

African Research Review

An International Multidisciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 6 (3), Serial No. 26, July, 2012

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070--0083 (Online)

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4314/afrrrev.v6i3.20>

English Language Teachers' Attitudes to the Promotion of the Standard Nigerian English: A Survey from a Nigerian City (Pp. 268-283)

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of the near-impossibility of attaining a native-like command of the English in a second language situation, which is one of the major factors found to be militating against Nigerian learners of the English language, this study examines the prospects of promoting the Standard Nigerian English to end the futile struggle of aspiring to a perfect mastery of the Standard British English. It attempts ascertaining the psychological readiness of English language teachers to embrace the teaching and assessment of students based on the more easily attainable SNE. Copies of a self-constructed twelve-item questionnaire were validated and administered to one hundred and forty-seven randomly selected secondary school English language teachers in Ibadan. Frequency counts, percentages, and chi-square statistics were employed to answer a research question and test two null hypotheses. The results revealed no significant difference in the language teachers' attitudes to the promotion of the standardized variety of the Nigerian English based on gender but significant difference according academic qualifications. It is thus recommended that Government undertakes research on the prospects and problems of elevating the standard Nigerian

English and meticulously implement the policy emanating from ensuing findings.

Introduction

English is the native language of South-west London. It is unarguably the language that enjoys the greatest geographical coverage of speakers in the whole world. English Language and Literature i-uk.com, an online publication of the British Council (n.d.) posits that around 375 million people speak English as their first language, with about the same number speaking it as a second language. About 750 million speak English as a foreign language. The same publication, citing specific examples of Japanese, German, Italian, and Czech, then asserts that “If the rest of the world isn’t talking English, they are borrowing English words to add to their own languages” (p.2).

In Nigeria, English remains the undisputed language of school instruction, governance, administration, legislation, judiciary, international relations, unification of the country’s numerous ethnic constituents, social prestige, and so on (Adeniran, 1980; Okedara 1997; Oluga, Adewusi, Babalola, Oyediran, 1999; FGN, 2004; Osisanwo, 2005). Without a credit pass in English Language, a candidate’s hope of securing admission to any course in a Nigerian tertiary institution is baseless (Olatunji, 2000; Osisanwo, 2005). Olatunji (2000) observes that English has remained the country’s practically sole official language in spite of the elevation of French as second official language in 1998.

The mass failure in English Language that has become endemic among Nigerian students at all levels of education is a topic of discussions and focus of research, a source of worry to many stakeholders (Ayodele, 2001; Aduwa-Ogiegbaen, 2006; Adekola, 2007; Kolawole and Olatunji, 2006). The general deficiency in the all-important language is also reflected beyond the classroom or examination. People of different socio-economic status and age commit unpardonable phonological, semantic, syntactic, and lexical blunders in their day-to-day uses of the language.

This should not come as a surprise since English is not a native language in Nigeria though many Nigerians are trying to make it their children’s first language by adopting it as medium of communication within their families. The ugly truth is that most of such parents succeed only in transferring Limited English Proficiency Syndrome (LTEPS) to their children. After all,

the parents themselves are inhibited by the same circumstances of second language environments. This challenge is not peculiar to Nigeria. As observed by Karahan (2007), many Turkish learners fail to attain desired English language proficiency in comprehensive and or productive skills in spite of early and consistent long-term exposure to the language at all levels of schooling.

The bottom line is that native-like command of a language in a second language learning situation is almost impossible. In fact, it is impossible to attain a native-like command of a second language without an opportunity to live among native speakers for a considerably long period of time. Kperogi (2010) too testifies that no Nigerian who was educated at home, including those who deride Nigerian English, can avoid speaking or writing it either consciously or unconsciously. Therefore, the idiolects of Nigerians are far from the Standard British English to varying degrees.

One of the attempts at helping Nigerians attain native-like command of the English Language is the publication of several books containing catalogues of "bad English" expressions common among Nigerians against prescribed Standard British English versions. Expectedly, attempts to master many of such prescribed expressions and lexical items result in confusion, arguments, and frustration since the students hardly have opportunities to practice what they are struggling to learn. This confirms Thater-Braan's (2007) assertion that particular ecologies give rise to definite languages. The ecological factors surrounding a typical Nigerian residing in a typical Nigerian environment do not lend themselves to native speakers' kind of English language mastery.

One of the rationales for the efforts at attainment of Standard British English is that public examination bodies, in spite of the limitations of their examiners, have adopted the Standard British English as yardstick for determining which candidate passes or fails. This can also be one of the causes of the much-talked-about perennial mass failure in English Language as the students are being asked to do the impossible. Even the examiners, who themselves are second language learners of English, are being made to pretend to be what they are not: masters of the Standard British English.

One may rightly wonder why the rigid insistence on the too lofty goal of language learning and unreasonably high standard of assessment when it is

common knowledge that there are as many standard Englishes as there are nations that have adopted that language as first, second, or even foreign language. Such recognized varieties of English are the Standard American English, Standard Australian English, the Standard Ghanaian English, the Standard Nigerian English, and so on. Co-existing with the standard variety of English in each country are other lesser varieties of English in forms of pidgin and its like.

Paradowski (2008) observes that English is one of the rapidly changing languages in the world and one of the identified reasons for this is the fact that new speakers of the language are not passive but are actively shaping it. Paradowski (2008) concludes that the inevitable consequence of this development is that native-speaker norms are losing relevance and reverence world-wide and adds an excerpt from the warning from Ruth Wajnryb, Australian linguist (2005, Dec 3) in *The Sydney Morning Herald*:

For those who would pull up the moat, who would turn English into a museum, who would laminate the dictionaries so that nothing new can be added or amended, a la the French Academy, I say be careful what you wish for (Paradowski, 2008:92).

Since this is the changing picture of the English Language around the world, one may legitimately wonder why there should not enough support for the continued standardization and promotion of the Nigerian English. After all, the Standard British we are aiming at and trying to preserve itself is not static.

Attempts at mastery of the Standard British English could be considered unnecessary as the adoption of the Standard Nigerian English would not exempt a Nigerian from the Commonwealth of Nations because of its potential for international intelligibility. As Igboanusi (2006) observes, some features of the Standard Nigerian English syntax are shared by other new Englishes. The following words of Omodiaogbe (1992:22) aptly support the assertion:

To those who are ready to make a compromise, a Nigerian variety of '*Nigerian English*' English that essentially meets the peculiar experiences

and needs of Nigeria, and at the same time is intelligible to other users of English, is the solution.

Omodiaogbe (1992) thus concludes that for the English language to maximize its future potentials in Nigeria, it must submit itself to bending, modifications, adaptations, even mutilations by Nigerian users. The school system must be prepared to midwife this distinct Nigerian English.

The evolution of the Nigerian English is claimed to have been noticed as far back as 1967 (Ogu, 1992). It is that variety that is at once distinctly Nigerian, yet also intelligible to the international reader (Walters, 2007), the prototype of the West African English (Wolf, 2001), the variety of English spoken by educated Nigerians (Ajani, 2007).

The recognition of the fact that Omodiaogbe (1992) has rightly identified the school system as occupying a central position in the task of midwifing and promoting the Nigerian English makes the examination of the attitudes of the English Language teachers in our schools necessary. No schooling system can prosper beyond the level of expertise and commitment of its teachers (FGN, 2004), and the commitment is anchored on attitudes. It is a generally positive attitude of the teachers to this variety of the English Language that can propel them to learn and teach it well to students.

One of the variables that have been identified as determining language behaviours is gender (Dennison, 2006). Van de gaer, Pustjens, Van Damme, and De Munter (2006) found greater language proficiency in girls than boys. Several other studies too have found linguistic development being easier for the feminine gender than the masculine (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2003; Ifegbesan, 2010). Going by all these and similar findings in extant literature, one can rightly expect differences between male teachers and female teachers in their attitudes to and efficiency in promoting the Standard Nigerian English.

If the Standard Nigerian English is to be promoted in Nigerian schools, English language teachers' attitudes to this variety of the language is greatly paramount. As observed by Lope Pihie and Bagheri (2011), teachers' attitude toward a subject affect both their choice to teach it and the quality of their instructional performance, and these in turn influences students' attitudes toward the subject, their motivation to learn the subject, and their achievement. Yara (2009) too opines that how teachers teach, how they behave and how they interact with students can be more paramount than what

they teach. Since studies have shown causal relationship between teachers' attitudes and students' academic achievement (Ogunwuyi, 2000), it is necessary to investigate English language teachers' attitudes to the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English as a predictor of what degree of success to expect if this variety of English is adopted as for school instruction and as standard for general examination.

Also of significant importance in efficient propagation of learning contents, be they old or new, is teachers' academic and professional qualification (Kerry & Wilding, 2004; Ololube, 2006). Ololube's (2006) survey reveals that professionally qualified teachers' motivational abilities are obvious on their students' academic achievements as well as on their fellow teachers. This then means that the attitudes of such teachers who are English language specialists to the Standard Nigerian English would go a long way in infecting other teachers and their students, thus spelling the success or failure of any move towards the promotion of the variety. Fuller's (2005) observation through empirical research that all other things being equal, highly qualified teachers produce greater student achievement than their comparatively less qualified counterparts supports this. It can thus be expected that teachers' academic and professional qualifications could be predictors of their attitudes to and efficiency levels the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English in schools.

Statement of the problem

Since the possibility of attaining a native-like command of the English language in Nigerian students' second learner situations is remote and they have consistently shown gross deficiency in the mastery of the language, there is need to find a lasting solution. The promotion of the Standard Nigerian English has been recommended in literature. But the attitudes of the English Language teachers that should be the vanguards of the propagation must be known and the factors responsible for such attitudes need to be ascertained if any meaningful success is to be achieved. This study thus aims at investigating the teachers' attitudes to the promotion of the SNE as the standard in Nigerian education to provide statistically valid direction to policy makers who may be considering such a venture as a viable solution to the endemic mass failure in English as well as the agony of futile struggle for native-like mastery of the language in out-of-school relations.

Research design

The ex-post facto type of the survey design was employed in getting data from junior secondary school English Language teachers about their attitudes to the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English.

Sample and sampling procedure

Eighty-three junior secondary schools were randomly sampled from the one hundred and fifty-two in Ibadan metropolis (five local government areas: Ibadan South-East, Ibadan South-West, Ibadan North, Ibadan North-East, Ibadan North-West) (statistics got through personal visits to the Oyo State Ministry of Education in 2009). All English teachers available in every sampled school were involved in the study.

Instrumentation

A self-constructed eleven-item questionnaire titled Attitudes to **Standard Nigerian English Promotion** that yielded 80.3 Cronbach alpha was used to obtain data for the study. The items in the questionnaire include those that seek information on each respondent's sex, highest educational qualification, years of teaching experience, knowledge of the existence of a standard variety of the Nigerian English and their attitudes to its promotion.

Copies of the instrument were personally administered to the concerned teachers who were implored to complete their copies promptly and return same immediately. The researcher, however, had to go back to collect some copies days later. One hundred and forty-seven of the one hundred and fifty-two copies administered retrieved were found valid for the study.

Method of data analysis

Frequency counts, percentages, means, and chi-square were the statistical tools for analyzing the collected data, answering the research question and testing the three null hypotheses of the study.

Analysis of data and interpretation of results

Table 1 shows that 16 (10.5%) of the respondents were holders of the Nigeria Certificate of Education, which is the lowest academic qualification for teaching in Nigeria. The greatest percentage of the teachers possess the first university degrees of B.A., B.A.Ed. or B.Ed. (85 or 57.42%) populated by a greater percentage of females (60%) than males (54.84%). Greater percentages of males possess Postgraduate Diploma in Education and the

Masters Degree (25.81% and 8.06%) than the females (23.53% and 2.35%) respectively. Furthermore, 3.23% males possess the highest academic qualification while only 1.18% females do. All these simply portray male teachers as being more committed to career advancement through the acquisition of greater knowledge and higher certificates.

This supports Stangor & Lange's (1994) assertion that women experience lower professional drive for better wages than men because the societal expectations from the former gender is lower than the latter. And so, more women are found on the lower rungs of the teaching ladder than at the top.

Research Question: What is the general attitude of the English Language teachers' to the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English?

Table 2 shows the cumulative percentages of all responses indicating straight-forward preference for the Standard Nigerian English as 58.84 while those precisely against it make 30.49% and those not yet decided as 10.67% respectively. The answer to Research Question 1 is that the attitudes of the pre-service English teachers to the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English are generally positive. The percentage of the responses in its favour is already unequivocally higher than that of the response against it, so much that even the undecided cases cannot weaken it, its percentage will still remain higher.

Ho1: *There is no significant difference in attitude of the English Language teachers to the promotion of the Standard English Language on the basis of gender.*

Since $X^2 (.058) > 0.05$, there is no significant difference in the English Language teachers' attitudes to the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English. Therefore the hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in the attitudes of the teachers to the promotion of the variety of English is not rejected. A closer look at the high mean value of each of the variables taken with gender shows that a majority of the English Language teachers believe that the adoption of the Standard Nigerian English as a basis of teaching and proficiency assessment would not affect the learners' international intelligibility negatively, it would reduce the incidence of mass failure in the language as well as the other subjects that are taught and examined through the medium of the English Language. They also believe that all the fears that people may be entertaining about the adoption and promotion of the variety of English are unfounded. Fewer of them (66 or

46.15%), however, confidently expressed their readiness to promote the use of the Standard Nigerian English, which some of them attributed to their perception of Nigerians' unbridled desire to Anglicize themselves at all cost.

Ho2: There is no significant difference in attitude of the English Language teachers to the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English on the basis of academic qualification.

Since X^2 (.000) < .005, there is a significant difference in the English Language teachers' attitudes to the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English based on academic qualification differences. Therefore the null hypothesis that states that there is no significant difference in attitude of the English Language teachers to the promotion of the Standard English Language based on academic qualification is rejected. The following table shows the exact mean comparison of the responses across the categories of non-graduate, graduate, and post-graduate certificate teachers.

The summation of the mean for each category of academic qualification would reveal that the teachers with postgraduate certificates contributed 9.4443, while the non-graduate teachers had a mean of 7.875 and the graduate teachers 7.6706 respectively. One could thus reasonably conclude that the higher the teachers' academic qualification, the better their understanding of the features of the Standard Nigerian English and consequently their passion to see it promoted adequately. The direction of the differences in attitudes to the variety of English Language according to academic qualification is thus revealed.

Conclusion

The findings from the study have revealed that there is a relatively fertile ground for the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English as a solution to the problem of mass failure in English language in examinations in Nigeria because of the generally favourable dispositions of the English Language teachers to the cause. A number of steps, however, need to be taken to ensure proper handling of the propagation of the Nigerian English.

Recommendations

1. The propagation of the Standard Nigerian English has to be clearly spelt out in the National policy on Education and its thorough implementation needs to be taken serious.
2. A series of measures need to be taken to keep English Language teachers abreast of developments in matters pertaining to the

Standard Nigerian English and various methods through which it can be adequately taught and learnt.

3. Language development centres need to be empowered to carry out research on actual standardization of this special variety of the English Language to preserve it from gross adulteration and lack of clear-cut standard.

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Table1: Description of the Respondents by Gender and Academic Qualification

Gender	Qualification					Total
	NCE	B.A/B.Ed.	PGDE	Masters	PhD	
Males	5(8.06%)	34(54.84%)	16(25.81%)	5(8.06%)	2(3.23%)	62(100%)
Females	11(12.94%)	51(60%)	20(23.53%)	2(2.35%)	1(1.18%)	85(100%)
Average Total	16(10.5%)	85(57.42%)	36(24.67%)	7(5.21%)	3(2.21%)	147(100%)

Table 2: Statistical Representation of the English Language Teachers' General Attitudes to the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English

Questionnaire Stimuli	Responses			
	Yes	No	Undecided	Total
Do you support that the Standard Nigerian English be used as basis for teaching and assessing students' English Language proficiency?	100(68.03%)	35(23.81%)	12(8.16%)	147(100%)
Do you believe that proficiency in the Standard Nigerian English without the Standard British English can empower a person to succeed in this age of globalization?	78(53.06%)	48(32.65%)	21(14.29%)	147(100%)

Do you think that one can be internationally intelligible with the Standard Nigerian English?	99(67.35%)	35(23.81%)	13(8.84%)	147(100%)
Are all fears about the consequences of promoting the Standard Nigerian English baseless?	83(56.46%)	50(34.01%)	14(9.52%)	147(100%)
Would the promotion of the Standard Nigerian English reduce the incidence of mass failure in English among Nigerian students?	93(63.27%)	40(27.21%)	14(9.52%)	147(100%)
Would you like to promote the teaching of the Standard Nigerian English to your students?	66(44.89%)	61(41.50%)	20(13.61%)	147(100%)
Average Total	(58.84%)	(30.49%)	(10.67%)	147(100%)

Table 3: Chi-square Statistics of the Respondents' Attitudes to the Promotion of the Standard Nigerian English according to Gender

	Sex	Existence	Assessment	Globalisation	Intelligibility	Failure	Fears	Promote
Chi-Square (a,b)	3.599	168.000	85.020	33.184	81.469	66.163	48.612	26.000
Df	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.058	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 4: Chi-Square Representation of the English Language Teachers' Attitudes to the Promotion of the Standard English Language according to Academic Qualification

	Qualification	Existence	Assessment	Globalisation	Intelligibility	Failure	Fears	Promote
Chi-Square (a,b)	153.510	168.000	85.020	33.184	81.469	66.163	48.612	26.000
df	4	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000

Table 5: Comparison of Means of Responses according to Academic Qualification

Questionnaire Stimuli	Qualification	Mean of Responses
Support for use of the Standard Nigerian English for teaching and assessing students' English Language proficiency	Non-graduate	1.4375
	Graduates	1.4118
	Post-Graduates	1.4894
Belief in empowering quality of the Standard Nigerian English in globalisation without the Standard British English.	Non-graduate	1.6875
	Graduates	1.6235
	Post-Graduates	1.8267
Possibility of international intelligibility with the Standard Nigerian English.	Non-graduate	1.5000
	Graduates	1.4118
	Post-Graduates	1.3836
Baselessness of fears about the consequences of promoting the Standard Nigerian English.	Non-graduate	1.8125
	Graduates	1.4941
	Post-Graduates	1.5780
Potential of the Standard Nigerian English to reduce the incidence of mass failure in English among Nigerian students.	Non-graduate	1.3125
	Graduates	1.5647
	Post-Graduates	1.2711
Readiness to promote the teaching of the Standard Nigerian English to students.	Non-graduate	1.4375
	Graduates	1.7294
	Post-Graduates	1.8955