Tackling the Challenges of Teaching English Language as Second Language (ESL) In Nigeria

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Abstract: *English Language teaching and learning is faced with myriads of challenges ranging from overpopulation to inadequate human power, government inconsistent policies, lack of essential teaching facilities, students' laissez –faire attitude; mother tongue interference and many others. The highlighted problems are not only common scenarios of the government owned schools but also exist in private institutions although with little variance. Lack of adequate language specialistsas well as interlingua problem are some common features of schools in Nigeria and most parts of Africa. To solve these and many other problems, the paper opines that English learners must be extensive readers; teachers must reward efforts of learners so as to motivate their struggle to acquire the language skills; government as a matter of priority should make available necessary facilities that will empower teaching and learning of English and also school management should arouse the interest of English learners by providing relevant equipment and facilities for effective English teaching and learning.*

Keywords: *English language, challenges, teaching, learning, higher education*

I.   Introduction

English language is originally the language of the Angles which is later adopted as the language of classroom, government, business and commerce, education, mass media, literature and internal as well as external communication in Nigeria and most African countries. English according to Lawal (2006) in Olaoye (2013) "is the brazen penetrating force, as a "rapist", not sparing even 'French-another malevolent aggressor. The pervasive influence of English on other languages is in the area of homogenization. This refers to the increasing global similarity in the use of a particular language or particular languages. This means that English is used for almost similar purposes-official, co-equal, national, first language, second language, and other languages, the consequences of which are deadly."Nigeria according to Olaoye (2013)is a country made up of three nations, and each of these ethnic group nations is struggling for their survival. In Nigeria, agreeing on a national language is impossibility due to multilingalism and our population. This spells the importance of English in Nigeria.Danladi (2014)asserts that"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."

Although,English Languagehas been adopted as an official language many decades ago in Nigeria, the learners still face difficulties learning it for many reasons. A chief reason is the fact that every Nigerian is endowed with his or her mother tongue but compelled to learn in second language or English. Obinna (2010) states that" second language refers to the language a person learns on top of his first or natural language. Although in some situations, the second language may be learnt almost simultaneously with first language, generally it comes at a later stage in the process of social formation."Second language usually serves as a truce in a multilingual setting.Dada (2006) statesthat "Nigeria happens to be one of the 22 most linguistically diverse countries in the world. In Nigeria today, according to the 15th edition of the Ethnologue report for Nigeria, there are about 510 living languages co-existing with one another. It is interesting to note that apart from the many indigenous languages, which are of course the mother tongues of Nigerians, non-indigenous languages such as English, French, Arabic, German and Russian also exist. English has become a second language in Nigeria, while Pidgin English, with probably the largest number of speakers, has also emerged as a result of the contact of English with the indigenous languages." Nigeria, no doubt, is a nation that has witnessed a cross-current of linguistic activities due to her inherent multilingual nature coupled with her colonial experience under the British." Dada further opines   that the issue of language contact and language conflict exists at three distinct but interrelated levels viz: the social, psychological and linguistic axes of the contact situation. The social aspect is concerned with issues like language choice or language use, the psychological aspect has to do with language

attitude as well as language and ethnicity, while the focus of the linguistic aspects is on code-switching, interference, etc." Thus English being a second language is faced with many problems. This is as a result of its complex and inconsistent nature.

II.   Problems facing the learners of English language

Learning a foreign language may not be butter and bread experience due tolanguages' peculiarities and distinctiveness.No matter the similarities, two languages are not utterly the same thing. Learners of English as a second language find its learning difficult because sudden break from a familiar language to a non –familiar onecan be difficult thus various errors ranging from phonetical error to syntactic, morphological to semanticerrors etc. are committed. Some of the problems are highlighted below:

a.   Problems of Immediate need

According to Kannan (2009:2), students learn basic grammar at school level for the purpose of passing only in the tests and in the examinations and not to face any real life situations. Application-oriented advanced grammar is not taught in schools. Furthermore, adequate practice is not given to students to learn a language." This writer totally aligns with Kannan opinion. It is obvious that students only read to pass English language but are not totally committed to its mastery; probably because learners are onlytaught and expect to regurgitate the experience ratherthan allowing them to self -discover the intricacies involved in English Language.

b.   Problem of mother tongue (L1) interference in English language learning.

Second English language learners experience mother tongueinterference phenomenon which deals with problems a learner encounters when he transfers the acquired skills in his native or indigenous language (L1) to his second language (L2). The problems can be syntactic (grammatical), phonological (mispronounciation), semantic or morphological.Nzinga (1983:121) in Oluwole (2014) lamented the low performance of new entrants at theUniversity of Ilorin saying that "there is clear ignorance of most basic elements oflogical interference … and most of the students donot have the opportunity to undertake advancedreasoning tasks." Phonetically, learners of English as a second language find it difficult to pronounce certain English words because the sounds are absent from their native languages. Examples are dental sounds /θ/ in thin, this and/ð/ in them, that etc. ; and also palato-alveolar fricative sound /ʒ/ in measure, pleasure etc. Syntactically, the students employ plurality to honour elders.

Example 1
a.   My father arrived yesterday. (He arrived yesterday.)
O ti de lana. (Yoruba Language)
In an attempt to express this in line with his indigenous respectful syntactic structure, he says:
They arrived yesterday. (Won ti de lana.)
Example 2
b.   My elder sister is on her way home. (She is on her way home.)
To duly respect her, the speaker will rather say especially in Yoruba language that
They are on their way. (Won n bo loju ona.)
Example 3
Semantically, there is misuse of words like
c.My father is an academician. Instead of
My father is an academic.
d.   His junior brother is a rogue. Instead of
His younger brother is a rogue.

c.   Problem of shortage of specialist teachers in English

Another problem which English learners encounter is staff shortage. Shu'ara (2010:18) explained that"there are academic staff shortages across board particularly in the critical areas of science and technology; Over 60% of the academic staff in theNigerian University System is in the category of Lecturer I and below.These shortages are compounded by inter- and intra-sectoral brain drain.It furthers revealed that Colleges of Education has staff shortfall of 56.9%, Poly/Monotechnics 56.9% and Universities 39.1%.These have implications on thequality of teaching and learning especiallyat tertiarylevel." In my opinion, there should be one lecturer to between 20 and 50 students; however, what obtains in our higher institutions is the opposite. Most of the lecture halls where General courses are taught are usually overpopulated and since listening which is the first foundational skill cannot be done in a noisy and rowdy environment, learning is hampered. Moreover, facilitators easily lose control of the class except in situations where colleagues assist in class control.

d.   Students' Psychological Problem

A very important challenge confronting learners of English as a second language is students' fearful attitude towards the use and usage of English especially in the presence of a competent user. Achebein Danladi (2013) says "it was humiliating to have to speak to one's countryman in a foreign language, especially in the presence of the proud owners of that Language. They would naturally assume that ,one had no language of one's own'' (...Chinua Achebe, "Things falls apart'' pp. 214).Speaking English requires a measure of confidence and readiness, however if a speaker feels inadequate to speak it, it may lead to incoherence and incorrect expressions. This discussion between an undergraduate and his lecturer is apt:

Student: Good morning, ma.
Lecturer: Morning (with derision).At 2:00pm?
Student: Sorry ma, good afternoon.
Lecturer: Can I help you?
Student: Yes ma. My GNS 001 work?
 Lecturer: Your GNS 001 work or mark?What about it?
Student: It is find ma.
 Lecturer: Found or missing?
Student: My classmates informs me of the missing score, ma.
Lecturer: Have you forgotten your concord rules?
Student: Yes ma, I don't ma.
Lecturer: I'm afraid I have a class now; come back same time tomorrow.
Student:O.k. ma.

The dialogue clearly indicates a psychologically disturbed student and its consequences on his expressions. Oluwole (2014:121) explains that "from a number of continuous assessment and examinations conducted for the students over the years, a number of errors and deviant forms in language use have been noticed." According to him, such errors among others include:
i. a poor knowledge of tenses and sequences of tenses
ii. weakness in concord
iii. winding constructions due to illogical thinking
iv. wrong use of prepositions
v. direct translation from mother tongue thought process to English
vi. inability to apply appropriate reading speed to reading material etc.

e.   Lack of basic and necessary equipment
Lack of basic facilities and equipment is a challenge that hinders effective teaching and learning of English Language. Most schools and colleges in Nigeria lack essential equipment which could have strengthen learners' skills. Most schools do not have language laboratory and well equipped libraries.
According to Oluwole (2014:123-124) other challenges confronting the teaching and learning of grammar in Nigeria are:

Language transfer (Interlingua).Language transfer according to himgives rise to interlingua errors which are based onthe interference theory. The transfer of learner's first languagepatterns into those of the second language constitutes one of the basesfor interlingua interference. When this transfer has a negative effecton the second language, then there will be problems.

IntralingualErrors in this category reflect general characteristics of rules oflearning. E.g. Over-generalization or faulty application of rules, thereby *producing* incorrect forms of analogy. Learners make inductivegeneralizations about the target language system based on the data towhich they are exposed. As a result of the restriction based on thedata, learners who are ignorant of the exceptions to certain rules ofgrammar generalize and produce incorrect forms by analogy." This makes learners to commit plural error, tense error, error related to abstract noun etc

Faulty instructional materials and instructional techniques
Some problems such as the aforementioned arise mainly from faultyinstructional materials and the pedagogical shortcomings of theteacher.

The inconsistency in the orthography of English
Spelling has been identified as a problem related to the nature ofEnglish. This is a problem area to both speakers of English as asecond language and the native speakers of English.

Solutions to Challenges Facing the Learners of English language
Reformed attitude
The English Language teaching and learning process needs reappraisal so as to tackle the challenges. According to Szynalski (2014),"all English learners would like to speak English well. They are excited at the idea of being able to communicate in English fluently. However, they usually do not care about the learning process itself. For most learners, learning English is a duty; something that they have to, but don't want to do. They don't see pleasure in learning English. Most learners would like to speak English well but don't like to be learning English." This problem must be overcome because it is not possible to be a competent speaker of English without giving it the attention it deserves in reading, studying, writing etc. It is not possible to master the intricacies involved in the language without total commitment to it. Essentially, English learners must read because reading in English improves pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills.Szynalski (2014) suggested the followings for learners of English:

- read English sentences and think about their structure
- learn new words from a dictionary
- write a correct English sentence by consulting dictionaries, grammar guides, and the Web
- practice the pronunciation of English sounds and words

According to August & Shanahan (2006), for effective mastery of English, the learners are expected to comprehend the following:
 a. Native language literacy.To them, when native language oral and written skills are effectively leveraged, oral and written literacy knowledge and abilities can transfer to the acquisition of English literacy, accelerating the learning time.

b.Similarity of native language to English.The more closely the student's native language and English are related, the more students can apply knowledge of similarities in vocabulary and grammar in the two languages to learning foundational literacy skills in English, such as spelling of familiar words or determination of where a sentence starts and ends.

According to Aduwa-Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2006),"a rich and stimulating language environment during the early years and beyond is essential to the development of verbal and intellectual skills necessary for language learning." Malinowski (1991) asserted that composition writing is a difficult skill to acquire, and recommended therefore, that teachers must use a variety of methods for teaching English Language. Ellis and Tomlison (1980) recommended basic skillsof spelling, punctuation, linguistic skills and convention of style to teach learners so that they can write essays proficiently. Reyner et al (2001:57) ascertained that "many good teachers are adaptive rather than rigid in their approach to teaching children and only loosely base their instruction on a given method."

In Nigeria, the teaching and learning of English is majorly done through the use of textbooks, dictionaries, chalkboards, workbooks and posters. Most schools lack modern technological devices like audio and video tapes, language laboratories, e textbooks, flash cards, internet facilities, newspapers etc. Thus as a nation, there is need to confront this issue so as to empower the teaching and learning of English. Kolawole (1998) equally stated that the teaching of English language is bedeviled with many problems such as inadequate period of teaching, method of teaching and lack of adequate and useful resources.To solve the problem, Cleve (1992), and Oluikpe (1979) advocated the use of methods such as guided controlled and free writing techniques in essay writing.

III.   Conclusion and Recommendations
The paper highlights the challenges which English Language learners face and equally proffer solutions. Essentially, effective teaching and learning of English will be realistic only when both the learned and learner demonstrate readiness to pay the sacrifices for its attainment. It is therefore recommended that
a.   English learners must be extensive readers.
b.   Teachers must reward efforts of learners so as to motivate their struggle to acquire the language skills.
c.   Government as a matter of priority should make available necessary facilities that will empower teaching and learning of English.
d. Parents should arouse the interest of their wards by providing needed materials and conducive learning and studying environment at homes.

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