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Assessment of Student's Linguistic Competence in Anambra State

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to evaluate the Assessment of Linguistic Competence as a Panacea for ineffective Teaching and Learning in Anambra State. Three research questions were formulated to guide the study. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select four thousand and ten (4010) respondents. The instrument for data collection was a well-structured questionnaire. The data collected was analyzed using statistical mean. It was discovered that students' linguistic competence is a sure possible solution to ineffective teaching and learning. Based on this findings deductions and recommendations were made.

Keywords: Assessment, Linguistic Competence,

INTRODUCTION

The English Language is undoubtedly the most important legacy of the British Colonial masters to Nigeria. From being a catalyst for political emancipation, the English Language has now apparently become the catalyst for nationalism,

political consciousness and intertribal comprehensibility.

It is the tool for social, political and educational expression in this vast multi-ethnic, multiracial country. In other words, the English Language is today in Nigeria the language of business, commerce, education, the mass media,



literature, science and technology and much of internal as well as external communication. For purpose of government and administration, English is the official language in Nigeria. Government records, administrative instruction and minutes, legislations, court records and proceedings are all in English.

The entrenchment of English is perhaps most noticeable in the field of education. Since the products of the schools will be absorbed into types of employment where English is the official medium of communication, proficiency in English is a necessary qualification. The pre-eminent position of English in the field of education is likely to remain for a long time. In the secondary schools, English has continued to remain the pivot among the core subjects. It is used as the medium of instruction and studied as a subject. This 'double action' of English in the secondary school curriculum according to Shaibu (2006:45), is supposed to equip the secondary school leavers with the required proficiency in order to achieve one of the central specific aim of secondary education which is according to the National Policy on Education, in section 4:20 (a), "*to provide all primary school leavers with opportunity for education at a higher level, irrespective of sex, social status, religious or ethnic background*".

Success in the effective use of the English language by students largely determines success in the achievement of this objective and vice versa. It is no wonder, therefore, that candidates who do not get the required credit pass in their secondary school English language examination have very little or no chance to participate in Nigeria's higher education program.

English as a Second Language (ESL) is very vital in the Nigerian educational system because it is used in the teaching of other subjects in the curriculum except perhaps, the local languages. It then forms the backbone of every subject in the curriculum, from the preprimary through the tertiary levels of education. To say that English affords a window on the world is to emphasize its relevance for the world of economic growth, advanced technology and applied science. It helps to frame discourses on any scientific specialism, hypothesis, reasoning chains, inferences, verifications and deductions. Scientific English in the main relates to concrete laboratory situations and workshop practices. In the recent times, the rate of failure in English Language or the rate of poor performance in both internal and external examination have been alarming and disturbing.

Meaning of Linguistics

According to Wikipedia online dictionary linguistics is the scientific



study of language and involves an analysis of language form, language meaning, and language in context. Linguistics traditionally analyse human language by observing an interplay between sound and meaning. Phonetics is the study of speech and non-speech sounds and delves into their acoustic and articulatory properties. The study of language meaning, on the other hand, deals with how languages encode relations between entities, properties, and other aspects of the world to convey, process and assign meaning, as well as manage and resolve ambiguity. While the study of semantics typically concerns itself with truth conditions, pragmatics deals with how situational context influences the production of meaning.

Grammar is a system of rules which governs the production and use of utterances in a given language. These rules apply to sound as well as meaning, and include componential sub-sets of rules, such as those pertaining to phonology (the organization of phonetic sound systems), morphology (the formation and composition of words), and syntax (the formation and composition of phrases and sentences). Linguistics also deals with the social, cultural, historical and political factors that influence language, through which linguistics and language-based context is often determined.

Meaning of Competence

Wikipedia online dictionary define competence as the ability to do something well or efficiently. It means possession of a range of ability or skill. It is the condition of being capable and the quality of being competent. Competence means to meet demands, requirements, or requests and to respond to a challenge. It can be said to meet or exceed performance requirements, to succeed or accomplish. It implies to prove one-self proficient and reliable in a given skill or ability. It infers to pass inspection, to meet or surpass certain standards, to be approved or accepted. It denotes to conform to rules or standards, to come up to scratch, to shape up, to fulfil one's obligation, to perform one's duty, to toe the line.

The concept of Linguistic Competence

Linguistic competence is the system of linguistic knowledge possessed by native speakers of a language. It is in contrast to the concept of linguistic performance, the way the language system is used in communication. The concept was first introduced by Noam Chomsky as part of the foundation for his Generative Grammar, but it has since been adopted and developed by other linguists, particularly those working in the generativist tradition. In the generativist tradition competence is the only level of language that is studied, because this level gives insights into the



Universal Grammar that generativists see as underlying all human language systems. Functional theories of grammar tend to dismiss the sharp distinction between competence and performance, and particularly the primacy given to the study of competence.

According to Chomsky (1965:56), competence is the ideal language system that makes it possible for speakers to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences in their language, and to distinguish grammatical sentences from ungrammatical sentences. This is unaffected by grammatically irrelevant conditions such as speech error. He says: *Linguistic theory is concerned primarily with an ideal speaker – listener, in a completely homogeneous speech community, who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors in applying his knowledge of this language in actual performance.*

One's competence is defined by the grammar or set of language rules, that is represented mentally and manifested based on his or her own understanding of acceptable usage in a given linguistic idiom. Therefore, grammatical competence defines an innate knowledge of rules rather than knowledge of items or relations. According to Chomsky, it is regarded to be innate because one does

not have to be trained to develop it and will still be able to apply it in an infinite number of unheard examples.

Statement of the Problem

Many learners of English as a second language are faced with the task of learning English language which no doubt is not their first language. Similarly, many teachers are faced with the task of teaching and gaining proficiency in English language, although, English language is not their mother tongue. How then are they to learn this foreign language so that they will be able to speak, read and write it with understanding close to the native speakers? This is what learners are so often expected to do in order that a common language will be available when necessary, a language for communication in the wider society, a language in which examination papers are written.

There is no problem about what to teach or what to learn, because there are carefully planned courses in the curriculum which will serve as a guide through school. The problem of the second language learner is how to learn this target language so that we are able to understand, speak, read and write it as the need arises. Marjorie Clarkson (1966:4) identified that, "Learners' problems are majorly how to learn speaking, how to learn reading, how to learn writing and how to put them to use".



Over time, academic performance in external examination is declining drastically. The result is poor performance in external examinations and indulgence in examination malpractice, bringing down the quality of our education.

The main objective of this study is to evaluate students' linguistic competence and to proffer solution to our drowning educational system. They will also look at some challenges that learners of the target language has that affect their gaining proficiency in the language. Since English language plays a very important role in the child's education in Nigeria and beyond, it thus becomes crucial as well as expedient to stress its importance for teacher education so that effective teaching and learning can take place in every classroom.

Research Questions

The following research questions have been framed so as to give bearing to this study.

1. What factors inhibit secondary school students' linguistic competence?
2. How does lack of linguistic competence of students contribute to ineffective teaching and learning?
3. How can lack of linguistic competence of secondary school students be remedied for effective teaching and learning?

Factors Affecting Linguistic Competence of Students

The following have been identified as the major factors affecting the linguistic competence of students:

- Qualification of teachers
- Method of teaching and learning
- Instructional materials
- Mother tongue interference
- Environmental and Personal Disposition to Learning

Qualification of Teachers

The use of inexperienced and unqualified teachers in teaching various subjects causes great harm to the students. There are teachers without the appropriate teaching certificates. The academic background of these teachers is feeble, and many are untrained, these teachers use poor teaching techniques and they lack assistance in the form of constant professional development through seminars, workshops, and refresher courses. These teachers go ahead to teach students at young ages knowing that there are some subjects that require experts in the field for a better understanding of those subjects. The solution to these is by getting teachers with the appropriate teaching certificates to these subjects and these will improve the general performance of students at Ordinary level examinations particularly in English language. Several eminent educationists and researcher have



asserted that the performance of students is to an extent largely dependent on the academic and professional qualification of their teachers. Ejiaka and Ezechi (2002:73) citing Dent (1947:44) have pointed out conclusively that:

No nation with due regards for its civilization and culture could dream of giving national education anything but the finest priority in the allocation of its mental and spiritual resources ... None but the finest and the fittest among its people ought to be allowed to engage in the supremely important task of educating the young who constitutes national assets upon which the value of all other assets absolutely depend on.

Similarly, Collins (1981:86) on the other hand in a research conducted on educationally trained and untrained graduate teachers has found out that:

...trained graduate teachers showed greater efficiency than their untrained counterparts. The untrained graduate teacher is likely to view teaching in a narrow perspective that he tends to be less committed to the teaching profession by and large, seems fair to say that teaching for the untrained teacher is an occupation to be taken less

serious and a job which makes fewer demand.

From his findings, he clearly affirmed the need for teachers to be well qualified, emphasizing that, “Teachers as organizers and disseminators of knowledge must be properly trained but we cannot have good schools to produce them”. Proceeding on professional qualification of language teachers as one major cause of second language learning problems in schools. Oyetunji (1984:56) pointed that, “*the number of untrained teachers of English in West Africa is still very large and discouragingly alarming ... when the standard of teachers is low, one wonders what the reprobates will teach the students*”.

In clear terms, what the above language educators are emphasizing is the importance of proper training, to improve the standard of ESL teaching and learning. Since professional qualification of teachers is one of the factors which militates against or poses great difficulty to ESL learners.

Thus, the need for well qualified teachers in the Nigerian educational system with more regards to language teacher cannot be over emphasized. It thus suggest that the only sure way out of the problem of poor performance as precipitated by the quality of staff, in other words teachers in both primary and



secondary schools is a holistic professionalization and eradication of provision for auxiliary teachers at all levels of the educational system. John Blackie (1978:67) notes that, “*a parent who is about to send his child to school will be anxious, above all that he should be taught or have good teachers*”. This statement reveals that parents are always concerned or more often, meticulous about proper qualification of teachers who handle their children since they want their children to be taught by qualified teachers. Equally, Freeman (1975:80) has pointed out that, “*parents and educational critics recommend that teachers should have good formal training*”.

Agunyegom (1981:76) summarizes the result of the findings on the need for adequate number of well qualified teachers pointed that, “*currently, many secondary school staffing is low while there is teaming number of students’ population*”.

From the above views of eminent educationists so far consulted, something is glaring especially when we cast a retrospection on the earlier view of Oyetunji who posited that nonprofessional or unqualified teachers are “reprobates” who has no concise or precise knowledge of the psycho-social levels of their pupils.

Conclusively, one would understand so far that it has been unveiled that one of the major problems/difficulties which ESL/L2 learners encounter arises from being taught by unprofessional poorly trained teachers of English.

Sofenwa’s writing on the importance of employing qualified English teachers in our schools, stated that “*a large number of failures are due to bad teaching which itself is partly a backwash effect on informalized syllabus*”.

Edwin Parker (1978:89) also sees the staff as an important factor in the school that greatly influences school performance of the students. He questioned their qualification and noted that

A certificate from a College of Education is preferable to a degree, for a person who takes a degree does not get adequate training in teaching techniques, and that a degree and College of Education Certificate is perhaps the ideal qualification.

And finally, writing on phonological problem posed by mother tongue, Atonwu (2007:34) suggested that, “*it could be guarded against by not employing “second best” teachers to teach English in our schools*”.



Despite a broad range of new teaching methodologies implemented in the classroom, research has shown that teachers play the largest role in the success of a school. Despite this, principals continue to have a difficult time firing teachers due to lengthy firing processes and resistance from teachers' unions. The negative effects of teaching can ruin many generations in a given area and create a poverty trap.

In countries that have highly educated populations, the most successful college students are most often recruited into the classroom. Regardless of the background, students who have at least four good teachers in a row will excel. Students who have two bad teachers in a row will never recover. Schools that need good teachers the most, such as schools in disadvantaged areas, often have the worst teachers. Students who struggle in public schools also struggle in college or never manage to get into college. This reinforces the cycle of poverty.

Some unqualified teachers ineffectively teach students, preventing them from earning the grades needed to pass a class. This leads to some students dropping out of high school. Other unqualified teachers pass students too easily, causing the students to graduate with high school diplomas but inadequate skills. Employers notice the lack of skills among graduates and raise the barrier of

entry for a job, requiring that students earn a bachelor's degree to get a position.

Some teachers might have a reputation for quality teaching because their classes frequently have high standardized test scores, but the teacher successful test takers by teaching the test. Students do not necessarily develop a greater comprehension of the course of content that they can take with them beyond the classroom.

Effects of Poor Teaching Methods

Poor teaching involves far more than an inappropriate match between the school's curriculum and the students' needs. It also involves the kind of expectations that the teacher communicates to students, the teacher's ability to deal with special needs in the classroom, his or her knowledge of normal child development, sensitivity to students' different learning and behavioural styles, and understanding that when English is the child's second language, conversational fluency doesn't equate to academic language proficiency. Moreover, when teachers do not personalize instruction to accommodate individual differences, the number of children identified as Learners Deficiency (LD) increases.

Poor teaching not only aggravates existing learning problems, but it can also increase the number of children erroneously identified as learning disabled. This can happen when some



children fall behind because they haven't had the right learning opportunities. The discrepancy between their intellectual ability and achievement is really a pseudo discrepancy, that wouldn't have occurred if teaching had been personalized and effective. Researchers who are demonstrating that instruction helps establish and strengthen specific neural networks, point out that poor instruction leaves a child without the necessary neural substrate to support academic progress.

According to Buddha, "*the mind is everything. What you think you become*" and therefore in accordance to that statement our mind is responsible for the actions we take. In this case, poor teaching methods have highly affected our mind and our thinking making us feel that we are not good at certain subjects, even making us go as far as hating the subject, whereas all that is required is a different approach. This has in turn affected student's action thereby making them shy away from such subjects when it comes to subject choices.

According to Aristotle, "*The one exclusive sign of thorough knowledge is the power of teaching*". AR-dictionary defines teaching "*as the activity of educating or instructing activities that impact knowledge or skill*". Tutors' handling of teaching is very flimsy in various parts of the world and hence poor teaching methods have really affected

students thereby giving them a lifelong phobia at certain subjects. Poor teaching methods is affected by many factors such as,

Lack of use of modern technology: In accordance to David Thornburg It is a well-known fact that technology improves every day and in every aspect. Poor teaching methods are highly influenced by the use of ancient material and beliefs for teaching, for example the use of chalkboards and the writing down of long notes takes students' time and leaves very little or no time for learning and understanding what is actually been taught. White board should be used instead of chalkboards in schools, also projectors and interactive boards should also be taken into consideration in helping the teachers present their notes in digital form and also to play relevant videos and illustrations to students allowing them to have a clearer view of what is being taught. The writing of notes can now be reduced if copies of notes are collected with the use of a storage device from the teacher and put into personal laptops of students. Once the copy of the note is given to each student, there will be room for more time for the explanation of topics being taught because students take a lot of time copying their notes which makes them tired and even discouraged to read back the lengthy note back because they don't have a good understanding of what has been written in



the note. The use of the internet should also be brought into consideration as a source of help to teachers and students thereby ensuring them not to be limited to knowing just what has been known for a very long period of time and leaving the students outdated. Modifications are made to various subjects and the internet can be a source of information for educators and students therefore the internet would allow everyone to improve and gain more knowledge on various topics.

Lack of effective management of classrooms: Classrooms are very important when it comes to learning, a standard class would be of great help to the students and their tutors. A teacher has to have rules and regulations given to the students thereby ensuring that there is a standard policy and a certain order in the classroom. The appraisal of pupils' work and the provision of sufficient feedback to students will turn out to be more knotty due to the large number of pupils. The overcrowded classrooms also causes shortage of sufficient instructional equipment, high pupil to teacher ratio also reduces possibilities of individual attention to the pupils. Only the students who sit down at the front rows of the classrooms gain from what the teacher is actually trying to pass across to the students. Congested classes are also not conducive for learning because of the

stuffy surrounding and make students start sweating which makes them stressed out so easily which is actually very harmful to the health and can actually lead to the easy transfer of airborne diseases between students. A standard classroom has to be well spaced, well aired, and beautified with different academic illustrations.

Non-student friendly teachers also cause great harm to some students by putting fear in the students' mind. Lack of motivation by teachers also falls under examples of poor teaching methods. There are certain teachers who don't care about the intellectual feelings of students, they just teach reluctantly and leave the class meanwhile there are certain students who already have a phobia for the subject and what is just needed is motivation which they don't get really from their tutors. Teachers should be of help at motivating students, encouraging and inspiring the students to make them get up and move on. There are also cases whereby students get frustrated at the subjects been taught, instances like that are also resolved by the assistance of these motivational and inspiring teachers. The use of jokes during teaching also aids learning, this makes the students really like the teacher and makes the class lively, and there is this belief that if a student likes a teacher, he will definitely love his subject.



According to General Ruben Cubero, the absence of individual questioning is also a factor that affects the overall performance of students. Teachers who do not carry all the students along during lectures tend to be ignorant of students who do not learn easily. Therefore, teachers have to be at the same pace with every student been taught and not leaving any student behind. A suitable solution to these is by the frequent questioning of students when new topics are been taught to know the weakness of students especially the quiet ones and to know the students who have paid total attention throughout the lesson. This also makes the class very lively and encourages the students to do private study at their leisure time. This factor would also help the teacher in knowing some topics he needs to go back and give a different approach when next he is teaching that particular topic. The use of added learning time should also be a necessity to help students who lag behind, or students who need extra lessons for effective understanding of topics. If a teacher uses part of his leisure time to gather some weak students together there would be a general improvement in those students' performance. These students would therefore put more interest and hence there would be a high tendency of getting better grades in the subject.

In addition lack of use of practical has also affected students in understanding what has been taught because they are certain subjects that require the use of practical to have a better understanding of the subject. The use of practical and application of the topics to the everyday day life would give students an idea or a clearer picture of what the teacher is explaining.

The absence of study groups also affects the attitude of students towards the understanding of several topics. Students will not be able to interact among themselves and share different opinions but if the teachers put the students into study groups mixing both the weak and smart students together. There will be interaction and discussion between students in a group about their different weak points and the ones who understand a particular topic very well will help those that are still weak in those topics. There will be a general improvement of every student's performance.

The teaching techniques that are used by most teachers remain principally the traditional 'talk and chalk' mode of delivery. These educators are under pressure to facilitate their students pass examinations, and therefore, they are forced to water down the implemented curriculum. This has in turn led to the poor performance of students. Therefore, in conclusion to these saying once a



student has a good foundation at a subject he will definitely have a passion for the subject and give his best shot to the subject.

According to Plutarch a Greek biographer and essayist, he stated, "*the mind is not a vessel to be filled. It is a fire to be rekindled*". The jaundiced attitude of students towards English language is highly exacerbated by the method in which it was been taught. These teaching strategies have also relied on the behaviourist model of learning, a paradigm that stresses learning by repetition and memorization. Teachers should therefore replace the behaviourist paradigms with strategies based on other progressive and improved methods of learning which would be of very great help to student at their ages and which will remove any fear, change the attitude, and bring confidence to students in doing the subject after the completion of secondary education.

Chomsky (in Mitchell & Myles, 2004:94) explains that the logical problem of language learning is caused by messy and fragmentary input, making abstract concepts based on limited examples of languages. Gass (in Bailey, 2006:65) refers to input as "... *the language to which the learner is exposed, either orally or visually ...*", in other words, the language which "surrounds learners living in a L2 environment".

Teachers are responsible for an inadequate language input due to their own limited English proficiency. Krashen found that the essential ingredient for L2 acquisition is comprehensible input through teacher talk. The teacher should talk on a learner's level of comprehension, that is, the learner should be able to understand what the teacher is saying (Richards & Lockhart, 1994:184). Transference from one speaker's use of language to another speaker's use of language can be viewed as a contamination factor in the use of the L2. Where teachers' own L2 knowledge is not on an acceptable standard for the use of English, their poor usage and knowledge of the language are transferred to the learners (Stander, 2001:108-110).

Mari-nova-Todd (2003:61; 67; 70) concludes from reviewed studies that the availability and the access to good L2 input and instruction produce the best outcomes in L2 and ensure native-like proficiency. In addition, Mari-nova-Todd (2003) found that the sooner a learner is exposed to the L2 in an environment rich with L2 interaction and input, the more time a learner spends on a task and the longer the learner is resident in a L2-dominated environment are better predictors of L2 acquisition than age. Appropriate circumstances and quality instruction lead to native-like competence in L2 in younger and older



learners. In addition, modelling is very effective, for example, using strategies to access meaning when reading. The teacher should model the strategies for which the learners eventually need to take responsibility. Frederickson and Cline (2002:441) explain that through modelling, the learner is provided with a step-by-step demonstration of what is required.

According to Ellis (2002:24), social factors affect the L2 proficiency attained by different groups of learners. During submersion L2 learners are taught in a class where L1 speakers are dominant; during immersion L1 learners are taught through the medium of L2 by bilingual teachers in classes where there are only such learners. August and Hakuta (in Lapp, Flood, Moore & Nichols 2005:159) explain that during English immersion English language learners (ELL) are immersed completely into the English contexts without any support in their home language. The aim of immersing learners into English contexts is to develop their English language and literacy skills. The reality is, however, extremely difficult for an English Language Learner (ELL) to learn a new language while simultaneously acquiring literacy in the L2 and not receiving support in their home language.

In Nigeria the tempo and complexity of educational change and the limitations of pre-service education call for intensive

in-service training program for teachers (Bagwandeem & Louw, 1993:8). Teachers' practical knowledge base is gained when it is grounded in theory and principles and informed by a knowledge base of effective language and content teaching appropriate to the stage of a program and the teachers' development (Cloud, 2005:279-280).

Mother Tongue Interference

Mother tongue interference has features most predominantly the assumptions underlying second language learning of teaching. Lee in (1968:77) thinks, "*That the prime cause or even the sole cause of difficulty or error in foreign language is interference coming from the learners' native language*".

While Carell (1963:35) argues that, "*facilitation and interference arises whenever an individual who has already learned one linguistic system to a high degree of competence attempts to learn another linguistic system in which his competence is initially virtually nil*". Weinreich (1974:89) on his own argues that, "*Mother tongue interference in linguistic terms refers to those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language contact*".

Akindele and Adegbite (1999:26) cited in Baba (2006:24) conceived of



interference as, “those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occurs in the list of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language”. They further stated that, “interference refers to a situation whereby two different languages overlap. The linguistic system of one of the languages is transferred into the other in the process of producing the later which is the second or target language”.

No doubt, the English in Nigeria is in contrast with Nigerian languages. It therefore affects and is being affected by the local languages as it is being heard. For instance, an average pupil/student has the tendency to first conceive ideas in the mother tongue and before speaking has to transfer his thought pattern to English. This causes slow and uninterested speech. It also makes the form of the phrase and sentence pattern to be vernacular in style. This leads to grammatical errors as these vernacular patterns are usually different from the English patterns. Okechukwu et al (1999:54) observes that:

First language learning or acquisition is almost always used to refer to the acquisition of a chronologically first language which the child finds himself (while) second language implies a formal learning situation

which a teacher in front of the class, with feedback and error correction, rule learning and an artificial environment that introduces aspects of grammar.

The above statement implies that the first language is acquired in a non-formal setting while the second is in a formal setting. In line with mother tongue interference, there are also several other incursions of the first language into the learning of the second language, such instances as identified are transliteration and code-switching. The problem of spelling for instance, is traced to the interference of the first language. Fries (1978:23) expresses the same view when he states that:

Mother tongue will always exist in the minds of the foreign language learners, particularly in environment which are alien to the target language. There will be constant conflicts between the language habits of his mother tongue. We cannot expect the pupil ... to forget, suppress or abandon completely these old language habits.

The impediments posed by bilingualism further attracted the attention of Fries (1978) cited by Ejiaka and Ezechi (2002:23) when he posits that, “the problem connected with



bilingualism arises out of any effort to develop a new language habit against the back-ground of different language habits”.

Having considered different views by several linguists, language educators and educationists about the problems of interference, suffice it to say that there still abound other difficulties posed by first language in the learning of the second language which are not identified in this study. Interference in the learning and acquisition of the English language manifests at various levels. These levels are phonological, lexical, grammatical or syntactic and semantic. The variables in mother tongue that hinder effective communication in English are caused by differences in phonetics. Most languages, for instance, do not use or pronounce, the combination in the same way as it is pronounced in the English language.

Basically, the interference of mother tongue in learning English is down to three basic concepts of phonetics. These concepts are the articulatory, acoustic and auditory phonetics.

Articulatory phonetics is all about how sounds are produced by the speaker. The production of speech sounds is dependent on the vocal tract and the articulatory capabilities of the speaker. In other words, how a speaker produces the sounds in his mother tongue will interfere with the way sounds are produced in

English. Some languages, for instance, produce clicking sounds the rest of the world is almost incapable of producing.

Acoustic and Auditory phonetics are about the reception, perception and mechanism, such as pitch, harmonics and amplitude of sounds. This is why it is important to hear the words, rather than trying to learn from written context only.

Bloomfield (1933:50) observes that, “*phonological interference is said to arise when a bilingual identifies a phoneme of the secondary system with one in the primary system and in reproducing it, subjects it to the phonic rules of the primary language*”.

This type of interference is manifested in some Nigerians when they learn and use the English language. Instances of this, drawn from some Nigerian bilinguals are given below. Some Nigerian learners of English perceive and produce English sounds as if they are local sounds in their languages. For instance, Hausa speakers who learn English substitute /p/ for /f/ and vice versa. They therefore produce fire as /pair/ and people as /f:fl/ instead of /pi:pl/. Similarly, the Yoruba speakers who learn English either add the consonant /h/ or subtract it particularly, in the initial position. They therefore produce “as” /az/ as “has” /haz/ and vice



versa. Similarly “add” /ad/ is produced as “had” /had/ and vice versa.

For the Tiv speakers in Benue state, in learning the English language, /r/ is substituted as /l/ and vice versa. Consequently, “road” is produced as “load”, similarly they produce “fry” as /flai/ and “fly” as /frai/. According to Okonkwo (2004:33) recorded that, “on a close study of

English and Igbo, one discovers that differences exist in phonology, syntax and semantics”. Regarding phonology (sound system) of English, there are about 44 speech sounds comprising 20 vowels and 24 consonants. There are unfamiliar vowel sounds such as the central vowels, and some consonant sounds such as the dental fricatives, which constitute articulation problems for second language learners of Igbo extraction, since these vowels and consonants identified above are not found in Igbo language. In producing these two consonant sounds, the Igbo student learner of English encounters difficulty in following the above expression as these two sounds contrast with the pure /t/ and /d/ sounds in Igbo language. Another phonological problem according to Okonkwo (2004:74) is the presence of the consonant clusters in the English language which is not the case in Igbo language. As Okonkwo clearly posits:

English language consonant clusters such as the “CC” and “CCC” are unfamiliar to an Igbo speaker/learner of English ... the problem is caused by the Nigerian mother tongue which selects a consonant/vowel close to alternation ... finally, English is an intonation language while most Nigerian language are mostly tonal ... the problem of pronunciation of words in keeping with the English intonation which uses stress and speech rhythm and proper use of rising and falling tones.

One particular characteristics of phonological interference is that it is present in one form or the other among most Nigerian users/learners of English in different forms. On the syntactic level, the intrusion of mother tongue into the target language is also manifested at the level of sentence formation. This is shown in the sentences of English formed by Nigerian learners. Such intrusion often exhibit omission of articles and prepositions particularly in phrasal verbs. In some cases, prepositions are used as verbs. Some examples are:

“I bought meat” instead of “I bought pieces/kilograms of meat”.

“Please, off/on the light” instead of “please, switch off/on



the light". "Minister of Information" instead of "the Minister of Information".

Still on the syntactic level of the English grammar, Okonkwo (1999:34) posited that:

The Nigerian speakers often restrict themselves to surface structure or meaning of the target language, preposition found in English language for instance, are lacking in Igbo language ... there are more than 70 prepositions in English and most of them have dual functions, either as adverb or as particles that connote with each other ... these combinations are difficult for a second language learner because they don't exist in his mother tongue ... and can be foreign to a second language learner.

Bokamba (1994) and cited in Baba (2006:74) posited that: "*the sources of lexical innovations in African English are*

mother tongue interference, analytical derivation based on English and the milieus and conditions under which English is learnt and used in Anglophone Africa". This portrays that lexical interference is a phenomenon in the learning and acquisition of English language in Nigeria. Some examples of local words that intrude into the target language according to Baba are; kuli kuli, agbada, suya, eba, akpu, kai kai, molue, gwongworo, okporoko, ogbono, agbero and boli. Also in lexical interference are coinages from the major languages in Nigeria. The word "egunje" is coined from Yoruba to mean "bribe". "Shawshaw" is coined from Hausa to also mean "bribe".

Sometimes, clear cases of meaning transfer from the local language into English are observed. Such instances of intrusions are called semantic interference. This interference is very paramount in words and even at the level of sentences and conversations. Instances of semantic interference are buttressed through the examination of the words below



WORDS	MEANING
Suck and lick orange	to eat orange
Enter a bus	alight a bus
Drop me	to alight
Themselves	each other/ one another
Carry go	to move/love making
Charge	to be annoyed
Spray	paste money on a celebrant's forehead at a function
Belgium	old woman of 30 years and above or second hand product.
Launching	to celebrate the purchase of a thing/ call people to donate at a function
Brother/sister	any man/woman related to you by blood, lineage, village etc.
Aunty	a woman in her 30s/ a female school teacher
Father	any man old enough to give birth to someone.

The sentences “*I am coming*” when one is going away demonstrates interference at the level of semantics. This negative meaning is derived from the meaning of the expression in the local language. “I am coming” is used where RP or British language would say, “I will be back in a moment”. Similarly sentences and expressions like:

“*How your body*” for “*how is your health*”.

“*Know the son of whom you are*” for “*beware of your family background*”

“*Shola's head is not correct*” for “*Shola is crazy*”.

“*My credit is finished*” for “*I am short of airtime*”.

“*Obinna branched somewhere*” for “*Obinna went somewhere*”

These are good examples of interference at the level of meaning. These so far identified problems by proficient teachers of English language who over the years have had considerable experience of comparative language studies, portends that second language learner are prone to encountering difficulties in learning the target language. All these problems are impediments to our getting proficiency of the target language.

Finally, it is also worthy of note that the English concord, according to Okonkwo is one of the major areas of the English language which can pose difficulties for second language learners.



Environmental and Personal Disposition to Learning

Everyone has a way they learn best that is affected by environment. Children are affected in different ways. Elements that affect learning style include emotional, physical, sociological, psychological and environmental elements. Environmental affected by the conditions of the classroom environment.

Most children can learn in an instructional environment that emphasizes their learning style strengths. Each child has a preferred style of learning that can be measured reliably. Learning styles include visual, or learning by sight; auditory, or learning by hearing; tactile, or learning by touching and doing; or kinaesthetic, which is learning through movement. When a teacher provides an environment, approaches and resources that match a student's learning style, students have better attitudes and achieve higher test scores; they retain more of what they learn and enjoy the process of learning. Because students have different learning styles, teachers need to provide an environment that accommodates a variety of learning preferences. The overcrowded classrooms also causes shortage of sufficient instructional equipment, high pupil to teacher ratio also reduces possibilities of individual attention to the pupils. Only the students who sit down at the front rows of the

classrooms gain from what the teacher is actually trying to pass across to the students. Congested classes are also not conducive for learning because of the stuffy surrounding and make students start sweating which makes them stressed out so easily which is actually very harmful to the health and can actually lead to the easy transfer of airborne diseases between students. A standard classroom has to be well spaced, well aired, and beautified with different academic illustrations.

Instructional Material and its Effect on Learning.

Several people have written on the importance of instructional resources to teaching. Oluyori (1986:52) while stressing the importance of instructional technology commented that, "*if the recently introduced system (6-3-3-4) in accordance with National Policy on Education is to be a success, then instructional technology has a role to play*". Balo (1971:43) commented that, "*audio-visual materials, as integral part of teaching-learning situations help to bring about permanent and meaningful experience*". He said that, they provide first-hand experience where possible or of vicarious one where only that is feasible.

In enumerating the factors that could be responsible for varying intra-and interschool/academic achievement, Coombs (1970:176), listed four



important factors including the acute scarcity of instructional resources which he said constrained educational systems from responding more fully to new demands'. He claimed that:

In order to do their part in meeting the crisis in education, educational systems will need real resources that money can buy, they will need a fuller share of the nations' manpower, not merely to carry on the present work of education, but to raise its quality, efficiency and productivity. They will need buildings, equipment and more learning materials.

On human resources, various educators for example, Ukeje (1970:47) and Fafunwa (1969:36) have written extensively on the prime importance of teachers to the educational development of any nation be it simple, complex, developed or developing. From the writings of these educators, one can infer that, *"whatever facilities are available, whatever content is taught, whichever environment the school is situated and whatever kind of pupils are given to teach, the important and vital role of the teacher cannot be over-emphasized"*.

Assuming that necessary facilities are adequately provided for, the environment is conducive to learning, the curriculum satisfies the needs of the students and the

students themselves have interest in learning, learning cannot take place without the presence of the teacher. Teachers represent a large proportion of the input of an educational system. Coombs (1970:176) observed that, *"the problem of teacher supply is not one of simple numbers. It is first and foremost a problem of quantity and of getting the right quality"*.

Fayemi (1991:77) also observed that, *"it is a truism that teachers are the hubs of any educational system"* that upon their number, their quality and devotion depend to a large extent the success of any educational system".

Fafunwa (1979:36-37) in his paper *"The Purpose of Teacher Education"* commented on the importance of teachers when he said:

The demand for more and better schools, the need to relate curriculum to the needs of the child and the environment, the crying needs of the child and his other instructional materials, the desirability of training in vocational and technical skills, and indeed the overall problem of preparing the future citizens of Africa who will be fully oriented to their environment cannot be accomplished without the aid of competent teachers.



Fagbamiye (1977:26-28) noted that, “schools with stable, experienced and qualified teachers usually have better school facilities in terms of school buildings, books and equipment than those schools which have difficulty in attracting experienced and qualified staff”. Numerous investigations have also been carried out to find the effects of instructional resources on students’ academic achievement. Eminent scholars have also contributed immensely to report the effect of one variable on the other. Consequently, there have been many reports from these studies which had served as useful guides to the present one.

METHOD

The sample for the study comprises of the two hundred and fifty nine public (259) secondary schools in Anambra State. The researchers adopted the simple random sampling technique and selected one hundred and eighty (180) secondary schools within the State. In all the selected school, twenty three (23) students were administered with the questionnaire. Thus, in all, four thousand, one hundred and forty (4140) respondents were selected and administered with questionnaire, and four thousand and five (4005) questionnaires were returned.

The researchers in order to collect useful data used well-structured questionnaire method. Three research

questions were formulated based on the research topic and the respondents were to tick (✓) the questions based on their personal opinion. They were not given any form of kickback but were encouraged to give the right answers as this would go a long way to solve their educational problems.

The instrument was subjected to face and content validity by two experts in Measurement and Evaluation. These experts vetted the instruments and made some corrections. However, their corrections were taken into effect and the items of the questionnaire were modified and used for data collection.

The researchers adopted a test re-test method of reliability. This is to ascertain the degree of consistency of test results obtained from the same instrument. The instrument was first administered to the ten (10) respondents outside the area of study. Afterwards the researchers repeated the exercise to the same group of students after one week. The two sets of response were correlated using Pearson Product Moment (PPM) correlation co-efficient. The results obtained from the two variables are 0.85 which shows a very high correlation indicating that the instrument was reliable enough for the study.

The questionnaires for the research were distributed to Senior Secondary Students in the area as a means of collection of data for the study from the



selected areas. The responses to the questionnaires were collected and analysed using mean frequency system.

The data was analysed using the frequency table and weighted mean category which includes;

Strongly agreed (SA) 4 points

Agreed (A) 3 points

Disagreed (D) 2 points

Strongly disagreed (SD) 1 point.

$$\text{Weight Mean} = \frac{4 + 3 + 2 + 1}{4} = \frac{10}{4} = 2.50$$

The decision rule was drawn on the criterion mean for agreeing or disagreeing on the item used for the analysis. The criterion mean score is 2.50. Therefore, weighted mean score of 2.50 and above for any item indicated that the respondents agree on the items whereas a weighted mean score below 2.50 revealed that the respondents disagreed on the items.

Research Question 1

What factors inhibit linguistic competence of secondary school students in Anambra State?

Questionnaire Items	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remarks
Teachers being poor models of incompetence in English language	782 3128	1661 4983	1481 2962	81 81	2.79	Agreed
Students poor academic background during early education	1962 7848	1081 3243	521 1043	441 441	3.14	Agreed
Mother tongue interference	162 648	2681 8043	1001 2002	161 161	2.71	Agreed
Dependence on examination malpractices	761 3044	1802 5406	801 1602	641 641	2.67	Agreed
Lack of instructional materials and good textbooks	480 1920	2921 8763	402 804	202 202	2.92	Agreed
Schools are located in noisy, slumps and other disadvantaged areas.	81 324	560 1680	2760 5520	604 604	2.05	Disagreed
Parents low level or lack of education	563 2252	1522 4566	1320 2640	600 600	2.51	Agreed
Inability of students to speak English frequently	1164 4656	1281 3843	800 1600	760 760	2.71	Agreed
Some classes are too large to be managed by one English teacher within the stipulated time	1801 7204	1284 3852	560 1120	360 360	3.13	Agreed



Research Question 2

How does lack of linguistic competence of students contribute to ineffective teaching and learning?

ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remark
It results to poor academic performance	2360 9440	1445 4335	120 240	80 80	3.52	Agreed
It slows the teaching and learning process	1723 6892	1160 3480	682 1364	440 440	3.04	Agreed
Students tend to shy away from speaking and asking questions in the classroom and this hinders ineffective teaching and learning	1005 4020	1860 5580	400 800	740 740	2.78	Agreed
Students find it very difficult to express themselves in the English language	881 3524	1484 4452	760 1520	880 880	2.59	Agreed
It results to low self-esteem of students which could make them introverts	1040 4160	2045 6135	520 1040	400 400	2.93	Agreed
It hampers students comprehensive ability even in other subjects	2322 9288	1523 4569	160 320	0 0	3.54	Agreed
It could make the teacher develop negative attitude towards the students	1805 7220	1720 5160	480 960	0 0	3.33	Agreed
Inability of students to speak English frequently	761 3044	1804 5412	960 1920	480 480	2.71	Agreed



Research Question 3

How can lack of linguistic competence of secondary school students be remedied for effective teaching and learning?

ITEMS	SA	A	D	SD	X	Remark
There is need for adequate qualified teachers in our school	441 1764	2362 7086	1121 2242	81 81	2.79	Agreed
Teachers should be competent so as to be good models to our students	360 1440	2923 8769	682 1364	40 40	2.9	Agreed
Teachers should be exposed to regular in-service trainings, workshops and seminars	282 1128	3122 9366	561 1122	80 80	2.91	Agreed
Conducive environment should be provided for proper teaching and learning of English language	522 2088	1962 5886	921 1842	600 600	2.6	Agreed
The government should provide quality textbooks for use in schools	361 1444	1802 5406	1402 2804	440 440	2.52	Agreed
Teaching should be learner-centred	1241 4964	2163 6489	361 722	240 240	3.1	Agreed
Students should be exposed to frequent use of the English language at school and in their homes.	921 3684	2202 6606	402 804	480 480	2.89	Agreed

CONCLUSION

The result of this study and its discussion have been shown. They confirm that linguistic competence lay a solid foundation for communicative competence. Where this is lacking, it results to poor proficiency of the target language which gives birth to poor teaching and learning. Therefore, the following conclusions could be drawn;

1. That students' poor performances were basically as a result of a poor foundation given to them.
2. That students were exposed to little practice in the whole school year as a

result of largeness of English classes, ranging between fifty and seventy (50-70) students per class.

3. That students find it very difficult to manipulate the grammatical patterns and structures of the English language, with any degree of confidence and accuracy.
4. There was an overwhelming prevalence of the intrusion and interference of the native language on the target language in the area. There were not enough specialist teachers of English language in Anambra State.



5. Most teachers are not proficient so cannot give what they have not.
 6. The students lack the required resources, human and material, needed for proper study of the English language.
 7. The students' incompetence affect their performance in other subjects.
 8. Even the qualified teachers could not do more because of largeness of class.
 9. Only very few teachers are dedicated and committed to their job.
4. Carefully, guided oral composition lessons should from time to time, precede the written exercises in order to motivate the students. An oral composition lesson has a unique advantage of guiding students to organise their materials and thereby unconsciously develop logical orderliness in their writing.
 5. That conscious efforts should be made by the ministry of education, its stakeholders and school authority to reduce teacher-students ratio 1:30, as this would avail teachers enough attention for individualized teaching and learning attention. This would, also, provide enough time for them to concentrate on the teaching of writing skills, speech drills, and oral lessons among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. There is need for everyone concerned with the teaching of English language to contribute towards bettering, alleviating or possibly eradicating the problems of second language learning, and fostering understanding and development of the students in the area.
2. Students should be exposed early to the reading of Literature and literary works of good authors as this increase their verbal and written abilities.
3. Plenty of practice writing should take place otherwise the learner will not have enough practical experience for correct use of the structures in other to make them a habit. In fact, in an ideal situation, it is best and expedient to do two composition, oral exercises and comprehension exercises respectively every week.
6. Qualified teachers of the English language should be employed. They should be periodically engaged in seminars and workshops so as to upgrade them, while inefficient ones should be retrenched.
7. Teachers should be encouraged to emphasize the teaching of grammar for the fact that it is the criteria for proficiency in the language. Although knowledge of grammar alone does not make a good student, yet, it is a basic foundation.
8. Teachers of English language should be monetarily and socially motivated (via the paying of language allowance



as it is the case for science teachers) as this would bring about staff motivation and increase the number of devoted staff.

9. Good reading as well as teaching guides on English language should be provided to teachers from the government, stakeholders and school authorities.
10. Workshops, seminars, lectures and in-service training should be organised and encouraged by the ministry and its various agencies, to keep teachers abreast of the recent development and provide them with vast knowledge of their subject areas.
11. The ministry of education should work out an effective essay, comprehension, grammar, etc. syllabus and supervise their use effectively in schools to make sure that they are implemented. Such syllabus should reflect the modern Writing Process Approach (W P A).
12. Until English language ceases to be a *condition sine qua non* for admission into our higher citadels of learning, the laudable noise against use of Igbo language and any other local indigenous language in our schools should be seen as placing the cat before the mice. Language as we must know is a vehicle of speedy civilisation. Until our language is given prominence in academic pursuits and scholarly circle and as such, our scientific-technological

prowess remains a mere deceptive melange

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