

INNOVATIVE TEACHING STRATEGY FOR ALLEVIATING MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ORAL ENGLISH IN IGBO-ETITI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

This research work investigated the innovative teaching strategy for alleviating mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of Oral English in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. A descriptive Questionnaire was used to elicit information from hundred (100) students and twenty (20) teachers who constituted the respondents. This work investigated the innovative teaching strategy that can be adopted by English language teachers to alleviate mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of Oral English, the hindrances of mother tongue interference, and the areas of occurrence of mother tongue interference. The instrument was validated by experts in Language Education and Measurement and Evaluation, both in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The data collected were subjected to analysis using mean scores. The results of the findings indicated that lack of qualified teachers, unfamiliar phonemes, and lack of audio-visual media language teaching aid contribute to mother tongue interference. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the government should employ experts or qualified teachers and provide audio-visual materials for effective teaching and learning of Oral English in Senior Secondary Schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State.

Keywords: Teaching strategy, mother tongue interference, Oral English

Introduction

Language is a structured system of communication. Basically, language is the most frequently used and the most highly developed form of human communication. Through language, people interact, share ideas and express their feelings. Without language, man would be incapable of a sustained and result oriented thinking. Language is the vehicle of communication and expression used for human interactions, politics, commerce, education and culture (Robert, 2021).

The role of language in the effective teaching and learning cannot be overemphasized. In Nigeria, English language plays the role of a second language, considering the multilingual nature of the country. English language is also the language of instruction in the Nigerian education system. Not only is it the language of instruction, it is also a compulsory subject and a yardstick for evaluating a learner's school performance. The normal teaching and learning thrives on effective communication between the teacher and the learner. No matter how expertly, learning experiences are selected and organized, the ultimate objective of the teaching and learning exercise would not be achieved if the language of instruction is unfamiliar to the learner. English language is indispensable to education in Nigeria, thus, it is a veritable tool for human development. As a basis for all communication, English language in the educational set-up is of very importance in putting across developmental thoughts, information and data. English language is seen as the Language that will bridge the gap in Education and its effective use in imparting the necessary skills for national development.

English Language is an essential course of study which is to be tested in all certificate examinations. It has become a prerequisite for employment, admission into higher institutions, technological development and language of the learned. All school subjects are taught in English language except the native language. It helps in spreading literacy and serves as a medium for transferring knowledge. Process are English language plays a good role because most of the textbooks we use in the teaching and learning written in English language. Competence in English language is seen as an index for academic excellence. Thus, it is a yardstick for measuring learners' academic performance (Robert, 2021).

Mother tongue is the language that a person learned as a child or is exposed to from birth or within that critical period (usually from their parents). Mother tongue is often regarded as one's first language. Nwaozor (2015) opines that mother tongue or first language contributes immensely in a child's personal, social, cultural, intellectual, educational and economic lives. Children learn best when the first language of instruction is their mother tongue (Bühmann&Trudell, 2008). Children also learn better and faster in a language they can understand. They enjoy school more and they feel more at home. Pupils tend to show increased self-esteem. Parents' participation is increased. Results of learning assessments show that when home and school languages differ, there is a negative impact on test scores - The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2016). According to an analysis of Southern African Consortium for Monitoring Educational Quality (SACMEQ III data in 2010), there is a positive correlation between speaking the language of instruction and pupil achievement, especially in reading (Trudell, 2016). Using the mother tongue in classroom has been found to enhance classroom participation, decrease attrition, and increase the likelihood of family and community engagement in the child's learning (Trudell, 2016). In order to enhance their learning, students also need access to inclusive and culturally relevant curriculum and learning materials in a language with which they are familiar (Bühmann& Trudell, (2008). Several studies show that offering instruction in the mother tongue has positive impact on girls' enrollment and transition rates primarily because girls are less exposed than boys to languages outside the home and so face a tougher barrier when the mother tongue is not used in school (Benson, 2004). Students who have strong first language skills are able to acquire the second language more easily due to language transfer. The mother tongue could be used as support for the second language acquisition process, which makes the learning process easier for students and teachers.

There is substantial research that addresses the role of the first language in second language learning and instruction. Some studies point to the positive effect of the first language on the learning environment. Howees and Pianta (2012) demonstrated the importance of the use of first language in the second language classroom. The study indicates that students who speak mother tongue in the classroom may create a more culturally sensitive environment that enhances learning and communication for children. The second language will always activate first language acquisitions; no matter what level of proficiency the person has (Spivey & Marian, 2010). Even if teachers avoid and forbid the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, the connections and links between both languages will always exist in the learner's mind (Cohen, 2010).

In the early stages of second language acquisition, learners process the new language in their mother tongue. The links between both languages can make learning contexts even richer (Horst & Bell, 2010). Although certain language skills can be positively and may assist in the development of corresponding skills in another language, the first language must be sufficiently developed before exposure to the new language (Zaunbauer& Moller, 2012). Students who begin in secondary school with higher levels of their first language acquire the new language more easily. There is a relationship between first language skills and second language acquisition. In fact, students who had stronger reading skills in mother tongue (first language)

performed better reading in English at the end of the year than the students who had lower reading skills in their mother tongue at the beginning of the year (Carlson, 2007). The evidence of mother tongue influence on English is very obvious. The most common reason is transfer or interference from the mother tongue. Generally, errors made in pronunciation are due to difference in the sound system and spelling symbols between the mother tongue and English.

Mother tongue interference refers to the influence of the native language of the learner in their acquisition of the target language. Mother tongue interference is the interruption of a home or native language over a target language (L2) especially in pronunciation and intonation. It is the interposition of one's mother language or language of the parents upon the target language which may result to atypical pronunciation of the target language. Some of the examples of mother tongue interference in the second language are the misplacement of the letter (l) for (r), instead of the word "road", "lorry" etc., you hear the learner pronouncing "load", "rolly". Some Igbo speakers have problems with the pronunciation of the English sounds like /l /, / r/, /θ/ and final vowel sounds. Hence instead of saying /lu:k/, they say /ru:k/, instead of 'ball' they say 'borru'. Again, some Igbo speakers have greater difficulty in pronouncing some English words like 'love' and 'law' which they pronounce as "nove" and "naw" respectively. Igbo language has no dental fricatives and there is a tendency for speakers to substitute /t/ and /d/ for English /θ/ and / ð /, respectively, thus confusing such words as 'tick' and 'thick' 'den' and then'. Mother tongue interference can be controlled by adopting a strategy that will be of great help in the effective teaching and learning of Oral English.

Strategy generally involves setting goals and priorities, determining actions and mobilizing resources to execute the actions. In the teaching and learning of Oral English, a strategy is adopted to help in the effective teaching and learning of Oral English, as well as alleviating mother tongue interference. Strategies are high level plans to achieve one or more goals under conditions of uncertainty. A strategy determines how the goals will be achieved by the means (resources). Strategy can be intended or can emerge as a pattern of activity as the organization adapts to its environment or competes. Max McKeown (2011) proposes that strategy is the human attempt to get to desirable ends with available means. Strategies play a huge role in this study in the sense that certain plans are put in place using a specified pattern to achieve a goal. Certain plans are put into consideration to alleviate the influence of native language in the expression of English language. Achieving a goal in this context is bringing out high level plans to alleviate mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of Oral English.

Oral English is the system through which we use spoken words to express knowledge, ideas, and feelings. Developing Oral English then means developing the skills and knowledge that go into listening and speaking, all of which have a strong relationship to reading comprehension and writing. Heinemann (2010) opines that Oral English is made of at least five key components and they are phonological skills, pragmatics, syntax, morphological skills, and vocabulary also referred to as Semantics. All of these components of Oral English are necessary to communicate and learn through conversation and spoken interaction. The teacher makes the Oral English classroom convenient by modeling the language which she does by saying aloud and writing the ideas in the subject matter. The teacher then introduces a teaching strategy to serve as a guide in the effective teaching and learning of Oral English, as well as alleviating mother tongue interference.

Teaching strategy is a method that a teacher will use to support students through the learning process. It is also a generalised plan for a lesson which includes structure desired learner behaviour in terms of goals of instructions and an outline of planned tactics necessary to implement the strategy. Goodwin (2018) defines teaching strategy as the method a teacher uses to convey information to students. As mentioned before, teaching strategies suggest a way in which a teaching situation can be approached.

Generally, the following are considered as the strategies that can be used in teaching Oral English that may alleviate mother tongue interference. Audio - lingual strategy: This is a productive strategy where language laboratory, visual and audio aids are used in teaching English language. Language immersion strategy is another strategy which exposes the learner to the target language through the aid of the learner's first Language. Another strategy is Grammar - Translation strategy where the target language is learnt through the translation of the native language and vice versa. Direct strategy is another strategy which is primarily focused on the target language without the use of mother tongue. The silent way strategy is a strategy where the teacher maintains silence and watches the students use the target language. The teacher only serves as an observer and a corrector.

However, this work focuses on audio visual teaching strategy which may alleviate mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of Oral English in senior secondary schools in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. Audio visual is electronic media processing both a sound and a visual component, such as slide, tape presentations, corporate conferencing, and live theatre presentations. Computer based audio visual equipment is often used in education, with many schools installing projection equipment and using interactive whiteboard technology. In audio visual, particular attention is paid to the audio and visual presentation of the material with the goal of improving comprehension and retention. Nowadays, teachers use various audio-visual aids to facilitate the teaching process and enhance the concentration and learning ability of the students. Webster's Encyclopedia Unabridged Dictionary(3rd Edition) of the English Language, defines Audio -Visual aids as "training or educational materials directed at both the senses of hearing and the sense of sight, films, recordings, photographs used in classroom instructions, library collections or the likes". So now, along with books, teachers may use related pictures, audio clips, videos, power point slides, posters and so on in the classrooms. The objective of using audio-visual aids is to enhance teacher's ability to present the lesson in a fun, easy and efficient way for understanding of the students. Audio-visual material makes learning more permanent and lasting since students use more than one sense. The use of visual and audio means makes abstract ideas more concrete for the students.

This study was thus guided by three research questions:

1. What are the innovative teaching strategies that can be adopted by teachers of English language to alleviate mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of Oral English in Senior Secondary Schools?
2. What are the hindrances of mother tongue interference to effective teaching and learning of spoken English in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State?
3. What are the areas of occurrence of mother tongue interference in spoken English?

Method

This study employs the descriptive survey design. Nworgu (2015), explains descriptive survey research design as those studies which aim at collecting data and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features, or facts from only a few people or items considered to be representative of the entire group. Descriptive survey has qualitative and quantitative method of data analysis but for the purpose of this work, we are going to make use of the two methods for study because we made use of questionnaire and unstructured interview for data collection.

This design is chosen because it describes in a systematic manner the facts concerning the topic under investigation. It is also interested in describing certain variables in relation to population in order to find out the strategies for alleviating mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of English Language in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State.

The geographical area for this study is Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area, Enugu state. Its headquarters is Ogbede. The senior secondary schools in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State are chosen because of the students' poor performance in English Language. Besides, the senior secondary schools in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area are large enough to provide useful data for this study.

The target population for this study is all the senior English Language teachers and senior students in the fifteen (15) public secondary schools in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area. The English teachers in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State are forty-five (45) in number, while the students' population in the senior classes is three thousand one hundred and fifty (3150). The researchers obtained information statistics from the Post Primary School Management Board (PPSMB), Nsukka Zone, which indicated that there are fifteen (15) public schools in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. Out of the fifteen (15) Government owned secondary schools in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area. Five schools were randomly selected, hundred (100) students and twenty (20) teachers were also selected through simple random sampling technique.

The instrument for data collection is a research structured questionnaire and unstructured interview entitled 'mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of English Language' (MTITLEL). The questionnaire was used specifically to collect information from both teachers and students. However, the instrument is divided into three (3) clusters. Cluster one (1) is to identify the strategies that can be adopted by English Language teachers to alleviate mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of English Language. Cluster two (2) is to identify the hindrances of mother tongue interference to effective teaching and learning of spoken English. Each of these clusters contains ten (10) items. Cluster three (3) is based on unstructured interview and it has seven (7) items. The interview was conducted by the researcher on the students and teachers to determine the areas of occurrence of mother tongue interference in spoken English in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. The questionnaire is rated on a four (4) point scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Disagree (D).

The research instrument was validated by three experts, two (2) experts in Language Education in the Department of Arts Education, and one expert from Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Science Education. All the experts are from the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The Valuator's corrections and suggestions helped the researcher to produce the final instrument for this study. The researcher administered the questionnaires directly to the respondents and collected them immediately with the help of the teachers to ensure a hundred percent return.

Mean score was used to analyse the data and answer the researchers' questions. The decision mean is any score from 2.50 and above was accepted and any score below 2.50 was rejected. In order to obtain the mean, values were assigned to the various responses as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) - 4 points, Agree (A) - 3 points, Strongly Disagree (SD) - 2 points, Disagree (D) - 1 point.

Result

The results of the data collected are presented in tables below as they reflect answers to the research questions.

Table 1: Mean rating and standard deviation of strategies that can be adopted by teachers of English language to alleviate mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of English language

	Strategies	Mean(\bar{x})	S.D	Decision
1	Use of Language laboratory	3.48	.77	Accepted
2	Use of pronouncing dictionary	3.20	.99	Accepted
3	Use of drills	3.38	.59	Accepted
4	The use of minimal pairs	3.19	.98	Accepted
5	Taking students to English speaking countries	3.14	.91	Accepted
6	Prohibition of Igbo language speaking in the class	2.27	1.03	Rejected
7	Use of tasks that require phonetic pronunciations	2.85	.94	Accepted
8	Use of recorders	2.91	.92	Accepted
9	Use of phonetic Charts	3.15	.90	Accepted
10	Use of projector	2.53	1.16	Accepted
	GRAND MEAN	3.01		Accepted

n=120, (\bar{x})=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

The table 1 reveals the strategies that can be adopted by teachers of English language to alleviate mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of English language. All the items except item 6 were accepted by the respondents as strategies.

Table 2: Mean rating & standard deviation Areas of hindrances of mother tongue to effective teaching and learning of spoken English.

	Hindrances	Mean(\bar{x})	S.D	Decision
1	Wrong pronunciation of English sounds.	3.09	.81	Accepted
2	Lack of speech fluency among the learners.	3.47	1.03	Accepted
3	Teachers of English language use mother tongue in their instructions.	3.27	.87	Accepted
4	Wrong intonation patterns among the learners.	3.15	.76	Accepted
5	Ineffective communication among the learners.	3.54	.69	Accepted
6	Students find it difficult to construct correct sentences in English language.	3.49	.60	Accepted
7	Mother tongue interference poses low interest in learning of oral English	2.94	1.16	Accepted
8	Mother tongue interference paves way for the use of written test than oral test in oral English examination.	3.49	.60	Accepted

9	The learners' mother tongue being a tone language negatively influences the learners' efficiency in stress patterns of English words	3.2	.97	Accepted
10	Speech sounds that do not exist in mother tongue are difficult to pronounce.	3.66	.47	Accepted
GRAND MEAN				Accepted
3.33				

n=120, (\bar{x})=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

Table 2 unravels the areas of hindrances of mother tongue to effective teaching and learning of spoken English in Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. All the items attained the 2.50 benchmark. Therefore, they were all accepted by the respondents as areas of hindrances of mother tongue to effective teaching and learning of spoken English.

Table 3: Frequency & simple percentage of areas of occurrence of mother tongue (Igbo Language) interference in spoken English

S/N	English phone me	Igbo reali zatio n	Wor d teste d	Standard pronunci ation	Respondent pronunciati on	Correct responde nt frequency	% Freque ncy	No. of wrong respon dents	% Freque ncy
1.	/θ/	/t/	Think	/θɪŋk/	Tink	21	21%	79	79%
			Faith	/feɪθ/	Fate	18	18%	82	82%
			Thank	/θæŋk/	Tank	22	22%	78	78%
2.	/r/	/l/	Ruler	/ru:lər/	Lula	15	15%	86	86%
			Red	/red/	Led	15	15%	85	85%
			Read	/redi/	Ledi	35	35%	65	65%
3.	/l/	/n/	Line	/Lain/	Nine	15	15%	85	85%
			Level	/levəl/	Nevel	16	16%	84	84%
			Nylon	/naɪlɒn/	Nynon	14	14%	86	86%
4.	/ʃ/	/tʃ/	Sheep	/ʃi:p/	Cheep	27	27%	73	73%
			Shuttle	/ʃʌtl/	Chuttle	29	29%	71	71%
			Shirt	/ʃɜ:t/	Chirt	27	27%	72	72%
5.	/ð/	/d/	These	/ðeɪz/	Dis	32	32%	68	68%
			Breathe	/bri:ð/	Breed	37	37%	63	63%
			Bathe	/beɪð/	Bade	27	27%	73	73%
6.	/eɪ/	/e/	Table	/teɪbəl/	Tebulu	18	18%	82	82%

			Face	/feis/	Fes	19	19%	81	81%
			Late	/leit/	Leti	12	12%	88	88%
7.	/ə/	/æ/	Abov e	/əbΛv/	Abovu	12	12%	88	88%
			Fathe r	/fɑ:ðər/	Fada	22	22%	78	78%
			Abou t	/əbaʊt/	Abouti	20	20%	80	80%

n=100, (\bar{x})=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation.

Table 3 reveals the areas of occurrence of mother tongue (Igbo Language) interference in spoken English. The data was captured through an unstructured interview gotten from the 100 sampled students and presented in a percentage and frequency table. The result shows that majority of the students failed to correctly pronounce the above English phonemes thereby proving the phonemes as areas of occurrence of mother tongue (Igbo Language) interference in spoken English.

Discussion

From the findings, it is evidenced that table 1 revealed the strategies that can be adopted by English teachers to alleviate mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of Oral English in Igbo Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu State. The table also showed that teachers make use of strategies like use of Language Laboratory, use of pronouncing dictionary, use of drills, use of minimal pairs, taking students to English speaking countries, prohibition of Igbo speaking in the class, use of tasks that require phonetic pronunciations, use of recorders, use of phonetic charts and use of projector to alleviate mother tongue interference. This result is in line with the findings of Reddy (2008:26) which states that the use of film projectors, charts, language laboratory, recorders and every other audio-visual media help in alleviating mother tongue interference. Muter (2009) also states that audio-visual media are important in learning foreign languages because they can stimulate learners and encourage focus in learning the target language.

In analysing the data collected for the research question two, the result showed that the English teachers encounter the following difficulties among others: wrong pronunciation, lack of speech fluency, use mother tongue for instructions, wrong intonation. Ajuola (2008) supports the fact that wrong pronunciation and wrong intonation due to transfer from the mother tongue are the major hindrances to effective teaching and learning of Oral English. The table three reveals the areas of occurrence of mother tongue (Igbo Language) interference in spoken English. The result shows that majority of the students failed to correctly pronounce some English phonemes such as /θ, r, l, ʃ, ð, ei, ə/ thereby proving the phonemes as areas of occurrence of mother tongue (Igbo Language) interference in spoken English. Egbe in Oluikpe (2019) holds the idea that many Igbo speakers substitute /r/ with /l/; /n/ with /l/ and vice versa. So, instead of saying *rat* they say *lat*; instead of saying *love*, they say *rove*; instead of saying *life* they pronounce *naif*.

Conclusion

This research has demonstrated that Audio-visual media can be used as strategies to alleviate mother tongue interference in the teaching and learning of oral English. There is linguistic incompetence in spoken English, both at the side of the teachers and the students. It

investigated that mother tongue interference occurs mostly in some English phonemes that do not have equivalent sound in the mother tongue.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers deem it pertinent to make some recommendations to those concerned.

1. Since qualified teachers are pivotal in teaching and learning, more qualified teachers, if possible the native speakers of English language should be employed to teach Oral English in senior secondary schools.
2. Language Laboratory should be used in teaching Oral English in schools. Therefore, government should make language laboratories and the technicians available to all secondary schools.
3. The ministry officials should ensure that audio-visual materials are provided for schools.

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