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EFFECTS OF TEACHING PHONETIC FEATURES ON SECONDARY SCHOOLS' STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE IN SPOKEN ENGLISH

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Abstract

This study was carried out with a view to finding out the effectiveness of teaching phonetic features on the performance of students in spoken English in secondary schools.

This was coupled with the view that if appropriate instructional aids were employed in oral teaching of the English Language, there would be improvement in students' performance. Importance of spoken English among students cannot be overstressed since it is the foundation and the material on which words and sentences are built. The phonetic aspect of it is seen as esoteric especially by non-native speakers Bankole 2019. And as a second official lingua franca language brought by the colonial masters into the soil of Africa and being used nearly in all facets of life in Nigeria, "we need to go to school to learn how the words are pronounced ,how the letters are joined to form words ,how words are used meaningfully, and how they can be joined together in sensible. ways. Akinjobi 2012. Also investigated was the influence of parents' attitude on students' performance in spoken English. The effects of personal motivation in spoken English by students was also investigated including some sounds which students found difficult to

pronounce in their mother tongue. One hundred and twenty (120) senior secondary students from two secondary schools (of mixed type)in Ilaro ,Ogun State ,Nigeria constituted the subjects. The pre-test-post test control experimental design (in which subjects in the experimental group were subjected to a period of teaching sessions was used . A –t –test was computed on post –test scores of achievement to compare the means scores of the experimental group. Findings among others showed significant difference in the performance of students that were taught phonetic features and those that were not. It was recommended that teachers should pay more attention to the teaching of the sounds clearly and distinctively in the classroom and the students be motivated in spoken English. Parents were to provide stimulating and conducive environment to aid their children of spoken English.

Keywords: Phonetic Features, Students 'performance, Spoken English

Introduction

The English language, without any gainsaying, has come to stay in Nigeria - the only invaluable legacy left behind by the British colonial administration in 1960 after the independence. (Bamgbose 1971).

English language is used for a lot of purposes in Nigeria, such as administration, politics, medium of instruction and communication.

Furthermore, English language has assumed the important status of being a (second)national language, it is used for social and inter ethnic communications to both the legislative and judiciary functions in Nigeria.

With this important roles that English language plays in Nigeria, the issue of bilingualism cannot be erased, thus a Nigerian child is faced with the problem of mastering two distinct languages with different sounds, forms and structure ,and other challenges (Akinjobi 2012).

According to Bloomfield (1933), bilingualism is a native like control of two languages scholars like Yolooye (1995) and Obanya (1973) believe that balanced bilingualism exists.

What we see in Nigerian schools is that the mother tongue interferes with English language. This is because the former is used at home and the latter is compulsorily used as a medium of instruction in their formal school curriculum.

The national policy education, (1981) as stated before, states that the English language be used as the language of instruction from the third year of primary school.

Also, Olagoke (1975), opined that for any successful work in the varsity, students are required to listen to lectures given in English language at a fairly faster pace.

All these are pointers to the importance of English language in Nigerian schools. In fact, the ministry of education curriculum has a well-laid plan for oral English teaching which is geared towards the teaching of pronunciation, stress and intonation, vowel and consonant sounds both in the primary and secondary schools, but unfortunately, what we see is that most of these teachers run away from this aspects of English and concentrate their attention mainly on teaching of reading and writing (no well equipped English Laboratory) which contributes to reasons students do not have the knowledge of English and eventually leads to a low grades of failure in English language.

In a lecture delivered by Professor C. A. Okedara in her inaugural lecture at the University of Ibadan on the English language communication and development; she gave the percentage of English language performance in schools which was not encouraging. The statement is stated below:

Percentage Of Nigerian Education Students Enrolment

Universities	No	Student Enrolment	%
Federal And States	36	236,261	1.09
Specialised Technical Institutions	3	2,161	0.01
College Of Agri. Poly And Allied Discipline	39	5,552	0.03
Secondary Schools	7,104	4,448,981	20.46

Source: Idris Gidabo (1997) "Education for Development" The Guardian, October 8, 1997.

Furthermore, in 1983, Ayodele stressed the importance of the English language in the secondary schools when he said their syllabus should outline the details of work to be done in listening, speaking, reading and writing and achieve an optimal mastery of the different skills of the language.

All these stress the need for proper mastery of English skills in our schools by students. In fact the failure in English means the failure in all subjects at W. A. S. C level in Nigeria.

This pathetic situation calls for concern of all and sundry especially from our teachers of English, all awareness and motivation to the teaching and learning of oral English in our schools should be improved. This also calls for intensive teaching of the sounds of English at the lower level which is the concern of this write-up.

Language exists in two major forms the spoken and the written. The spoken form of language is usually referred to as the primary medium of communication while the written medium is regarded as the second form. In this write up, we shall be concerned with the spoken form of English how its effective teaching can improve the performance of students in secondary schools.

Speech is perceived as a stream of meaningful options made up of sounds and sounds are regarded as the raw materials of language from which words and sentences are built up (Lekan Oyeleye 1996). Language can be acquired either formally or informally. It can also be natively and non-natively acquired (Abiodun Sofunke in Applied Linguistics).

The case of Nigerian students falls into these two categories as a result of colonialism. The results is that learners of English as a second language especially the spoken aspects face a lot of problems in the process of learning and speaking of the second language.

The sounds, the accent and the mother tongue structures are being transferred to the target language English, thus we observe the adulterated version in Nigeria due to factors like the attitude of teachers towards spoken English, inadequate instructional materials and facilities in schools to facilitate proper teaching and learning of spoken English. The concern of this study is to investigate if the effective teaching of the sounds of this target language (especially the uncommon ones in learners language), coupled with appropriate instructional materials can improve the performance of students in spoken English.

Statement of the Problem

The problems facing students of English students and their teachers are many in the teaching and learning process especially in the oral or spoken English. The majority of the students and Nigerians in general face problems of pronunciation based on the poor mastery of the vowel and consonant sounds, the stress and the intonation coupled with the influence of Mother Tongue L1 (Ayodele ,M.O and Jayeoba .O,S 2022}

Problem Of Language Acquisition By Nigerian Students

What accounts for why English spelling does not coincide with pronunciation? And how irregulars preterites (English language irregular verbs) came to be what they are? These are questions bothering the minds of linguists in this part of the world of Africa and in the part of someone learning the second language (English) in Nigeria.

The features of an average Nigerian student's language such as the sounds syllable, structure and rhythm of his mother tongue comes in place of the sounds, syllable and rhythm of the language he is learn

This is the case in Nigeria where the child speaks the mother tongue language at home and in school in order acquire education, he learns and is exposed to another language, how will he cope?

To Stevenson K. J. spoken more than written English arouses strong feelings of hostility and it appears to be more acceptable but unlike other languages learners of colonisers, English language learners always avoid speaking like their native speakers. The question is why is it so and what can English teachers do to help their students out of this problem and still make sure they excel in areas of English test?s.

For example, English language has twelve pure vowels which are:

/i:/, /I/, /e/, /a:/, /o/, /u:/, /æ/, / /, /p /, / ɔ/, /Λ /, / ʒ/, /ə/ and other eight diphthongs which are: /eI/, /əI/, /aʊ/, /ɔi/, /Iə/, /eə/, /ʊə/ which are both closing diphthongs and centring diphthongs whereas the Yoruba version

has only seven vowels which are /a/, /e/, /i/, /o/, /o/, /u/. A child that has been introduced to these sound from birth will find it difficult to master all the English sounds if he has to pass his exam and this will need the assistance to specialist.

Ditto in English consonants, there is a sharp difference in some sounds in their place and manner of articulation. For example;

English Phonemes, z, f, v, b, p, t, s,
Yoruba Phonemes, bi, di, fi, pi, gi, hi,..Kis

From the list of phonemes listed above, not all the consonant phonemes are found in Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo Language in Nigeria, this poses problem for a child learning English and the quick thing he does is to transfer the knowledge of what he learns from home into English sounds which cannot bring the proper sound as that of the nature speaker.

Also, in English language there is no /gb/ sound, but the students in Nigeria pronounce it as it should be pronounced in their mother tongue because they are conversant with it from home.

In the area of longevity some English phonemes are pronounced longer than other like /i:/a:/ these are not found in Nigerian languages and they pose problems to the students.

The syllable nasal / / is often represented by 'n' sound in most Nigerian languages as in "o n lo" which in English language sound / / as in 'I am going' / /.

Some linguists like Tiffen and Williams had pointed out that consonant clusters create problems for some Nigerian learners and in some cases there is an absence of consonant sounds. Example is Bread which is (ccvc) in English but /buredi/ in Yoruba forming (cvcvcv) in Yoruba sounds. All these **account** for why students have difficulty in oral/spoken English in Nigerian schools

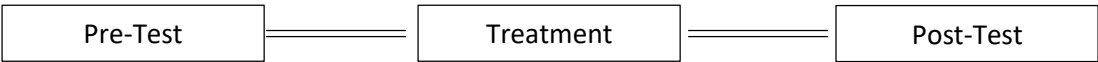
Influence Of Home And Environment On Students Oral English.

The child will learn from a very early age to respond to the sounds and tunes which its elders habitually use in talking to him and in due course, from a need to communicate, will himself try to imitate the recurrent sound patterns which he has become familiar with. In other words, he begins to make use of speech and his constant exposure to the spoken form in conveying the increasing subtle types of information. English language is a stress-timed language and generally most of the sounds employed in English language, are not present in most African languages. This being the case, the features of an average Nigerian student’s language such as the sounds syllable, structure and rhythm of his mother tongue comes in place of the sounds, syllable and rhythm of the second language he is learning,

Methodology

The study investigated the effectiveness of teaching phonetics segmental on the performance of students in spoken English in secondary schools.

Table 2



Two secondary schools were randomly selected from Ilaro, Egbado South local government in Ogun state. A pre-test was administered on the students in SS1 (senior secondary 1). The two schools were Itolu community High School, Ilaro and Anglican Grammar School, Ilaro. 120 subjects from the two schools were involved. Since it is an oral English class, the method employed was the audio-lingual teaching. The students were first shown the organs of speech chart and were later made to exercise their vocal organs as the teacher demonstrated. A week program of instruction was organized and the students were taught all the English sounds with much emphasis on the sounds that are not common in their mother tongue language.

After each lesson, the students were made to listen to the sounds on the tape-recorder. The students pronounced the sounds as they perceived them. They were also made to listen to their native recorded

message on the cassette several questions were asked of which the students responded positively students were made to pronounce this sounds individually and assignments given and were corrected later.

Conclusion

The study showed that most of the students seldom speak English with their parents, this is a major hindrance to good performance in spoken English. This is an evidence that spoken English should be part and parcel of students in order to improve their performance in oral English. Also, parents attitude towards their children's performance in English is not encouraging as evidence in the number of parents that check their children notes on daily basis.

From this statistical inference on the pre-test and post-test, based on the research question, it was observed that there is a significance difference (t-test) in the pre-test and post-test of the experimental group. While there is no significant difference in the control group.

The difference in the experimental group may likely be as a result of the teaching that was carried out after the pre-test. The result therefore shows the effectiveness of the teaching which may be a facilitator to their better performance. As expected, there is a significance difference in the performance of students that are taught phonetic features and those that are not, however it should be noted that only the effective teaching will bring about such improved performance.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the results in this study, the proper teaching of the sounds of English should be the basis in oral teaching class and this should be done by experienced teachers who are also specialist in oral English. This should also start from the lower classes so that the students would have been well grounded in the sounds especially the sounds that are not common in students mother tongue and environment such as the Palata Alveolar and the Alveolar fricative. In addition, parents should encourage

their children in speaking English at home in order to attain proficiency in the spoken skill. They should create more time for their children both at the mid-week and during the holiday.

Teachers should act as good model during speech work in the classroom so that the students can pronounced the sounds clearly and correctly. This should be coupled with audio-visual materials like radio/tape recorder, speech organ chart and R.P model recorder on cassette. Empty cassettes should also be made available where these students can train the speech organs after listening to their own recorded pronunciations and correct theirs from their teachers model.

Furthermore, schools should provide enough textbooks for students and teachers use. They should also provide oral language laboratories that are well equipped where audio-visual such as film stripes, overhead projector, television tape, radio-cassettes players, empty cassettes for students recording of sounds and other skills that can lead to proper mastery of spoken English.

Students should be encouraged to listen to news and participate in debates, drama, quiz competition, concerts, radio presentations and discussions. They should also be encouraged to have cassette pen friend. English language speaking should be made compulsory in all schools, both in and out of school. This school should provide in-service programmes for teachers of English language so that they can update their knowledge of oral English. They should also provide/create enough time to oral English on the school time-table in order to give room for proper practice of oral English. Teachers should correct students immediately any mistake is perceived in students pronunciations. Other teachers in schools should be made to attend oral seminars. Students and teachers should be given at least a year of study in Britain for proper and proficiency in spoken English. Excursions can also be organized for students to go abroad.

Several tests and assignments should be given to students and be marked by teachers in other to improve their spoken English and especially more emphasis should be paid to difficult sound that are alien in students first language.

Finally, more attention should be giving to our male students in oral teaching class.

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