spheres in Nigerian. This effective communication will traverse in written and spoken aspects of the English language. Thereupon, communication as an integral part of the English language is seen as a process of interaction between two persons or more depending the channel of information or communication. Based on the content of this article, the following areas were highlighted Nigeria's background and use of the English language, English language and human development in Nigeria, communication, constraints to the use of English language for effective communication, strategies to ameliorate constraints in the use of English language among others. Recommendations and conclusion were drawn based on the issues raised and discussed hitherto.

Key words: *English language, means, enhancing learners, communicative.*

Introduction

English is the most widely used international language for communication around the world (Krashen, 2014). In the current era of globalization, the development of the world is increasingly moving dynamically (Kaya, 2017). This makes the use of international languages such as English increasingly important to master, including among students. Students in Nigeria are required to master English to be able to compete nations. However, this will not work well if the ability to speak English is very minimal. It is undeniable that English is the most widely spoken language in the world. Mastery of English is very important for students. However, there are still many who do not realize the importance of good English mastery for a student.

Communication has emerged with the mankind and become the most prominent feature of human life throughout history. The word communication has entered our language as the equivalent of the French word 'communiquer'. Literally, it means 'to communicate and to inform' (Zilhoglu, 2013). Moreover, some other explanations are given to the word of communication by Lunenburg (2010) as the process of transmitting information and common understanding from one person to another. Aytekin (2018) as a process of mutual interaction while Karatekin, Sonmez and Kus (2019) describes communication as the basic skills which individuals need to have in order that they can continue their existence in social life. Ozerbas, Bulut and Usta (2017), are of the view that communication is a process that includes speaking and listening act resulting to what Voltan (2020) refers to as the exchange of messages between at least two people. Cetinkaya and Alparslan (2020), argue that the ability to express oneself well and clearly, the skill of listening carefully to others and being able to fully and accurately understand what others say. This position aligns with what Turhan (2018) said that communication aims at conveying information and making sense of the information which individuals have obtained. It also embraces the ability by which the individual adapt to the environment (Deniz, 2018).

Individuals can realize themselves and

understand their environments only by communication (Sahin & Aral, 2015). Communication skill is important to succeed in family, school and business life. Good communication will bring productivity and satisfaction (Ozerbas, 2017). People who are successful at human relations are also successful and happy in social life. Communication provides a basis for the modeling of society and enables individuals to make regular contact with the others (Sahin & Aral, 2019). The role of communication in understanding the others, sympathizing with them and sharing the same views, and enabling positive behavioral changes is an undeniable fact (Cetinkaya & Alparslan, 2020). In addition, communication skill is regarded as a prerequisite for empathizing in human relations approach (Turhan, 2018). By meeting some of their psychological and social needs through communication (Kaya, 2017), individuals are able to maintain their lives as people who can believe in themselves and overcome difficulties. In the 21st century, communication is a process that requires interpersonal interaction and therefore, brings people in various experiences and/or gains as a natural outcome of this interaction. Furthermore, it is a sort of power that directs the society and also countries.

Junior Secondary Education is unique because apart from complementing the education already received by a child at the primary level, it completes the required nine-year basic education cycle as practiced in Nigerian system of education. It is a stage where the vocational thrust of basic education is consolidated and where core, vocational, non-prevocational and academic subjects are offered and taught (Kaya, 2017). The core subjects include English Language, Mathematics, French, and a major Nigerian language other than that of the environment, Basic Science, Social Studies, Citizenship Education, and Basic Technology. Certification of a child at the end of this phase depends on his/her performance in the Continuous Assessment (CA) and the Junior School Certificate Examination (JSCE), being coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Education (if owned by Federal Government) or State Ministry of Education (if at

the state level). A child thus has to write the Junior School Certificate Examination (JSCE) at the end of this phase while a child with the minimum number of passes in the subjects in the curriculum including English Language and Mathematics (varies across the states) qualifies to be promoted to the Senior Secondary (SS) phase where he/she will be trained for additional three years. When a child fails the JSCE (i.e. fails to obtain the minimum passes including English Language and Mathematics).

Nigeria Historical Background and Use of the English Language

Nigeria is the most heterogeneous and populated (167m people) state in Africa with more than 395 languages and having different dialects and large geography especially on the Northern part (Makama, 2019). Nigeria is a popular country comprises great number of people with distinct languages, history, social and political organizations. Many of the customs and traditions of the respective Nigerian peoples reflect and qualify Nigeria as a nation. There are also other small groups with clear identities apart from the major tribes of the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba who are the three predominant tribes and languages across the country. Nigeria's socio-cultural and religious composition is thus complex and an all encompassing as noted by Crawford (2017), that ethnicity, language region and religion interactively form Nigeria's matrix of cultural pluralism. But it was only the Colonial conquest which began with the annexation of Lagos in 1861 that the various peoples and organizations became under one political entity referred to as Nigeria by January 1, 1914. That amalgamation formed the basis of formal coming together and nationhood of the various peoples. Society thus makes language and as well language makes a society.

Communication is only possible through language and symbols in a symbiotic relation. Okedigba, (2017) maintains that communication through language is a basic and an indispensable character of man throughout the history and existence of man on earth. Prior to the adoption of English in what is now Nigeria during the pre-colonial era, Arabic and to some extent, the Portuguese had played a dominant role in the

North (areas like Kano, Bomo, Katsina, Zaria, Sokoto and Daura) and South (Lagos, its surroundings and Benin) as a result of Trans Sahara and Atlantic Trades in slavery and later raw materials respectively. English is Nigeria's linguistic tool for knowledge, intra/international communication and a major for of unity, political uniformity and cohesion, loyalty and national consciousness as well as socio-economic development. Religious (Missionaries) and educational (introduction of Western education factors) have during the colonial period aided the institutionalization and development of English language in the colonial Nigerian state (Okedigba, 2017). In Africa, colonialism has been responsible for dividing people that were hitherto together and uniting or most close to one another which later manifested in inherent complications, lingual complexities and consequent disaffection/loss of identity among peoples. Later attempts to regain identity, autonomy or reunion result in conflicts involving both states and peoples (Alexander, 2018).

As an official language, English has silenced the national language debate at least for a while. English language played a major and conspicuous role in the fight for Nigerian independence. English was the instrument for the peaceful agitation for independence that was bloodless. No wonder it is said that Nigeria got her independence on the platter of gold. Credit must go to use of English as it is official language. Almost all the national dailies and political gazettes appear in English. Without the use of English, activities in various government houses and offices would definitely crumble or end in chaos. The emergence of English language in Nigeria and its acceptance as the official language has undoubtedly positively affected every spheres of the country.

English Language and Human Development in Nigeria

Indeed, education is a major tool in human development, it is essential to note that the language through which education is acquired is also of utmost importance. English is the language of education in Nigeria. Every form of education is expressed and acquired through

language (Kamwendo, 2020). It is through English language that formal education is acquired in Nigeria. In other words, it is through English language that the skills and knowledge needed for human development is acquired. Therefore, by extension, English language is a primary instrument for human development in Nigeria. The benefits of education (acquired via English language) are enormous; they include: Improved social relations - Better job opportunities - Higher family income - Higher productivity - Access to better health facility - Improved standard of living - Ability to participate in the life of the community (Kamwendo, 2020).

Besides these benefits, English language has conferred on Nigerians other privileges that bear on human development as well as national development, both on the home front and on the global scene. On the home front, English language is essentially regarded as a unifying factor. It has allowed Nigerians to co-exist peacefully even in their diversity (Barmbose, 2017). It is this peaceful co-existence that engenders development either on individual or national basis. Considering the multilingual nature of the country, the communication crises that would have occurred among people from different linguistic background is bridged by the use of English. It is possible for Nigerians irrespective of their ethnic backgrounds, to study or work in any part of the country. The same goes for teachers/workers who could also choose to teach/work in any part of the country without fear of language barrier. English language has advanced Nigerians economically (Storm, 2016).

Locally, people engage in trading and other business activities to increase their economic power and improve their standard of living. This has been successful because of the use of English. Storm (2016) avers that globally, people engage in international businesses facilitated by the use of English. Again, the status of English as a second language in Nigeria has attracted foreign investment. According to Euromonitor, the Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows from the English speaking countries such as United States of America and United Kingdom are typically high in the countries that use English as their

second language. Thus, Nigeria has benefited in this regard because of their use of English. Examples of such foreign investors are Mobil, Shell, Nexen in the oil and gas sector (Wright, 2016). Other sectors that are boosting the nation's economy are information technology (IT) services, banking and telecommunications. As stated in the Euromonitor: Companies such as MTN communication and Microsoft have found that both Nigeria and Pakistan offer a more attractive business environment than many other countries as a result of higher proficiency levels in English language of citizens of these two countries among other factors. This confirms the fact that improved English language skills help to attract more foreign investments. These investments in turn create more job and career opportunities for Nigeria. Euromonitor report also confirms that Nigerians believe that learning English in particular offers great opportunity for career advancement and higher pay (Wright, 2016).

In affirmation to this statement, Krashen, (2014) opines, "Before any Nigerian can occupy any position of eminence today, he must be 'English compliant' "He further avers that promotions and ability to advance one's career through national and international communication is tied to one's education and particularly to one's ability to speak good English. This is in line with Ogundepo (2014) assertion that, "people who could speak and write English had more chances of being employed than those who could not".

Constraints to the Use of English Language for Effective Communication

Several factors can affect retention and remembering in second language learning. These factors have been identified by Kaya (2017) as follows:

Retroactive Interference and Inhibition: This is the inhibiting effect of an interpolated learning on the retention of an original learning. Retention of what is learnt in the second language situation depends on what has been formally learnt in

Positive or Negative Transfer: This deals with the effect of previous learning on the retention of the new material (L2). Positive transfer may take

place when the new learning is similar to one already learnt, and the learner receives help from his previous experience. On the other hand, negative transfer can occur when the habits and patterns of the native language are transferred to the learning and speaking of English language.

Poor Socio-Economic Background of Learners: The average Nigerian child comes to school for the first time to enter the world of books. He or she owns a book of his or her own when he or she goes to school and has never seen books owned by others (Ozerbas,, 2017). As a result, the child lacks the neurophysical coordination necessary for learning to read. Ozerbas (2017) reported in his studies that one of every three students in Nigeria lacked class readers, exercise books or rulers, either because their parents were too poor to provide them or because the students had lost them. Many parents also feel that if the Universal Primary Education (UPE) was termed “free” by government, then the government schools should provide the necessary books at school. Lack of books during lessons constitutes a very grave setback to learning and performance.

Media for Learning English

Most of the Nigerian secondary school students are dependent almost entirely on their school (Okedigba, 2017) for learning English. The influence of latent English language is very small and often pernicious, for instance, newspaper reading is very poor and so the child hardly forms a reading habit at home. There are very few children pictures, books and paper magazines, published in Nigeria in English. Added to this, Nigerian dailies are expensive, dull and rarely entertaining. Only very few of them have students’ columns and more often than not, the language used is not simple enough to get across to the secondary school student (Okedigba, 2017). Most Radio English programmes targeting the secondary school students are on during school hours, but the schools hardly tune in because they fear it might interrupt with the normal timetable.

Deficiencies in Pedagogical Methods

There are gaps and inconsistencies in the

structural pattern of teaching English in secondary schools, which violate the elementary linguistic principles of teaching. For instance, many structures are either not taught at all or taught at the wrong time (Taiwo, 2017).

Strategies to Ameliorate the Constraints in the Use of English Language for Effective Communication

Effective communication skills are fundamental to success in numerous aspects of life. A classroom ambiance depends heavily on the quality of communication taking place in it. Modern education concept relies much prominence on preparing a student for being the finest professional in a specific platform. Effective communication is an essential part of a professional life no matter in what field you are. Students with effective communication skills will be more probably to contribute to class discussions, will ultimately achieve more from their experience in class, and will be more productive members in group projects (Okedigba, 2017). Omole (2018) explains the following as the ways of improving effective communication skills in students.

Motivate Students to Initiate and Engage in English Language Conversation

To improve effective communication skills in students; it is essential to motivate them to initiate and engage in conversation. Most of the students may not want to talk at all. This makes it tough for them to show their feelings properly when upset or stressed. So motivate their involvement in activities. Commence and support talks throughout art activities, during paired reading activities, and when playing games. In the classroom discuss feelings about events occurring to students.

In this way, you offer support, scaffolding to establish stronger communication skills in students.

Create safe atmosphere for learning

Create a supportive and safe atmosphere where students feel comfortable to open up and show their ideas and thoughts; this will help students to improve effective communication skills. An

ambiance that permits students to ask if they require help is vital to their academic success. Having an open-door policy and enabling students to talk about anything is an excellent way to promote effective communication.

Active listening

Show students that you care about what they feel and want to say by listening actively. Listen to hear students, not only to respond and give an answer. Listening to students is one of the essential ways to improve effective communication in students. Actively listening to students encourage them to ask more question in the classroom.

Teamwork

Teamwork is an essential way to improve effective learning in students. Doing group work and more team activities is an excellent way to take concentrate off competing with one another and focus more on working together to achieve great results. This way can motivate communication, collaboration, and cooperation and assist students in communicating more and effectively show themselves with their classmates.

Allow students to share opinions

Allow students to share their opinions in the classroom is also a vital way to improve effective communication in students. Asking their opinions in the classroom will help them to develop communication skills. Teach students to share their thoughts in the classroom. When students share their opinions in the classroom, they become more comfortable and able to speak on any topic.

Positive feedback

Sometimes teachers forget to mention the positive feedback when a student has performed well. The positive feedback encourages students to perform better in all the fields. Giving positive feedback is an essential part of promoting effective communication in students.

It has been shown that students that receive praise are more probably to trust that they can achieve tasks and be successful. Another

advantage of the positive feedback is that it can help to build a student's confidence, supportive atmosphere, and create a good harmony (Ogundepo, 2018).

Conclusion

The need and importance of English language in every Nigerian citizens communication cannot be overemphasized especially with regards to the multi-cultural, ethnic, religious and cultural heterogeneities just as the development of any and every society is dependent upon successful exploitation of its languages and their material constituents and language, being an interwoven and an integral part of human, is essential to interaction, communication, exchange and social existence and harmony. The development, sustenance and structural improvement of any society is dependent on effective use of its language(s). With language, human existence thrive, become realistic and meaningful with an identity, sense of belonging and a definite identity and bond. The leaders, traditional rulers, educationists and politicians have only been able to achieve whatever level of unity and integration among Nigeria's heterogeneous parts only with the significant and strategic roles of English as a unifying language among them. This is further so as without effective means of communication, no national security or development can be achieved as there is no proper communication. English has remained Nigeria easiest and most accessible means of western education, information and communication, science, technology and international relations.

Recommendations

In line with the discussion so far, the followings can be suggested:

1. Government and other stakeholders in education should ensure the provision of national dalies to various school libraries.
2. Teachers should maintain an environment in which students can express themselves well, by paying attention to their individual differences displayed during the lessons. Teachers may include in-class activities to improve the communication skills of their students more in their instructions.

- . Since the attitudes of students towards learning have an effect on their academic achievements, teaching methods and techniques to enable students be more active in the process of teaching should be adopted.
4. Government and other stakeholders should provide stable electricity in our educational institutions to enhance the effective utilization of ICTs in teaching and learning of English language.
5. Students should be encouraged to read national dailies to improve their proficiency in English language

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