

THE IMPACT OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE AND LANGUAGE ON THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGER STATE

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Abstract

Learning of English language has been one of the major challenges in secondary schools in Niger state. This study therefore examines the problem associated with teaching and learning of English language as a second language. Due to the fact that mother's tongue has a huge and important role to them. This study examine the impact of mother's tongue interference on the teaching of English language as a second language, to examine the impact of language transfer on the teaching of English language as a second language, to examine the impacts of students readiness to Learn, to examine the impact of availability of resources on the teaching of English language. The population for the study consisted of junior and senior secondary students in both public and private in Niger State. The sample size of the study consisted of one hundred and fifty (150) students from five (5) secondary schools in the area of the study. This research was carried out using the survey research design with the population of 100 student in both the public and private schools in Niger state. The purposive sampling method was used to select 150 participants, majority of the respondents were females (53%) the greatest proportion of the participants (45%) were in JSS 2. A structured questionnaire titled, "the problems associated with teaching of English language as a second language in Niger state". The research questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics while hypothesis were tested using regression analysis. To ensure validity of the instrument for this study, the questionnaire was vetted by research supervisor and other expert in the field and this covered the content validity of the instrument. The results show that there is a significant relationship between mother's tongues interference and English language. This was treated on the basis of the hypothesis formulated for this study. It was followed by conclusion drawn from the findings along the recommendation. The study clearly reveled understanding of the problem associated with teaching of English language as a second language in secondary schools in Niger state. It concluded that mother's tongue has an influence on the English language students. Based on the outcome of the study it was recommended that secondary students should make use of the information provided in this study through the findings to improve their learning of English language as a second language.

Introduction:

English became the official language of Nigeria when all its region amalgamated as a political entity at the beginning of the 20th century (Ola-Busari, 2014). Danladi (2013) opines that the diversity of languages in Nigeria is so clear that languages of people living within close proximity were tremendously different and unfathomable to one another. The need for a lingua

franca, a general language that every citizen can communicate with, heightened the need for the use of English language as Nigeria suffered from the problems that came with the multiplicity of languages (Obiegbo, 2016).

The quality of English learning and teaching till about the 1980s was impressively identified with the teachers' and learners' competence. This was achieved partly because of the high importance placed on the language as well as the opportunities it brought to the learners. The motivation to learn and remain proficient in the language grew amongst students at various levels of the educational system. Also, it served as a tool for inter-ethnic and cross-cultural communication in a multilingual setting in Nigeria (Akeredolu-Ale, 2007).

The use of English language has proven over time to be an essential component of the Nigerian curriculum. English as a language is also very important in Nigeria as it is the official language of the country. Generally, English is the major language of globalization, local and international trade, international relations, science, technology, and politics. English language is increasingly leading other languages in the global space whilst opening new frontiers (Hamisu, Sani, Umma, & Maryam, 2018). Evue asserts that one of the major reasons why English is significant to Nigeria education sector's growth is because it plays a pivot role as a medium of knowledge transfer in Nigerian schools (Evue, 2013).

Socially, the social linguistic situation in Nigeria has often seen the social network and other activities be conducted in English. In a nutshell, English is widely practiced and occupies a prominent function both at the workplace, in the media and as a medium of instruction in schools along with the three crucial indigenous languages as well. Politically, "we cannot promptly specify the number of languages spoken in Nigeria" as a nation. The multiplicity of languages in Nigeria is so obvious and egregious that languages of people living within a 25 kilometer radius are massively different and incomprehensible to one another. The implication of this complex language situation is the absence of established effective communications between the ethnic groups, which becomes the basis not only for bigotry and hatred but for resorting to the use of English as a predominantly official language. It also implies that the choice of any of the three indigenous languages as a national language certainly will deteriorate to disintegration or unpleasant feelings. This has influenced the essential character and the role of English in Nigeria as unifying compacts". English should provide an expected co-coordinating role as a way of inter-ethnic and international communications. During the early days the first type of English that served as a contact communication in Nigeria was a pidgin English, which has graduated to Creole in some riverine parts of Nigeria. From inception, English served a dual role in Nigeria, serving not only as a contact language between Nigerians who could interact among themselves on one hand, but also between Nigerians and Europeans. It is now not only a second language, but also the language of commerce, education, politics, law and administration of the entire country affairs, though in different usages and command. Knowledge of English is therefore an essential requirement for anyone to promote or live in any wider context of the community, no matter the variety of English. (By this, we want varieties which have been influenced according to purpose, geographical dispensation, and mother tongue.) It is this convenient texture of the English language that provides the group interaction and group relations varieties for inter-ethnic communication and gives individuals the sense of oneness, unity and loyalty – the few that is accessible. Even the ceremonious English as is taught in the formal settings (school) always

support the local texture – not used as an Englishman uses it. English in Nigeria is seen as a weapon because it provides an excellent representation of political supremacy (Danladi, 2013). English language is an irresistible language which aids the development of several nations, particularly the 3rd world nations. The language has kept them more relevant and to derive the maximum benefit from the opportunities that surround every area of human need, both for personal development and national advancement. This is one of the reasons why English language has flourished as the language of development in most developing countries of the world (Owolabi & Nnaji, 2013). In Nigeria, it is widely and popularly assumed that the mastery of English language is a defining attribute of an elite status as it correlates with other social makers such as post university education, a good job and comfortable incomes that come with it. In the education sector of Nigeria, English is the language of instructions in schools especially the upper level of primary schools, secondary schools and tertiary institutions. The use of English language is a prerequisite for admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria; and it has also been made a compulsory course to be included into the curriculum of all first year students in the universities as instructed by the National Universities Commission (NUC). It becomes imperative for University specialist English lecturers to wholly, effectively and efficiently provide a transparent change in the students (Obiegbu, 2016).

However, there has been a drastic and rapid decline in the quality of English teaching and learning in recent years. The situation seems to have worsen as it is now a major concern across Nigeria due to the recorded failure rate in English in the Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE) and National Council Examination (NECO) in recent years (Ola-Busari, 2014). It is a widespread motion that the standard of the use of English language in Nigeria is rapidly a concern for specialist English language teachers. Most students find it challenging to express themselves in English language in social gatherings and/or for academic purposes.

The mass failure of English language has become rampant amongst the Nigerian students at all educational level especially in entrance examinations like Senior Secondary Certificate Examination, National Examination Council, General Certificate Examination, etc. This has heightened the worries of several stakeholders and it has been and is a topic of discussion and also a focus for several researchers to help determine the problems surrounding these failures and also suggest and recommend solutions to help mitigate this problem (Olusoji, 2012).

Learning a foreign language has proven to be a long and quite complicated process because the learners will be required to understand all aspects of the new language (Brown, 2007). Learners of English as a second language find it quite complex because a sudden break from a familiar language to a non-familiar language could be quite difficult (Brown, 2007). Some of the challenges faced by learners of English as a second language are:

Cultural Differences: Culture is the totality of the way of life of people. Culture has to do with sense of belonging and non-belonging to a specific community with historical background, language, heritage, and myths.

The role of culture in learning a foreign language cannot be over-emphasized as the learner must or is expected to know almost everything about the new language. Hence, the difference in culture makes it quite difficult for learners to learn and understand English language.

Problems of immediate need: The system at which students are being taught English language at school level can be said to be for the purpose of passing tests and examinations only and not to prepare them for real life situations. This factor leaves learners to regurgitate the knowledge rather than rediscovering other aspects of the language (Kannan, 2009).

Negative Transfer: Negative transfer can be explained as using the same structure of the native language when speaking or communicating the new or foreign language. Learners of English language as a second language encounter the challenge of mother tongue interference as they usually try to transfer the acquired knowledge of their native languages to the foreign or second language. Language Transfer gives rise to interlingua errors which are based on language interference theory.

Students' Psychological Problem: This is a very essential challenge which is mostly overlooked by learners and teachers. Most learners of English language as a second language exhibit a fearful attitude towards the learning and usage of English especially in the presence of a more competent speaker. Speaking, writing and communicating with English language require a degree of confidence and readiness. Hence, learners should show more confidence while communicating in English in order to avoid incoherence and grammatical blunder.

Decline in Reading Culture: To confidently declare that one has read is to have comprehend what has been read. Unfortunately, there has been a drastic decrease in reading habit amongst students and the youth generally. The new wave of information technology has gripped the younger generation in a tenacious and fascinating manner.

Arbitrary Language: Yule (2014) asserts that English is an arbitrary language which means that there is no correlation or relationship between the form and the meaning. This factor poses to be a challenge for learners of English as a second language (Yule, 2014).

Problem of mother tongue interference in English language learning, language differences amongst the teachers and the students, students' psychological problem, insufficient time allocated to the teaching of English language, insufficient teaching materials, shortage of specialist teachers, etc are several problems that are associated with the teaching of English as a second language in Nigerian secondary schools.

Thus, this study seeks to examine the problems associated with the teachings of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.

The hypotheses to be tested for the purpose of this study are stated thus:

Hypothesis I

H₀: Mother tongue interference has no significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.

Hypothesis II

H₀: Language transfer has no significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.

Methodology:

To examine the problems associated with the teachings of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State, the study will adopt a survey research design.

The main population of this study will consist of 3 private and 2 public secondary schools with English language bias in Suleja local government area of Niger state.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The purposive sampling technique is adopted because it proved quite difficult to determine the exact number of English language students in all secondary schools in Suleja local government area of Niger State. Hence, the researchers will select the sample size based on registered secondary schools.

Instrument

The research instrument selected and used for this research work was a well-structured questionnaire, which was specifically designed to achieve the objectives of this study. The structured questioner was distributed to the selected secondary school English teachers for the purpose of the study and served as a major source of data. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section of the questionnaire was used to get general information about the students while the direct interview was used for the teachers. Second section contained questions and statements formulated with reference to the hypotheses. Their responses was placed in a Likert Scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) Strongly Disagree (SD) and Undecided (UD). The questionnaires will be self-administered by the researcher to the respondents.

3.4 Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

To ensure the validity of the instrument for this study, the questionnaire and direct interview questions was vetted by supervisor and any other expert in the field and this will cover the face validity of the instrument. The questionnaire will cover area of study which will cover the content validity of the instrument.

A Cronbach Alpha test was carried out to ascertain the reliability of the instrument.

Method of Data Analysis

The data obtained from this research was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. The inferential statistics that will be employed is regression analysis to test the stated hypotheses.

Results

Hypothesis One

H₀₁: Mother tongue interference has no significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.

Table 1 : Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the Impact of Mother Tongue Interference on Teaching of English as a Second Language

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	17.678	1.424		12.416	.000
	Mother Tongue Interference	-.048	.100	-.041	-.483	.630

a. Dependent Variable: Teaching of English as a Second Language

Table 1 revealed non-significant results ($\beta = -.041$, $t = -.483$, $p > .05$) leading to the upholding of the null hypothesis. It is therefore concluded that mother tongue interference has no significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.

Hypothesis Two

Ho₂: Language transfer has no significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.

Table 2: Simple Linear Regression Analysis for the Impact of Language Transfer on Teaching of English as a Second Language

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	10.399	1.305		7.970	.000
Language Transfer	.504	.097	.403	5.194	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Teaching of English as a Second Language

Table 2 revealed significant results ($\beta = .403$, $t = 5.194$, $p < .05$) leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis which stated that language transfer has no significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State, and the upholding of the alternative hypothesis. It is subsequently concluded that language transfer has a significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.

Discussion of Findings

This study examined some of the problems associated with the teaching of English Language in selected Nigerian secondary schools. Two null hypotheses were formulated and tested using the simple regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings were discussed hypothesis – by – hypothesis below.

The first null hypothesis stated that mother tongue interference has no significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State. This hypothesis was subjected to appropriate test of significance and found to be unsupported by the data collected and therefore untenable. It was subsequently rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis, leading to the conclusion that mother tongue interference has a significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State. This finding corroborated Brown (2007) who concluded in his study that learners of English as a second language find it quite complex because a sudden break from a familiar language to a non-familiar language could be quite difficult. This problem could be caused by linguistic distortion created by exposure to an earlier language (mother tongue).

The second null hypothesis stated that language transfer has no significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State. This hypothesis was analyzed and found to be unacceptable in light of participants' data. It was consequently rejected while the alternative hypothesis was upheld. It was ultimately concluded that language transfer has a significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State. This finding was in line with that of Yule (2014) who asserted that

English is an arbitrary language which means that there is no correlation or relationship between the form and the meaning and that this difficulty in language transfer poses a challenge for learners of English as a second language. Furthermore, this finding seemed to be indirectly confirming Evue's (2013) results that English is significant to Nigeria education sector's growth and plays a pivot role as a medium of knowledge transfer in Nigerian schools and therefore language transfer could be deduced to affect the teaching of English as a second language.

Summary of Findings

The summary of the major findings from this study is highlighted below:

- (i) Mother tongue interference has a significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.
- (ii) Language transfer has a significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.

Conclusion and Recommendation:

Based on the findings of this study it is concluded that each of mother tongue interference, language transfer, students' psychological problem, and availability of resources has a significant impact on the teaching of English as a second language in secondary schools in Niger State.

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