



LINGUISTIC CONSTRAINTS IN THE USE OF ENGLISH IN NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates linguistic constraints in the use of the English language in Nigeria. The study further explores the ascendancy of the English language in Nigeria from historical and contemporary perspectives. The paper selects Error Analysis theories as the preferred linguistic framework upon which the study is anchored. Findings revealed that interlingual and intralingual influences constitute major linguistic impediments to the Nigerian users of the English language, and significantly account for the flagrant abuse of the language in their spoken and written discourses with its attendant consequences on the sustainable educational development of the country. It was recommended, among others, that Nigerian users of English should endeavour to acquaint themselves with the knowledge of the inherent linguistic and structural discrepancies and inconsistencies not only between the Nigerian indigenous languages and English but also within the English language itself. There is also the need for writers of the English language textbooks in Nigeria to explicitly simplify those difficult and confusing linguistic rules of the language and their exceptions, while Nigerian users of the language should make constant reading of literature books written in good English a necessity.

Keywords: Linguistic performance, linguistic constraints, English Language, sustainable educational development

INTRODUCTION

The supremacy and indispensability of the English language in Nigeria are so conspicuous that there is no longer any contention that the language has become an integral part of Nigeria despite the age-long clamour in some quarters for its replacement with an indigenous Nigerian language. This status quo has remained unchanged till this day, and has even become more expedient in the contemporary civilization considering the fact that the much anticipated sustainable development which Nigeria yearns for would remain chimerical in the absence of the English language. Obviously, it has become indisputable that the indispensable roles of the English language in the affairs of the country justify its ascendancy. The position of English not only as the nation's official language but also the language of education, mass media, politics, religion, commerce and industry etc. may not be successfully contested by any other language in the country.

However, in spite of the increasing need to use the English language effectively and efficiently in Nigeria, research findings indicate that many Nigerians demonstrate high degree of incompetence in the language. This is unfortunately evident in the enormous errors that often characterize their written and spoken discourses. Corroborating the aftermath of this circumstance, Onuekwusi (2016:7) laments that there is hardly any brochure, invitation card or poster in our environments that is completely without errors. He remarks that these items most often contain errors of concord, spelling and diction.

Indisputably, the incompetence in the use of the English language impacts the education system negatively since the language is the sole medium of academic instruction throughout the country. It is incontestable that the ability to communicate effectively and the laying of the sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking may not be realized outside the medium of the English language (National

policy on education, 2012). This explains why concerted efforts are being made to educate Nigerians in the language. Notwithstanding this effort, competence and performance of the English language users in Nigeria still leave much to be desired. For example, Onuekwusi (2016:7) reports a case of one of the prospective students of a Business Faculty in Nigerian institution who upon answering an examination question on the role of the Central Bank of Nigeria wrote that: “the major road (not role) of centre (not central) Bank of Nigeria is in Abuja where you flow (not follow) to Ikeja in Lagos so that you bus (burst out?) in Nigeria.”

Indeed, the foregoing production depicts a high degree of incompetence in the use of the English language as well as inaccuracy in thought and speech. It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine linguistic constraints in the use of the English language in Nigeria, with a view to ascertaining its implication for the sustainable educational development of the nation. In doing this, the paper investigates the degree of linguistic competence and performance of Nigerian users of English. It further examines the fundamental linguistic constraints that hinder effective performance in the language among Nigerians and finally discusses the implication of the use of the English language in Nigeria's sustainable educational development.

The Ascendancy of the English Language Usage in Nigeria: Historical and Contemporary Issues.

It has often been argued that English is a language of historical luck in Nigeria taking cognizance of the situations that resulted in its implantation, spread, wide acceptance and domination in the country's sociolinguistic and political life. The arrival of the British into Nigeria inevitably brought about the introduction of its language -- English into the country. However, the earliest contact

between Nigeria and Europe was made with the arrival of the Portuguese into the Nigerian territories in the 15th century. This occurred in places such as Warri, Brass, Calabar etc., predating the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

The unwillingness of the Portuguese merchants to learn the native language of their host resulted in the invention of adulterated English widely known as Pidgin English. This was particularly to make communication between the two groups of people possible for the purpose of business transaction. Akindele and Adegbite (2005) inform us that subsequently the unpurified English of the coast began to undergo refinement following the arrival of the European missionaries in 1842 as they introduced Standard English for the purpose of evangelism and education. In other words, Standard English, in contrast with pidgin, did not play any crucial role in Nigerian society until the 19th century when white missionaries began to arrive in Nigeria in steadily increasing number (Jowitt.1991:25) with the holy Bible and reading and writing materials for evangelism and western education.

At the inception of western education in Nigeria, pupils were taught nature study, craft, agriculture and hygiene, all in their mother tongue. However, this did not last long as the colonial administration needed the assistance of men and women who could communicate effectively and efficiently in English to carry out some menial official activities for the administration. Consequently, the need to set priority in the teaching and learning of English became glaring. Thus, in 1882, the English language was made not only a compulsory subject in Nigerian schools but also a medium of academic instruction. According to Bahdeh (2004:12), the supremacy of English in Nigeria began right from the time it was compulsorily made a means of training the urgently needed manpower to run the new government

agencies and services. The reason for this arrangement was partly to train clerical officers, messengers and interpreters for the smooth-running of the colonial administration.

There was no doubt that the introduction of English was overwhelmingly welcomed in Nigeria from the initial time. Children were motivated to speak the language as it conferred on them enviable status and placed them above their contemporaries who could not speak the language. Baldeh (2004:15) cited in Kelleghan (1961) remarks that the motivation to learn English in Nigeria is strong as it is a decided advantage to know the language well. He further states that a good knowledge of English opens the door to education, skilled job, positions in commercial establishments and the civil service. According to Tomori (1977), among the adult members of the Nigerian society, there was then a heightened desire to learn English. He reports that:

The adults wanted to learn English for practical necessity, economic advantage, status symbol, religious motives and civic responsibility. Of these, practical necessity was the motivating factor. Respondents wanted to read and write their own letters because of (i) difficulty of getting someone at their leisure (ii) to avoid sharing their secrets with the reader (iii) the pride of a literate person reading to an illiterate. Besides, they wanted to be able to sign their names. Many of them complained that it was a shame to have their thumbs blackened every time they had to sign a document. There was also the overriding desire to

read receipts and street names, give the dates of births of their children in schools and clinics, and to be able to read their children's school reports.

The foregoing research report vividly captures the motivation and desire of most Nigerians to learn and use English at the time of its earliest spread in the country. This indeed accounts for the acceptance and ascendancy of the English language in Nigeria,

In the contemporary time, the relevance of English in the affairs of Nigeria is even more profound. The unfortunate amalgamation of the different sociocultural and linguistic groups in Nigeria in 1914 by Fredrick Lord Lugard significantly gave English an undeserved status in Nigeria as it has continued to become irreplaceable so long as Nigeria continues to exist as an indivisible political entity. To this end, English is at present the most important language in Nigeria as it is solely the nation's (i) language of interethnic communication (ii) language of accommodation, participation and social mobility (iii) medium of academic instruction (iv) official language (v) language of mass media and politics (vi) language of commerce and industry etc. It is for the above reasons that it seems impossible to replace English with any other indigenous language in Nigeria, hence, its acceptance and national spread.

However, a major constraint at the present age is the infelicitious use of English in the country both as a means of communication in the society and as a language of education. According to Jowitt (1991: 25), one of the paradoxes of Nigeria's current language situation is that though the general position of English in national life is perhaps stronger than it has ever been, the quality of English spoken and written by Nigerians is perceived to have been deteriorating over a long period

of time. Indeed, the communicative strength of English language written and spoken in Nigeria leaves much to be desired as most of the speakers' expressions are characterized by errors that sometimes distort meaning and result in breakdown in communication.

What then is responsible for poor communicative competence? It should be recalled that before the introduction of English as a medium of academic instruction and as an official language of the nation, the medium of communication between the colonial masters and the natives was Pidgin English. Lord Lugard himself was not interested in having Standard English taught in the colony but rather was more interested in having effective administration (Ogu, 1992:93). The implication of these, according to Umera-Okeke (2009:184), is that "the cornerstone of the British introduction of the teaching of the English language was not based on the evolution of a "standard" English but on the emergence of a fairly communicative English." Therefore, right from the beginning, there have been variations and deviations in English spoken and written in Nigeria compared to the British Standard English. Till this day, the quality of the English language of many Nigerians has continued to deteriorate unabatedly as the years go by, leading to the formation of habit inaccuracy in thought and speech and sometimes in communication breakdown among users in sociolinguistic experience.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Error Analysis theory propounded by Stephen Pit Corder. This theory constitutes the most fundamental approach employed in the analysis of errors which second and foreign language learners commit in their effort to use the target language for communication.

Contrastive linguistic analysis was so essential to linguistic study around the 19th and 20th century Europe when the objective of

the exercise was exclusively to ascertain the historical and generic relationship between languages. The essence was to ascertain the areas of the second language which constitute difficulty for the learner and which result in the learner's unconscious transfer of features of his mother tongue into the target language. However, as time progressed, research findings in the 1960s began to reveal that not all errors committed by the second language learner are attributed to interlingual influences. It became clear that there are some errors not caused by mother tongue interference which the contrastive linguistic theory could neither predict nor account for. This revelation resulted in the emergence of error analysis as an alternative to contrastive analysis which was found inadequate to satisfactorily explicate learner errors.

The theory of error analysis became popularized in the 1960s courtesy of Stephen Pit Corder and his colleagues. It is comparatively a recent analytical procedure designed to provide empirically objective and reliable analysis of learner errors. Error analysis is simply a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign or second language. It is a linguistic activity which systematically investigates the language learning process so as to discover learners' problems (error) and correct them (Bright, 1992:296; Uwadiegwu, 2017:167).

Error analysis is an important theoretical framework for handling errors that occur in the language learning process. It is a useful analytical procedure for accurately and objectively studying, analyzing and interpreting learner errors in respect of their causes, sources, kinds, frequency of occurrence and remedial strategies. The theory sees error as a systematic deviation from the acceptable norms of a target language, resulting in a breach of the codes of a target language (Corder, 1974:258). Error

analysis may be conducted to ascertain how one knows a language; find out how a person learns a language and obtain information on common difficulties encountered in language learning as an aid in language pedagogy (Richards. 1978:96). This can be effectively done by a careful collection, description and analysis of learner interlanguage in order to see how it differs from the forms a native speaker of the language would have produced in similar circumstance.

Linguistic Constraints in the Use of the English Language in Nigeria

There is no doubt that the performance of many Nigerians in the use of the English language, including learners in higher institutions, leaves much to be desired. This is evident in the grammatical constructions these users produce in the English language which are characterized by various kinds of syntactic and morphological errors. The most embarrassing is the incompetence displayed in mispronunciation of some common English words. Onuekwusi (2016:7) remarks that the label of our warped learning and use of English are everywhere for us to see. There are several factors responsible for this widely acknowledged anomaly. However, the two most prominent of the causes of this abysmal performance in the language are interlingual and intralingual problems. They constitute significant impediments in the users' efforts to achieve proficiency in the English language.

Interlingual Constraints in the Use of the English Language among Nigerians.

Interlingual problems are part of the major causes of incompetent use of the English language in Nigeria. This is particularly because of the structural discrepancies between the English language and Nigerian indigenous languages. Actually, there is hardly any two languages that are similar in all ramifications. Even where languages share similarities or features, each language

is usually marked with peculiar characteristics which make it different from another language (Onuigbo and Eyisi, 2009:87). The Nigerian environment typifies the “un-English” linguistic environment in that out of the 516 indigenous languages in the country, none shares any relationship with English genetically. The English and Igbo languages, for instance, are different in terms of genetic relationship and classification. Oluikpe and Onwuta (2016:59) state that the English language belongs to the Germanic group of Indo-European languages that have common dialect of a common ancestor called Proto-Germanic, while the Igbo language, on the other hand, belongs to the Benue Congo family of the Niger Kordofania of African languages.

As a result of the above generic and structural differences between English and Nigerian indigenous languages, users of the English language in Nigeria encounter interlingual problems. This has to do with the transfer of elements of their native languages into the English language. This is technically referred to as mother tongue interference or interlingual influence. Interlingual problems arise as a result of the influence of the mother tongue on the target language which a learner is struggling to acquire or learn. Transfer has to do with using what is already known about a language to enhance comprehension and production of the second language (Opara, 2016:85). Interlingual transfer could be positive or negative. In cases where the target language differs markedly from the native language, negative transfer occurs, but in a situation where the first language and the target language share similarities structurally, positive transfer occurs. By implication, influence of the native language can impede or facilitate the learning of the second language. Positive transfer facilitates learning while negative transfer impedes learning, especially if the first language is

allowed to impose itself on the target language (Ellis, 2002:29).

It is the imposition of structural elements of the mother tongue on the second language that results in the production of deviant forms of the target language, which are regarded as errors. Interlingual problems can manifest themselves at all levels of linguistic analysis. However, it is usually more evident at the phonological and syntactic levels of language. We shall illustrate this briefly by stressing some instances of this interference in the language of an Igbo speaker of the English language in the areas of syntax and phonology.

The Syntactic level of language is one of the major areas in which interlingual problems manifest in the English language usage of many Nigerians. The reason that is often advanced for this is the apparent differences in the syntactic structures and patterns between the English language and indigenous languages in Nigeria. The Igbo speaker of English, for example, is bound to use English inappropriately if he/she sticks to the syntactic patterns of the Igbo language while forming sentences in the English language as this would inevitably result in transliteration. In this circumstance, such a speaker would speak English as if he/she is speaking the Igbo language. This is why it is not uncommon to hear some Igbo bilinguals make the following erroneous sentences in the English language:

- (i) Let me **come and be going**. (ii) The boy is always **making mouth**.
- (iii) I don't talk to her because she **has a bad mouth**. (iv) The novel you gave me is very **sweet**.
- (v) I wanted to **follow** him to the party last night.

Undoubtedly, a second language speaker of English who makes the foregoing sentences has displayed his/her incompetence at the

syntactic level of the English language. This is because such a speaker has unconsciously transferred elements and structural patterns of his/her mother tongue (Igbo in this case) into English, thereby, producing deviant forms of the language.

At the phonological level, many Nigerian users of the English language who are incompetent in the language experience profound difficulties in articulating some vowel sounds of the language. For example, the ignorant speaker does not actually recognize and observe the differences between the long and short vowel sounds in words where they occur such as /i/, /i:/, /u/, /u:/, as in /ship/, /sheep/; /pull/, /pool/, /sit/, /seat/ etc. There is also difficulty in the pronunciation of the schwa sound / / in words where it occurs such as 'ago', 'about', 'teacher' etc. Besides, there is mispronunciation of some diphthongs such as /ei/, as in 'shape', 'say', 'play'; /i / as in 'idea', 'here', 'Idiom'; / u/ as in 'ago', 'home', 'slow', and /u / as in 'poor', 'during', 'tour', etc. Since these diphthongs are not found in his mother tongue, the learner usually substitutes these strange sounds with the sounds he feels are nearest to them in his native language. This sort of escape route eventually results in phonological errors due to the negative transfer of elements of the speaker's mother tongue into English.

In the area of consonant sounds, negative transfers and errors are minimal because so many English consonants have their somewhat equivalents in Igbo sound system. Therefore, in most cases, the learner achieves positive transfer effortlessly. However, the English consonants /ʔ/ and /ð/, the voiced and voiceless dental fricative sounds, respectively are not found in Igbo sound system. As a result, pronunciation error occurs whenever the learner encounters words where these sounds appear. It is for this

reason that some English words such as 'strength', 'think', 'them', 'this' etc. are wrongly pronounced. The user, in most cases, wrongly substitutes /ʔ/ with /t/ and /ð/ with /d/, which are sounds obtainable in his native language and eventually mispronounces the words.

The ignorant user encounters interlingual problems in syllable placement in English words and sentences. There is greater problem in consonant clusters because the Igbo language has no consonant clusters. This accounts for why words such as 'bread', 'umbrella' etc. are wrongly pronounced as the learner declusters the sounds by inserting vowel sounds in between the clusters. By so doing, he/she pronounces 'buredi' instead of 'bread', 'umburela' instead of 'umbrella', which are erroneous forms in the English language.' Also, the same anomaly applies to stress placement where the learner most times gives prominence to every syllable in the English word by pronouncing them with the same pitch. In addition, the ignorant learner, in most cases, wrongly stresses both content and grammatical words in the target languages. But the native speakers normally stress only the content words and unstress the grammatical words in a sentence so that the desired meaning could be effected (unless in the case of emphatic or contrastive stress).

In respect to intonation, most Nigerian speakers of English do not observe intonation patterns of the English language. This error could be attributed to the fact that most native languages in Nigeria, including Igbo, are tonal languages whereas English is a stress-timed language. So, English does not use tone markings but rather uses intonation marks — the rising tune, the falling tune, the rising-falling and falling-rising tunes in connected speech. The absence of these phonological features in the learner's language most often results in phonological errors. For instance, a typical Nigerian speaker of English does not often use rising

tune to indicate when he is asking a question such as "Are you a student?" He may not also use the falling tune to show that he is making a declarative sentence such as "The Lord is merciful", as it is obtainable among native speakers of English. These phonological errors occur mainly due to the phonological differences between the English language and Nigerian indigenous languages.

Intralingual Constraints in the Use of the English Language among Nigerians

It is obviously not all errors that second language users of the English language commits are as a result of the influence of the first language. Indeed, a great deal of errors is made owing to the inherent inconsistencies or irregularities in the English language itself. Contrary to the position of the contrastive linguists that incompetent use of a second language emanates from the structural differences between the two languages in contact, research findings have cast doubts on the validity of the claim as it has been proved that transfer did not often occur when there were differences between the first and second language (Ellis, 2002:29).

Actually, many errors found in the language of the second language user of English reflect interlingual problems and not necessarily transfer. Interlingual constraints have to do with the issues that result in the wrong use of English caused by the complex and inconsistent nature of the grammatical and morphological rules of the English language. These inherent irregularities that characterize the English language contribute significantly to the erroneous and incompetent use of English by many Nigerian users and learners of the English language. A case in point is the error that occurs in the use of tenses in English, especially the irregular verbs, which result from structural irregularities within the verb

system of the language. This inconsistency which startles the learner equally extends to pluralization of nouns. For example, a second language learner of English finds it difficult to decipher why he/she is allowed to add “-s” to words like “boy”, “chair”, “book” to form their plurals whereas it is not so with nouns like “staff”, “furniture”, “information”, “luggage” etc. Commenting on this state of affair in the English language system, Onuigbo and Eyisi (2009: 91) aver that:

The problems of teaching and learning of English language in a second language situation are not just interference problems but also problems resulting from inherent structural irregularities within the target language itself. Every language and not just English has some problems that result from illogicality in language issues. But it is not always logical that the language behaves in a special way in a given context, it must behave the same way in all situations. As we all know, conventionality in language allows for the use of the language according to the unwritten laws of the linguistic community.

The widespread misuse of English especially at the syntactic and morphological levels which abounds in Nigerian society is largely attributed to the lack of knowledge of the confusing rules of the language and their exceptions.

Uwadiogwu (2017:163) rightly observed that some foreign words borrowed into English retain their pronunciations, past forms and spelling forms, thereby, generating likely

tense, spelling, grammatical and pronunciation errors for the second language user of English. For instance, the plural forms of these words are most likely to confuse and startle many Nigerian speakers of English: *agendum* (singular) - *agenda* (plural), *stadium* (singular) – *stadia* (plural), *datum* (singular) – *data* (plural), *forum* (singular) – *fora* (plural). Also, the rules guiding plural realization in the English language requires one to use either '-s', '-ies' or '-es' (as in *boy* -- *boys*, *church* -- *churches* and *lady* -- *ladies*). However, it is not on all words that these morphemes are needed for plural formation. Some nouns require zero morpheme as in '*sheep* -- *sheep*', '*equipment* – *equipment*,' to form their plurals. Others realize plurality through internal vowel change as in '*man* -- *men*'; others yet realize their plural forms through other radical morphological manipulations that have no direct relationship with the singular form as in “*child* -- *children*”. (Onuigbo and Eysis, 2009).

The implication of these is that the ignorant user who is not conversant with the morphological and syntactical rules guiding English as well as their exceptions would inevitably produce erroneous sentences in the language. Little wonder one hears many Nigerian speakers make expressions such as

- (i) We have supplied those **equipments** to the workers
- (ii) All our **luggages** were thoroughly searched at the airport
- (iii) I have **casted** my vote, etc.

To this end, Opara (2016:163) opines that since the irregular nature of the English language could be a source of errors, learning activities should be built around these complex aspects of the language. This can only be achieved through personal commitment by a way of conscious learning not only through reliance on exposure to

learning experiences but also through voracious reading of good books as well as listening to competent speakers of the language.

Competence and Performance in the English Language: The Nigeria Experience

The fundamental objective of any second or foreign language learning is the acquisition of an appreciable level of skills and competences in the target language to enable the learner use the language appropriately in sociolinguistic experience or speech event. Incontrovertibly, before one uses a language in practical ways, one must be competent in that language. The concepts of competence and performance were introduced into the broad file of linguistics by Noam Chomsky in 1965 as a way of distinguishing between one's knowledge of a language and one's actual production (usage) of the language. Competence itself denotes underlying knowledge of a system, event or fact; a non-observable ability to do something or an inherent skill resident inside a person. Performance, on the other hand, is an overtly observable and concrete manifestation of competence.

In language study, linguistic competence refers to the internalized knowledge of a language possessed by a native speaker of a language. It is the possession of adequate knowledge to use a language effortlessly in at all levels of linguistic organization – phonologically, syntactically, semantically, socially etc. Chomsky (1965) defines linguistic competence in this regard as the speaker's knowledge of what constitutes a well-formed sentence in a particular language. A native speaker of a language is born with the innate ability and knowledge to use his/her language. But in the case of a second language user, competence is achieved through dogged effort in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, Chomsky's competence is a linguistic model

which shows what speakers of a language know when they know a language (Akmajian, Richard, Ann & Robert, 2010: 6). This encompasses the user's knowledge of the grammar of the language, its meaning, sound system, and of course, all the pieces of the language and how those pieces fit together to communicate meaning.

Linguistic performance is the concrete manifestation of competence. It reflects not just what speakers know about the language they use but also the actual use of the language in real life situations. Performance in this case entails actual production and comprehension (speaking, writing, listening and reading) in linguistic events. Anagbogu, Mba and Eme (2010:27) see linguistic performance as the action of putting into practice the knowledge of the language which a speaker has internalized. Linguistic performance, therefore, has to do with the actual use of a language in practical situations, the exhibition and demonstration of competence in a language one learns or uses. It is expedient to ascertain the degree of this performance in a second language situation because it is only when one makes a production in the target language that we can judge whether his/her competence in the language has improved or not.

In the case of the English language usage in Nigeria, it is indisputable that so many users of the language demonstrate high degree of incompetence in the language which is explicitly attested to by their poor performance in the language. It is clear that a greater number of Nigerian populace use the language in formal and pidgin status, amounting to about 75% of the entire population (Onuekwusi, 2017:9). However, majority of these users flagrantly abuse morphosyntactic and phonological rules of the language, resulting in the production of erroneous forms of the language. The situation is even more disheartening among

learners of English in our educational institutions. The poor performances of these students are evident going by their results in the English language in external examinations. For instance, statistics from the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) reveal abysmal performance in the

English Language for over a decade now. The results of the Nigerian students in English language in the last ten years are presented in the table below:

S/N	Year	Number of Candidates in Nigeria	Percentage of Credit Pass and above	Percentage of Pass	Percentage of Failure
1	2007	346337	29.94	35.68	26.55
2	2008	358961	46.02	24.43	16.54
3	2009	324660	50.28	23.83	14.60
4	2010	1351557	33.38	35.44	31.18
5	2011	1540250	55.35	24.1	20.55
6	2012	1658887	58.51	22.73	16.44
7	2013	1660056	51.62	24.59	21.29
8	2014	1636103	29.55	30.30	28.17
9	2015	1603890	57.2	27.10	14.06
10	2016	1484034	70.92	19.47	7.24

Source: West African Examinations Council office, Enugu, Nigeria.

The table above lays bare the performances of Nigerian students in English Language external examinations organized by WAEC for ten consecutive years. A critical analysis of the results reveals that Nigerian students generally have been performing poorly in the English Language examinations. This conclusion is based on the fact that at least a credit pass in English is required for a candidate to be offered admission into any higher institution in Nigeria. The implication is that any candidate who scores below a credit pass in English is deemed to have failed the examination. Therefore, considering the percentage of credit pass and above as indicated in the table, majority of

the candidates failed English in these years under review. The situation is even more worrisome against the backdrop of the fact that examination malpractices have often characterized external examinations in some parts of the country in recent times. This abysmal performance in the English language by both students and other members of the Nigerian society is a testament to the degree of difficulty Nigerian users of English encounter in the learning and use of the formal variety of the language permissible in competitive examinations.

Implication of the Use of the English Language in Nigeria's Sustainable

Educational Development.

The English language has unarguably made itself a significant instrument of sustainable development in Nigeria. Considering the indispensable roles of the language in the country's educational development, no one is left in doubt that the educational development which the country yearns for would remain a mirage without appreciable level of competence and performance in the language by the learner at all levels of education. *The National Policy on Education* (2012) succinctly states that the “inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy, the ability to communicate effectively and the laying of the sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking cannot be realized outside the medium of the English language.” This is why it is imperative that those who use the language must use it correctly, especially when it has to do with teaching and learning. This is because its incorrect use leads to formation of habit of inaccuracy in thought and speech, which makes it difficult for the learner to acquire adequate knowledge of the language and affects his performances in other areas of study (Baldeh, 2004:14).

In order to ensure that the sustainable development needed in the Nigerian education sector is realized, proper groundwork has to be laid in the English language development which would impact generally on the acquisition of broad-based knowledge to drive other sectors of the Nigerian economy. This discourse will now examine the implication of the use of the English language for some relevant stakeholders involved in the teaching and learning as well as promotion of the English language in Nigeria.

Implication for the Nigerian Government

Governments at all levels are saddled with the responsibility of providing worthwhile education to all the citizenry. Since English is

not only an official language in Nigeria but also a medium of academic instruction at all levels of education in the country, training and retraining of the English language teachers should be a serious priority of government. Furthermore, provision of learning infrastructure should be made available to the English language teachers. The old tradition of assigning English courses to teachers who did not major in English language should be jettisoned. In fact, government has to see the poor performance of students in English as a huge source of concern, and so, device various means of arresting the ugly situation.

Implication for the Ministry of Education

The various ministries, commissions and boards that oversee the education system have the duty of ensuring quality control and adherence to best practices. Thus, it is necessary that the teaching of English language teachers are monitored and evaluated periodically to see that standards are maintained as regards content delivery. This is crucial because any deficiency in the teaching and learning of English would definitely have reverberating consequences on the other subjects studied in school, and eventually lead to a fall in the standard of education. In this circumstance, achievement of sustainable education in the country becomes unattainable.

Implication for English Language Teachers

The English language teachers are indeed major players in the development process of the Nigerian education system. Consequently, it is expedient that they strive to render their best services to the learners. To do this effectively, they have to develop themselves through in-service training, workshops, seminars and conferences so as to remain abreast of current trends in the profession. This would forestall teacher-induced errors in language teaching and

learning process, and also enhance professionalism in the discharge of their noble responsibilities. It is equally important that they engage in research to unravel the problems associated with the teaching and learning of the English language in a second language situation, with a view to minimizing the identified constraints.

Implication for Students and their Parents.

It is essential for students to understand that success both in academic work and in the wider society in Nigeria is not possible without adequate knowledge of the English language. Poor use of the English language has persisted among the present students as attested to by the yearly results of the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria. Apart from the nonchalant attitudes of the students over their studies, they perform below average in English because the language does not receive family and social reinforcement. Therefore, both the students and their parents have to see the need for learners to achieve grammatical and communicative competence in the English language to ensure adequate participation in the society as well as success in academic pursuit.

Conclusion

The acquisition of appreciable degree of competence in the English language is a daunting task wherever the language is learnt and used in a second or foreign language situation. This is because users in either of the situations are not only linguistic adults in their own indigenous languages but have also been so acclimatized with their native languages which meet their overall linguistic needs. This circumstance gives rise to incompetent use of the target language. This paper examines these linguistic issues (interlingual and intralingual factors) from the perspective of the use of English as a second language in Nigeria, with a view to investigating linguistic constraints in the use of the language in the country. The study identified structural linguistic differences between the English

language and indigenous languages in Nigeria, as well as certain inherent discrepancies within the English language itself as factors that constitute significant impediments to the Nigerian users of English. The paper, therefore, concludes that interlingual and intralingual influences are the fundamental constraints which hinder effective competence and performance of many Nigerian users of English. This thus accounts for their flagrant misuse of the language in their written and spoken discourses with its far-reaching consequences in the educational development of the nation.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, it is recommended that:

- ❖ Nigerian users of the English language should endeavour, through conscious study, to acquaint themselves with the knowledge of the inherent inconsistencies in the rules of the English language.
- ❖ Writers of the English language textbooks in Nigeria should try to explicitly simplify those difficult and confusing rules of the language and their exceptions.
- ❖ The study of Literature in English should be made compulsory at all levels of secondary education in Nigeria.
- ❖ Nigerian users of English should learn not to transfer linguistic elements of their mother tongue into the English language in their written and spoken discourses.
- ❖ Government and private school owners should ensure that only qualified English language teachers are recruited to teach the language.

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