



Factors Affecting Secondary School Students' Performance in English Language in Adamawa State.

¹Talatu Banu, ²Aworo-okoroh J.O., ³Umar, Amos Hadiya

¹Department of English, Federal college of Education, Yola

²Department Of English & Literary Studies Taraba State University, Jalingo

³Department Of Languages and Communication Federal Polytechnic, Mubi

ABSTRACT

English Language is an indispensable tool for national unity, integration and global communication. Secondary school students need to acquire competence in the use of English Language besides being fluent. Proficiency level of English at all levels of our educational system has become a matter of great concern to educationists and education planners in Nigeria. In Adamawa State for in particular, the proficiency and performance in English Language in secondary school is far below the anticipated level. Literacy is considered less than 30 percent of the population thus the state is still regarded as backward and educationally less advantaged. This research seeks to unravel the factors that are hindering the effective teaching and learning of the English language. Drawing on responses from the five educational zones in Adamawa state, the study identified teachers qualification, learning environment, class size and instructional materials as major factors affecting the teaching of English language and in turn students' performance in the subject. The study concludes by recommending to policy makers and government the need to address these identified factors if Adamawa state must achieve literacy in the nearest future.

Key words: Education, Proficiency, Performance, Literacy, Adamawa

Introduction

English language is an important language of communication in Nigeria. It is a second language and used in formal settings. It is the language of the media, education, commerce and international relations. The language has several varieties and prominent among them are the British, American and Canadian English. But the variety that is being taught and spoken in Nigeria is the British variety. Nordquist (2005) defined English as a second language as "a traditional term for the use or study of the English language by non-native speakers" (p.1).

The colonial masters introduced the English language to Nigerians as they did not value the indigenous languages. The school curricula were structured after the culture, education and history of the colonialists transmitted through the use of the English language. This gave the natives no other choice than to acquire the English language. Thus the English Language became Nigeria's lingua franca. That is, the language of 'convenience, for communicating with diverse ethnic groups being tutored and related in a common language. The quality, efficiency and effectiveness of Nigeria's education and educational curriculum relied on the English language as the lingua franca cum official language. This was as a result of prejudicial disposition of the colonialists to Nigerian languages. In Nigerian homes, children are taught from the cradle to speak the English language as a language of communication.

People speaking any of the Nigerian languages in an environment where the English language would have been spoken are derogatorily considered as having not arrived. This derogation and relegation appeared to have found approval by the colonial masters who instituted laws to favour the English language above the native languages. Thus, English Language became an indispensable tool for national unity, integration and global communication. Baldeh (2004) referred to it as "a window on the world" (pg.56-69). Learning the English Language equips Nigerians to confidently meet other people from other English-speaking countries of the world for socio-economic transactions. Above all, students needed to acquire competence in the use of English Language besides being fluent. It will be recalled that the proficiency level of English at all levels of our educational system has become a matter of great concern to educationist and education planners in Nigeria.

Asby (2008) noted that the quality of English used in the classroom is such that all pupils are at a serious disadvantage. Adesina (2006), English Language faces the problem of shortage of teaching staff and concomitant question of the quality of those in services. A teacher should be articulate and well-informed about the language he teaches. One cannot teach what one is not proficient in.

However, despite all these problems, learning English in Nigeria is imperative as English is a global Language without which communication with the global world will be impossible. Students must be assisted, encouraged and aided to learn the English language for their ultimate success in Nigeria and the world at large. Some factors like large class size often impact negatively on the effectiveness of teaching as well as learning. According to

Ehrenberg in Jenkins (2004) class size can reduce the amount of time students can actively engage with each other, increase the disruptive behavior in the classroom, reduce the amount of time the teacher can spend working with each individual student, reduce the material the teacher can cover, eliminate many methods of assessing students i.e. open-ended assessments and writing assignments and it can reduce the learning by reducing the kind of teaching methods that the teacher can employ in her classroom.

The attitude of students is rooted in their belief systems. According to Tardif (1997), Students who have the impression that nothing they do will alter the results of the learning process, or who attribute success to good luck and failure to bad luck, or who see the pedagogy and didactic practice of the professor as the sole determinant of success or failure, will make little effort to contribute to their own learning. The interaction of students with other students with previous unpalatable experiences of such subject can discourage the efforts of such students. Therefore, it becomes penitent to focus not only on methodology of teaching but also encourage students to look inward and explore learning strategy.

Therefore, this study sets out to examine the various factors affecting the effective teaching and learning of English language in Adamawa State with a view to seeing how the teaching and learning of the language could be improved and ultimately improve the standard of education in the state considered backward in education with literacy level below 30 percent across board.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Learning as a concept has been defined by many scholars most especially psychologists, who provided three criteria for learning to take place. That is for learning to take place there must be change in behavior, the behavior must be relatively stable, and the change must be as result of exposure to conditions in the environment. Travers (1977) defined learning as relatively permanent change in behavior as a result of exposure to conditions in the environment.

Also Mukherjee (1978) is of the opinion that learning is an inference from some performance of the organism manifesting change of behavior. He argued that change in behavior must be permanent and they do imply gain to the organism for his/her survival. Altun (2006) asserted that learning may be both vertical and horizontal. It is vertical in so far as precision in increased or information is added to that already learned. It is horizontal in so far as what is learned is integrated and organized as a part of a functioning unit of expanding experience. Thus the former means qualitative and the latter is quantitative in nature. Learning is expected to bring about more or less permanent change in the learner's behaviour. Sternberg (2003) further said that this change may range from the acquisition of a relatively simple skill, item of information to the mastery of complicated mechanical performance and application of difficult and abstract reading material, change in response or behaviour is caused partly or wholly by experience. It includes behaviour change in the emotional sphere, refers to the acquisition of symbolic knowledge or motor skills. It however does not include physiological changes like fatigue, temporary sensory resistance and hunger. Learning should enable us to make the least use of the things in the world around us. For example, one has to learn the art of living harmoniously with others by learning how to establish good relations with his fellows. Learning is not limited to the school alone. It continues even after the school days.

Mahuta (2009) defined teaching as the interaction between students and the teachers on a particular subject matter. He added that in this type of interaction, there may be one or many students that differ in many respects, such as age, sex, bright and below average intelligent, physically normal, physically challenged highly motivated, rich or poor, background. Ogionwo (2006), perceived teaching as the means in which the society deliberately socializes the younger generation to fit into adult life by teaching them the norms and values of their respective communities. Also according to Farland (1973), teaching is not just a technique; it is a relation of oneself and others. It is a sophisticated exploration of intellect, personality, circumstance and social interaction.

Defining effective teaching is of course problematic. Ideally, we might define effective teaching as that which leads to high achievement by students in valued outcomes, other things being equal. We acknowledge that available assessments – and particularly those that have been used for high-stakes accountability or in existing research studies – may not fully capture the range of the outcomes that we might specify as desirable aims for education (Popham and Ryan, 2012; Muijs, 2014; Polikoff, 2014). Despite these limitations, wherever possible, it makes sense to judge the effectiveness of teaching from its impact on assessed learning. If the assessments and value-added models available to us are not good enough, we need to improve them. In the meantime we must exercise some caution in interpreting any claims about teaching effectiveness.

Methodology

The study adopts descriptive research design. The target population of this study comprised of 100 senior secondary school students selected from the selected educational zones within Adamawa State namely: Ganye, Mayo Belwa, Yola, Numan and Mubi Local governments. The schools are too selected alongside location and ownership. Stratified random sampling technique is used to select 50 students. Ten respondents will be drawn from each zone. The instrument used for this study is a questionnaire designed by the researchers on the factors affecting effective teaching and learning of English language (FAETLEL) with two sections (A and B). Section 'A' consists of background information focused on relevant moderator variables such as school location, students' level and age. Section 'B' contains items on factors affecting effective teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools in Adamawa State. The instruments (students' and teachers' questionnaires) was administered with the assistance of the school management and class teachers. The collected data was descriptively analysed.

Descriptive Analysis

Question 1: To what extent does School learning environment affect the teaching and learning of English language in Adamawa State?

variable	respondents	Numan	Mayo	Mubi	Yola	Ganye
Does learning environment affect teaching of English Language	teachers	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	agree
Does learning environment affect students learning of English language	students	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	agree

From the above responses from teachers and students, it is obvious that learning environment in most of the schools are not conducive for effective learning hence it affects the learning outcome of students' performance in English language.

Question 2: To what extent does teaching methods affect the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State

Table 2

variable	respondents	Numan	Mayo	Mubi	Yola	Ganye
Teaching methods affect teaching of English language	teachers	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	agree
Teaching Methods affect students performance	students	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	agree

Table 2 above shows that in all the educational zones visited, there was a unanimous consensus on the importance of teaching methods on student's comprehension and performance in English Language.

Question 3: To what extent does class size affect the teaching and learning of English language in the five educational zones of Adamawa State?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation scores obtained from the views of teachers and students with regards to the effect of Class Size.

variable	respondents	Numan	Mayo	Mubi	Yola	Ganye
Does Class size affect teaching of English Language	teachers	Strongly agree small size is better	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree
Does class size affect students comprehension in an English language classroom	students	Yes the smaller the better	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	agree

Responses from the above question indicates that class size affects the teaching and learning of English language in senior secondary schools in Adamawa State to a low extent.

Question 4: To what extent do instructional materials and teaching aids affect the teaching and learning of English language in Adamawa State?

variable	respondents	NUman	Mayo	Mubi	Yola	Ganye
Does Teaching materials and instructional aids enhance the teaching of English language	teachers	Strongly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree
Does the use of instructional material and materials prove students' performance	students	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Agree

Both students and teachers agree that instructional materials and teaching aids play a major role in the performance of students in English Language. Both class of respondents agree that an improved, modern teaching instructional materials will enhance teaching of English language in Adamawa State.

Question 5; To what extent does teachers' qualification affect the teaching and learning of English language when segregated by school location in Adamawa state?

variable	respondents	Numan	Mayo	Mubi	Yola	Ganye
Does Teacher qualification affect learning and performance in English language	teachers	Strongly agree small size is better	Agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	agree
	students	Yes the smaller the better	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	Strongly agree	agree

The table indicates that teachers' qualification affects the teaching and learning of English language in secondary schools to a high extent.

Question 7: What difference exists between the views of public and private school students regarding the factors affecting the teaching and learning of English Language in Adamawa State.

Conclusion

It has been proved in the course of this study that factors such as school learning environment, and teaching methods and teacher's qualification have a significant effect on the teaching and learning of English language in Adamawa State

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made to improve the effective delivery classroom instruction:

- 1) A conducive school learning environment which consists of adequate chairs and desks and good lightening system should be provided in order to facilitate effective teaching and learning of English language.
- 2) Teachers of English should be sensitized through workshops and seminars on the need to be creative in their use of teaching methods in order to enhance effective teaching and learning.
- 3) Policies should be formulated by the state Ministry of Education for the purpose of regulating the class sizes. These regulatory laws should be strictly enforced mostly in public secondary schools where most of the classes are too crowded to accommodate learners.
- 4) There should be adequate provision of instructional resources which can help facilitate the teaching and learning of English Language.
- 5) Qualified English teachers should be employed in order to facilitate the effective teaching and learning of English language in urban and rural areas.

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