IMPEDIMENTS TO LEARNING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION: A PHILOSOPHICAL DISCOURSE

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Abstract
The English Language plays many important roles in Nigeria in respect of its social, professional, and educational life. It dominates the everyday life of an educated Nigerian. It is the medium of instruction especially from the fourth year of primary education to tertiary education. It is taught and learnt as a second language because of the central position it occupies. Unfortunately, however, learning the language is fraught with impediments which largely include the inherent inconsistencies or irregularities in some aspects of the language, colloquialisms and slang, language transfer, inadequate learning facilities, and unqualified teachers. If appropriate measures are put in place, learners of English can go a long way towards achieving communicative competence, which is the goal of learning English as a second language.
Keywords: Second language, impediments, inconsistencies, language transfer.

Introduction
Teaching learners how to use the English language carefully is a pretty good start for education. The English language is one of the subjects in the Nigerian school curriculum taught to students. It is also the official language of communication in Nigeria. In recognition of the importance of English for enhancing educational attainment as well as for improving the communication ability of citizens, the government had made it a core subject (FGN, 2014). It is also compulsory for students to have credit in English before entering university. This also explains why many parents go off their way to see that their children pass at credit level or above in English. The importance of English as a school subject derives mainly from its utilitarian value to the larger Nigerian society for example; English is the official language of administration and commerce, thus, without it, one may be rendered ineffective in administration and business.

A large number of children start school only to find out that their teachers are talking to them in a strange language (English) as against talking to them in a language they understand. Language, whether local or international plays a vital role in education. It is based on this that Shale (1988) said that language is important for comprehension and making use of knowledge. The language barrier makes communication more difficult and consequently affects the learning process. Confucius posited that if a language is not correct when what is said is not what is meant and then what must be done remains undone. Language barriers or impediments create massive problems in the education

process. One of the problems language impediments create is that students who cannot understand their teachers may not learn anything. This affects the teaching and learning process immeasurably. How can these impediments be tackled? This is what this paper aims to discuss.

The Concept Impediment

To examine the concept of impediment, a simple logical analysis of the concept is required this is because analysis has always been at the heart of any philosophical discourse. Analysis of concept helps in eliminating a concept from ambiguity. To analyze simply mean to separate into constituent components or elements or to determine the essential features that define a phenomenon or a concept in question (Lilly and Martin, 1989).

An impediment can be described as something that makes progress, movement, or achieving a task difficult or impossible (Dictionary.cambridge.org). This suggests that a war which stops citizens from going about their normal business can be described as an impediment. Similarly, a goalkeeper that stops a football striker from scoring a goal is an impediment. It should be noted however, that impediment as used in the context of this paper can be described as anything that affects the learning of the English language. For example, if the mother tongue of an individual affects the learning of English, then the mother tongue becomes an impediment.

English Language as a Second Language

The English Language in Nigeria is taught and learnt as a second language with the express purpose of learning it adequately because it is a language of national and international communication. According to Nordiques (2017), English as a second language is a traditional term for the use or study of the English Language by non-native speakers in an English speaking environment. The environment, in this case, maybe a country in which English is the mother tongue (e.g. Australia, the US) or one in which English has an established role (e.g. Nigeria, India). Obviously, in Nigeria, designations such as "Second language". "linguafranca", "world language", "national language", "official language", "language of higher education", do apply to the English language (Adekunle, 1985:4). In Nigeria, it is the most extensively used language. As pointed out by Adeyanju (1983:10), not only does English dominate our public and social life as the most extensively used language across the country but it also reaches into the homes through all media and some of our children even speak it as their first language". Furthermore, it is a veritable gateway to world knowledge. This is because "it is the language used to interact with the outside world" (Oyetunde and Muodumogu, 1999:2). This is in addition to the fact that highly sophisticated publications in all subjects, are in English. With particular reference to the use of the internet in Nigeria, English is the medium. English as a second language in Nigeria is not necessarily the second language sequentially, it may be the third, fourth or even the fifth, but as noted by Akindele and Adegbite (2005:50), "it is a language in which a bi/ multilingual person conducts his everyday activities but shares this role with another language in which the speaker has a greater linguistic facility or intuitive knowledge". Oyetunde and Muodumogu (1999:2) further illuminated why English is a second language in Nigeria, this is "because of the many important roles it plays in Nigerian society".

Commenting on the philosophy of teacher training for the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) English, as postulated in the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) minimum standards, Obi-Okoye (2002:54) observed that it is elegant. According to him, it not only emphasizes the important relationship between language and communal life, language and communication, language and personality, language and learning, language and critical thinking and consciousness but also language and literature and cultural development. This philosophy among other things suggests communicative competence in the use of English language teaching and learning in a second language situation.

Yule (2010:194) defined communicative competence as the general ability to use language accurately, appropriately and flexibly. The first component is grammatical competence, which involves the accurate use of words, and structures. For example, "He goes to school every day'' rather than"*He go to school every day". The second component is the socio-linguistic competence. This is the ability to use language appropriately. Typically, the learner is expected to say" I eat sugar –cane" rather than "*I drink sugar – cane" which many learners of English may be tempted to say, as applicable to their culture. Another example involving a student and a teacher as interlocutors in a classroom situation; it would be appropriate for the student while taking permission to say "May I go out?" rather than"I want to go out", which is not in keeping with the cultural context of English. The third component is strategic competence, which entails organizing a message effectively and compensating for difficulty, via strategy. For example, a Hausa native speaker learning English wanted to refer to "Linzami" in English but didn't know the English word and so he resorted to describing it: "a piece of metal put in a horse's mouth so that a rider can control it". That was understood to mean "bit" in English. According to Yule (2010:194) "strategic competence is the ability to overcome potential communication problems in interaction".

Communicative competence generally involves the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing.Despite the understood target for learning English as a second language in Nigeria, there are perceived hindrances or impediments which need to be pursued to the home of remedies.

Impediments to Learning the English Language in Nigeria
1. Inconsistencies Inherent in the English Language
The inconsistencies inherent in some features of the English language tend to hinder learners' progress. As noted by Academia (2011:.2), "of all the possible languages to learn English brings its difficulties and challenges". Here, reference is to the inconsistencies inherent in the language, especially in its pronunciation, orthography and morphology.
Adeyanju (2018), counselled that:

> *Unlike African languages, one cannot rely on the spelling of English words to lead one to accurate pronunciation or spelling, since most English words do not necessarily retain the same sounds at all times. Secondly, since the sounds of English words often change in rapid speech, where they run into each other and*

> *are modified by other words and attitudinal factors, you need to listen to good*
> *spoken English, e.g. from the BBC, to attain 'an ear for the language'. (P.1)*

Adeyanju (2018:1) further explained the situation above that although there are general rules of pronunciation in English, there are also so many inconsistencies and exceptions. Of course, examples abound. Typically, an English vowel sound may be retained in words that are spelt differently. Consider the following vowel sounds:

/ u:/ as in   t<u>oo</u>, t<u>wo</u>, tr<u>ue</u>, r<u>u</u>le

/ ɔ:/ as in   f<u>our</u>, <u>all</u>, w<u>ar</u>, m<u>ore</u>,

/ i:/ as in   s<u>ee</u>, s<u>ea</u>, s<u>ei</u>ze, chi<u>e</u>f

An English letter of the alphabet does not stick to the same sound. Consider the following sounds as they all represent the letter 'a':

/æ/ as in   bad, cat, pack, damp

/ ɔ: / as in   saw, law, paw, lawn

/ ei / as in   pay, say, ray, lay

Some letters of the alphabet are in some cases silent in the words they appear. Consider:

'h' as in   ghost, fight, tough,

'g' as in   sign, fight, sight

'e' as in   some, time, lane

'b' as in   debt, plumber, plumb

Concerning morphology, Akindele and Adegbite (2005:144) observed the lack of consistency in word-formation rules:

"in-, im-, iL-" mean 'not' in informal, impossible and illogical, but 'in'- means 'highly' in less'- means 'without' in childless, useless, powerless; but not in priceless' which means 'very costly'. One who writes (writer); one who reads (reader); one who acts (actor); but one who cooks (cook). inflammable.

'In the pronunciation and morphological cases discussed above, a key point to note is that they do constitute hindrances or impediments to learning English as a second language. Remedies have been suggested by Adeyanju (2018:1) that if ones English is to improve considerably, one must first learn the various systems, rules, and regulations of English at all levels_ morphology, syntax, and discourse.

Broadly speaking, learners should make concerted efforts to learn English even outside the classroom situation, that is, on their own. Academia (2011) emphasized that credible and high-quality English can provide an effective way to learn English. One way to overcome the challenges (of inconsistency) is to participate in a range of speech-related learning activities.

2. Colloquialisms and Slang

Academia (2011:3) rightly observed that "Colloquialisms and Slang confuse understanding of the English language". This is because learners come across them when English is spoken in less formal contexts and hardily can distinguish between formal and casual language. Yule (2010:269) explained that "Slang, or 'colloquial speech', describes words or phrases that are used instead of more everyday terms among younger speakers and other groups with special interest". He cited the word 'bucks' as an example of Slang which means 'dollars or money', where 'megabucks' suggests 'a lot of money'. Effectively, a learner of English who deploys the word 'megabucks' to mean 'a lot of money' will be penalized.

Since colloquial speech or Slang is an established feature of English but in informal situations, learners should be taught to distinguish between formal and casual language. Furthermore, they should be encouraged to practice formal English.

3. Language Transfer

Language transfer refers to the following: cross-linguistic influence, linguistic interference, the role of the mother tongue, native language influence, and language mixing (Odlin, 2003:436). Of the five terms mentioned above, language transfer and cross-linguistic influence are the most frequently used in contemporary second language research (e.g. Odlin, 2003:436). Yule (2010: 191) upheld in evidence that some errors may be due to ''transfer'' (also called ''cross-linguistic influence''). Transfer, as he reiterated, means using sounds, expressions or structures from L1 when performing in the L2.

The phenomenon of language transfer in the second language (L2) learning is indeed real. Swan and Smith (2001: xi) corroborated this position when they maintained that there is less disagreement than there used to be about how far 'interlanguages' are influenced by learners' native languages, and most linguists would probably now agree that the mother tongue can affect learners' English in several ways''. By 'interlanguage' is meant the variety of a language that is produced by non-native learners (Swan and Smith, 2001:ix). Learners of a second language do manifest elements of their mother tongue in their spoken or written expressions. Akindele and Adegbite (2005:143) affirmed that ''retroactive interference constitutes a hindrance in the learning of English by a non-native speaker''. As asserted by Rivers (1968:40), the major difficulties for the language learner are to be found at those points where the foreign language differs most radically from the native language. Of course, it is common knowledge that language transfer may be positive or negative as a result of similarities or differences between first language and second language, but research interest is largely in the negative aspects. As noted by Wilkins (1972), it is now well established that once a person has acquired any language as a first language, the sounds which he has acquired, the grammatical patterns of the language, and process of thought in the culture, interfere with his acquisition of another language. Odlin (2003: 437) affirmed that language transfer influence affects all linguistic sub-systems including pragmatics and rhetoric, semantics, syntax, morphology, phonology, phonetics,

and orthography since language is part of a culture, then we can as well claim that culture is also affected by language transfer. Meanwhile, the present work limits itself to language transfer.

Adeyanju (2018:41) presents examples of ungrammatical sentences which are usually the product of direct translation from one's local language to English:
Wrong: Why I avoid teaching is that being a teacher it means adding more headaches to myself.
Correct: I avoid teaching because being a teacher is an additional headache (burden on me).
Wrong: The teacher should try and be writing some of the ideas on the board.
Correct: The teacher should write some of the points on the blackboard.

Adeyanju also observed the use of long-windedness using double – barrel verbs from the mother tongue. Examples are: "come and see" "went and told people".
Other similar expressions are:
"* I saw it with my own eyes" "* I gave it to him with my own hands" "*He said it with his own mouth"

NB. The symbol *marks ungrammatical sentences. The above ungrammatical renderings are cases of language transfer. Other prime examples of language transfer from students' essays and oral presentations are:
Wrong: I can hear the smell of the latrine.
Correct: I can perceive the odour of the latrine.
Wrong: I am seeing the bird.
Correct: I can see the bird.
Wrong: I do not hear French.
Correct: I do not understand French.
In phonology vowel length is hardly observed, most vowels tend to be pronounced short. In the use of consonants, / θ / and / $\eth$ / are often confused, learners tend to deploy / t / and / d / sounds respectively in their stead. For example, 'day' for 'they', and 'tin' for 'thin'.

Since communicative competence is the target in second language learning, the question of language transfer requires attention. Typically, teachers, curriculum developers, and textbook writers should "anticipate the characteristic difficulties of learners of English who speak particular mother tongues, and to understand how these difficulties arise" (Swan and Smith, 2001: iv), to minimize transfer features involved in learning English. This is quite critical, given the central role of English in Nigeria. Similarly, Adeyanju (2018:1) emphasized that "if spoken English is to improve considerably, you must first learn the various systems, rules and regulations of English at all levels." In his views, learners must spend time listening to good native speaker models primarily the British Broadcasting Corporation(BBC). Furthermore, the learner needs to master phonetic symbols (phonetic literacy) to enable them to pronounce words they see in the dictionary accurately. For the fact that contrastive analyses and error analyses complement each other and thus contributing to the

success of a foreign language programme (e.g. Chiang, 1979), the two analyses should be carried out by teachers and researchers for improved teaching and learning. Most importantly, learners should be abundantly exposed to the Standard English norm through various communicative activities. Teachers at all levels are encouraged to from time to time remedy the errors being made by learners, for improved communicative competence.

4. Inadequate Learning Facilities

Environment and resources may make or mar English Language Learning. The International Communications College (ICC) Hawaii (2017) argued that "environment and resources play a role in how fast and how well you learn". Commenting on the greatness of textbooks, ICC Hawaii (2017) cautioned that if you don't have audio tools and access to people outside of the classroom whose native language is English, along with teachers who can teach proper pronunciations, learning is limited. Indeed, textbooks should play a complementary role only. Exercises may come from textbooks, but to entirely depend on the textbook may not be appropriate. In the schools, "textbook syndrome" appears to be a common phenomenon. In this case, teachers cover the textbook from page to page without taking into consideration, the background of their students for modification or supplementation. In some places, the selection of the textbook is not done by experts. This claim was supported by Bamidele (1993:28) that "Ironically, some of the officials in the ministries are the least suited for textbook selection". Of course, such people are interested in the financial benefits derived from the deal. Akindele and Adegbite (2005:139) lamented the situation whereby the English as a second language learner is exposed to limited data in his environment. According to them, much of the data he is exposed to cannot be described as raw but artificial. Consequently, the learners end up learning and using bookish and stilted English. A difficulty posed by Verghese (2007:23) in respect of learning in India, is that teaching English does not leave the desired, impact on the student because the class is too big for the teacher to do any worthwhile job. Thissituation also applies to classrooms in Nigeria where the number of pupils or students can rise to 150. Simply put, resources are overstretched.

In a situation of this kind, the teacher hardly marks assignments or exercises which are expected to provide students with feedback. Verghese (2007:23) noted that teaching English suffers as a result of inadequacy and poor availability of resources. Audiovisual aids are often not available in schools in Nigeria. Regardless of the level of learners, the lecture method tends to dominate lessons. In the face of the difficulties above, learners of English are hardly encouraged to achieve communicative competence. They are often deprived of learning facilities. The consequence is summarized by Oyetunde (2010:32) that ''perhaps the most apparent evidence of a public primary system that is in distress and a disservice to children and taxpayers is that a great majority of children in public primary schools cannotread". Regarding the secondary level, he noted that the standard of education is very low. He added that the situation at the tertiary level is not very much different from what obtains at the primary and secondary levels. This, according to him, is understandable since it is the products of the lower levels that are fed into the university. Akere, as cited in Oyetunde (2010:34) stressed that at the tertiary level of education, students have so much difficulty with their

communication skills in English that they cannot function effectively in their academic use of English.It should be stated that the availability of appropriate learning facilities are very necessary if learners of English as a second language are to meet the expectation of communicative competence. Oyetunde (2010:37) observed that quality education is the product of a conducive teaching-learning environment which consists of physical structures, ready access to qualitative books and supplementary teaching, and learning materials. As emphasized by Verghhese (2007), ''audio-visual aids are an integral part of the learning situation and are as important as the blackboard and chalk''. He reiterated that teaching English in India suffers as a result of the inadequacy and poor availability of these resources.   Shukla (2018), supported this position when he stated that the resources a teacher use while teaching play a role in how students learn. He counselled teachers to leverage digital interaction and technology to facilitate learning.

5. Unqualified Teachers

The situation of unqualified teachers in the Nigerian education system, especially at primary and secondary school levels is quite alarming. This position has been corroborated by Galadi (2010:490) that "by far, the most serious impediment to standards in education is the quality of teachers available for the teaching of language. Olaofe (2001) as cited in Galadi (2010:.490) reported that''out of the 207,081 teachers in primary schools in the north, only 51,630 (24.9%) are qualified. 30% of the primary school teachers are not anything better than the pupils they teach". Indeed, one of the present writers served on a state government committee on primary education whose report (in 2019) revealed that 75% of the primary school teachers in the Gombe State of Nigeria, could not construct good sentences in English which is the medium of instruction from the fourth year upwards. What then do they teach if they cannot construct good sentences in English, being the medium of instruction as prescribed by the National Policy on Education? Udu (2010:495) noted that "one of the factors responsible for poor standards in English is the preponderance of non-specialist teachers". By implication, such non-specialist teachers are unqualified to teach English, and so they retard the learning process of pupils. Udu (2010) reported that:

In a survey of 66 public primary schools in Katsina-Ala Local Government Area of Benue State, the researcher established that out of the 851 teachers teaching English language in the sampled schools, only 73 specialized in the English language. Because of the high percentage of teachers without specialization in English, there will be low motivation in both the teaching and learning of the subject, poor coverage of the school syllabus, high incidence of examination malpractice, and high failure rates in the subject (495).

The situation above is very bad, given that the primary school is the very foundation for the development of education in Nigeria. There is no wonder that students in secondary and tertiary institutions suffer relatively in learning English. Wilkins (as cited in Verghese, 2007) warned that:
> *It should be unrealistic to expect a teacher to set objectives which himself is not*
> *capable of reaching. A teacher who himself has difficulty in speaking the*

> *language he teaches is not going to succeed in giving his pupils a command of spoken language. (24).*

A viable solution to the teacher problem is that employers should endeavour to employ English language teachers from the four categories presented below as prescribed by the Teachers Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) (2004:13).

Class: Holders of PhD in Education or PhD in other field plus Education (e.g. PGDE, NCE).
Class: Holders of Master's degree in Education or Master's degree in other field plus Education (e.g. PGDE, NCE).
Class: Holders of Bachelor's degree in Education or Bachelors in other field plus Education (e.g. PGDE, NCE).
Class: Holders of Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE). By the above classification, NCE is the minimum class of teachers recognized.

In compliance with the National Policy on Education (2014), they should not be employed to teach beyond the junior secondary school level. What is also relevant is that all teachers should keep abreast with professional trends through attendance of conferences, seminars and workshops. Employers should see to it that they offer in-service education (training) to their employees.

Conclusion

The fundamental position in the preceding discussion is that the learning of English as a second language is loaded with impediments. They mainly include inconsistencies inherent in some features of the English Language, Colloquialisms and Slang, issues of language transfer, inadequate learning facilities, and unqualified teachers. If the suggested solutions offered at the discussion of each impediment are implemented, a lot will be achieved by learners towards communicative competence. Furthermore, while at the primary school level the activity method should apply mainly, at the secondary school and tertiary levels, the use of the "flipped classroom", a teaching innovation, which is often accompanied by technology is hereby recommended for the promotion of communicative competence. Thakare (2018) explained that "a flipped classroom is where students are given study materials like short video lectures, reference notes, for studying the topic beforehand". In this case, 'beforehand' implies before the classroom time.Indeed, during the classroom time, discussions on the subject matter and activities like quizzes, group assignments and debates based on study materials provided earlier are carried out (Cf. Sabe, 2019).

On the whole, since teachers occupy a pivotal position in teaching and learning, only those of them who read English and are within the four categories of teachers prescribed by the TRCN (2004:13), should be allowed to teach.

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