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An Investigation on Functionality and Usage of Language Laboratories For Teaching Oral English in Colleges of Education in Bauchi State

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Abstract

This research attempts to investigate functionality and usage of language laboratories for teaching oral English in colleges of education in Bauchi State, Nigeria. The topic has been chosen due to the role played by language laboratory in assisting students to develop proficiency in the spoken aspect of the English language. The objective is to find out whether there are well-equipped language laboratories in the colleges and are utilized in the teaching of both segmental and supra-segmental features of English phonology. The researchers used the descriptive method with simple statistics in processing and analyzing the collected data. The total population comprises all the students of English in the three colleges of education owned by Bauchi State Government. However, eighty-three (83) students were found to be one over three of the total population of NCE one students across the three institutions and so were used to represent the entire students of English in the colleges. The results proved among others that there are well equipped and functional language laboratories in the Tertiary institutions in Bauchi State – Nigeria and the students are exposed to the use of such laboratories in the process of learning the pronunciation of English sound system but mother tongue influences their pronunciation especially of sounds that are not available in the first or native language and in this sense (Hausa language). Thus, the students have difficulty in differentiating similar vowel sounds of English language. It was also found out that the students have problems with vowel length. Length is phonologically functional in Hausa language whereas it is not in English language. That is to say, vowel length has phonological meaning. The supra-segmental features of English are understood by the students but it was however found out that they have some difficulty in



understanding the concept of Intonation. The study recommends among others that government should expand language laboratories in Tertiary institutions in Bauchi. Special training should be given to language laboratory technologists and lecturers should adopt the habit of teaching both segmental and supra-segmental features of English phonology side by side and not in isolation.

Key words: Language Laboratory, Oral English, English Sound System, Investigation, supra-segmental, Colleges of Education.

Introduction

This study is an outcome of an attempt to investigate functionality and usage of language laboratories for teaching oral English in colleges of education in Bauchi State, Nigeria. The aim is to find out whether both segmental and supra-segmental features of oral English are taught in language laboratories in the colleges and to find out whether there are well-equipped language laboratories in the said institutions.

Oral English is an integral part of foreign language learning since it directly affects learners' communicative competence as well as performance. Limited pronunciation skills can decrease learner's self-confidence, restrict social interactions and negatively affects estimations of a speaker's credibility and abilities. He maintained that one of the key requirements for language proficiency is to secure understandable pronunciation for language learners. This is because intelligible pronunciation is an essential component of communicative competence.

Proficiency in oral English is one of the basic requirements for mastering the English language. However,

observation reveals that students' performance in oral English in the tertiary colleges of education in Bauchi state is questionable despite its significance. The choice of the topic is motivated by the researchers' experience in lecturing in one of the tertiary colleges of education in Bauchi State. This means that it was an observed phenomenon and so the researchers are interested in finding the root of the problem and possible solutions through a well-articulated analysis of results. It has been noted that students learning English as a second language face a lot of problems in their pronunciation of the English sound systems – vowels, consonants, (segmental), intonation, syllable and stress (supra-segmental). This is so because of the poor teaching of oral English in language laboratories. This results in negative teaching and learning of the English language at the tertiary institutions in Bauchi State.

Therefore, the importance of investigating difficulties in oral English teaching stems from the fact that pronunciation stands as an obstacle in communication especially when the meaning of a certain word or an expression is altered because of the wrong pronunciation of an item



as when one says 'fen' for pen or 'ship' for 'chip' or even 'flease' for 'please'. However, it is necessary in this research to find out the availability, functionality and usage of language laboratories which is key to effective teaching and learning of oral English in our tertiary institutions.

It was observed that students of English as a second language in tertiary institutions of learning in Bauchi State find it very difficult to pronounce correctly some English language sounds due to one reason or the other as corroborated by Jibrin (2011). Such reasons may include poor educational background, mother tongue or first language interference and insufficient exposure to the English language. Other reasons could be that some Hausa learners of English do not have rich knowledge of English language and in addition their pronunciation of a second language system poses problems of different kinds from those which learners face when they learn their first language. There is also the problem of absence of the use of model pronunciation of English sound system among many lecturers in the Department of English in the four tertiary Colleges of Education. So, the students have their teachers as role models, to rely on and copy, but in most cases are not good or accurate in pronunciation of English sound system. There is also the dearth or absence of language laboratories in some of the institutions. Some that have are either not well equipped or not functional at all, and some that may be functional, their sitting capacity may not contain the students. In this situation, the

lecturers that teach these pronunciation courses do it manually but neglecting the best method achieved through drills, minimal pairs, pronunciation skills and short conversations. Richard and Rogers (1986:44) view that "such type of class or lessons are the ones that give primary attention to phonemes and their meaningful contrasts, allophonic variations and combinatory phonetic rules along with attention to stress, rhythm and intonation".

Most of the students are merely concerned with getting a pass in the course than actually mastering it, neglecting the fact that proficiency in English is far beyond that. On this note, Osinsanwo (2012:143) views "that many Nigerian students believe that as much as possible since they can use the English alphabets to form words and communicate though unintelligibly, to them communication has taken place and so they viewed both teaching and learning of pronunciation negatively as 'a waste of time'".

Despite the importance attached to the oral English in the production of good English on the speaker's side and maintenance of intelligibility on the listener's part, it is observed that studies are not conducted to investigate and address the issue as it focuses on colleges of education in Bauchi state. Consequently, the scenario has led to the conduct of this research to reveal the current performance and situation in the state and to provide basis for designing the contents in the teaching of oral English and to propose



relevant information to the policy-makers, curriculum planners, speaking specialists, parents and any other individuals concerned with the issue in question.

Literature Review

Language laboratory is an audio-visual installation used as an aid in teaching and learning of oral English where each student is able to replay one track of a tape for more understanding and hears pronunciation of English sounds directly from the native speaker or near-native speaker. It is an important tool of teaching oral English in the sense that a learner is allowed to use the head phone to listen to pronunciation of the sounds in collaboration with the teacher. The laboratory gives the teacher the opportunity to express simple ideas that will help the learner to gain confidence in their speech production.

Although it is not possible for second language learners to achieve hundred percent competence in their pronunciation like the native speakers, the result of this problem is mispronunciation, misspelling, mistress and the consequent poor learning of English as a second language. In relation to this, Baker (2000, p7) said 'Students find that they can improve all aspects of their proficiency in English except their pronunciation and mistakes which have been repeated for years are difficult to eradicate'. The long-term solution to this problem is to have compulsory phonetic course or subject in English language to be taught by experts in the field of

Phonetics and Phonology. This can be done through active drills on minimal pairs, pronunciation skills and short conversations.

From the foregoing, it can be seen that the teacher's role is not only to teach but to facilitate learning by monitoring and modifying English language at two levels: speech production and speech performance. This is because the English sound system – vowels, consonants, stress, intonation, syllable rhythm etc - is neglected in spite of its importance for correct and intelligible communication. Therefore, this study is set to spot the areas of difficulties Hausa native speakers in Bauchi State tertiary institutions face in learning English language sound systems and it tries to investigate the reasons and suggest possible solutions and recommendations.

Richards (2001) opined that language laboratories can be used for teaching a number of languages efficiently as sensibility towards sounds and rhythm of foreign language can only be obtained through the best sample of spoken language, and this is the foundation of language laboratory function.

According to Eze & Eze (2017) the language laboratory is simply a teaching aid which can provide useful practice in both oral and aural skills and also to a certain extent, in reading and writing. As a practice instrument, the laboratory has a valid role in language teaching and learning and its effectiveness depends on both the quality of the instrument and the way in which it is used.



Language laboratory is the most advanced form of audio-visual aid used in language teaching which attempts to make use of all possible mechanical aids in developing facility in comprehension and in speech. It is a special room designed and used primarily for language learning with the aid of electronic equipment whose purpose is to enable the student to hear the program material with utmost clarity and high fidelity. He should hear his own voice as he speaks, for comparison with models. It is also a facility that allows the teacher to listen to each individual speaker or student without being detected stack. In Gordon's word (1991) a language laboratory has an advantage as an aid to learning because it is a machine that can be controlled; it can be made to repeat and it never tires.

The purpose of the use of language laboratory according to Asningtias (2018) is for the students to get exposure of real-life language by the speakers of English. To run an effective language laboratory, four elements he said should be present, namely, the facilities, standard operational procedure, learners and language laboratory coordinator.

The language laboratory support teachers in delivering foreign language through audio or audiovisual. It has gone through many development stages over the years. The type of language laboratories commonly used are: Conventional laboratory, Lingua phone laboratory, Computer assisted language laboratory and Multimedia Hi-Tech

language laboratory (Asningtias, 2018).

Methodology

Being a descriptive research, a survey research designed was adopted and used a sample of a definite population of an investigation to describe, explain and document what is in existence of the present status of the phenomenon under investigation. The population of this research includes all students of English in the three functional colleges of education owned by Bauchi State Government. The reason for excluding private colleges is that based on preparatory observation, it was discovered that they lack sufficient number of students and targeted language laboratories. This made it a purposeful sampling with the choice of the three institutions. However; their large number necessitated a selection of a sample within the research's population for a smooth conduct of the research. Based on this, 100 level NCE students of English were utilized and one-third of such population was selected in each college to represent the entire population. For the lecturers, two (2) were selected in each college to supply the required information. This made a total of six (6) in all the colleges. For students, a total number of twenty-eight (28) were selected in Aminu Saleh College of Education, Azare, twenty six (26) from A.D. Rufa'i College of Education, Legal and General Studies Misau and twenty nine (29) from Adamu Tafawa Balewa College of Education, Kangere. This made the total of eighty three (83)

students in all the three institutions. The selection of the sample was simple random to ensure that each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected.

The data types for this research covered both quantitative and qualitative, which were obtained from primary and secondary sources. Thus, the primary data was generated from the respondents which specifically comprised of students selected from the colleges of education in the state. Such sampled students were given pronunciation test; questionnaire and their speech habits were observed. Furthermore, lecturers were interviewed to obtain information on their experiences concerning the availability, functionality and use of language laboratory in their colleges and to further reveal whether the students are actually exposed to these Results and Discussion

laboratories. To ensure the accuracy of the responses, the researcher adopted observation method in that such laboratories were observed to see the available set of equipment. On the other hand, the secondary data were sourced through literatures that seem to add credence to the research.

Therefore, through the said procedure, the researcher in conjunction with the research's assistants conducted the test on pronunciation aspects for the selected students, administered them the questionnaire and then observed their performance in speech production through interaction. Since data analysis is "a process of handling mass data and summarizing it into an interpretable value" Jen (2007, p73), the data were summarized and analysis was made to bring out the clear picture of the problem in question.

Table 1 Showing the Overall Responses of Students in the Questionnaires administered

S/N 0	Statement	Options	Frequency	Percentage
1	There is well equipped, functional and useful language laboratory in my institution.	SA	57	68.67%
		A	26	31.33%
		D	0	0
		SD	0	0
2	Students' exposure to language through pair work, group work, listening and practical dialogue in sound	SA	45	54.22%
		A	37	44.58%



	systems improves proficiency in English language.	D	01	1.20%
		SD	0	0
3	Listening to English sounds and words correctly pronounced from the audio, CD plates, radio, TV channels and sounds dictionary help Hausa native learners to improve their pronunciation in English language.	SA	53	63.86%
		A	27	32.53%
		D	02	2.41%
		SD	01	1.20%
4	There are adequate lesson periods and Pronunciation drills in my institution.	SA	42	50.60%
		A	33	39.76%
		D	6	7.23%
		SD	02	2.41%
5	There is significant difference between learning English sound system in the language laboratory and in the classroom.	SA	37	44.58%
		A	37	44.58%
		D	07	8.43%
		SD	02	2.41%
6	There are enough Pronunciation teachers in my institution.	SA	48	57.83%
		A	33	39.76%
		D	0	0
		SD	02	2.41%
7	English vowels and consonant sounds are theoretically and practically taught in my institution.	SA	46	55.42%
		A	36	43.37%



		D	01	1.20%
		SD	0	0
8	Model pronunciation being taught by non-native speaker improves correct pronunciation of English sound system.	SA	34	40.96%
		A	38	45.78%
		D	05	6.02%
		SD	06	7.23%
9	Supra-segmental features of English (stress, intonation, syllables etc) are mostly taught in the classroom rather than language laboratory.	SA	39	46.99%
		A	32	38.55%
		D	10	12.05%
		SD	02	2.41%
10	In teaching English sound system, what is taught in the course content differs from what is supposed to be taught.	SA	37	44.58%
		A	30	36.14%
		D	14	16.87%
		SD	02	2.41%
11	Lecturers do conduct practical listening skill in my institution.	SA	53	63.86%
		A	23	27.71%
		D	05	6.02%
		SD	02	2.41%



12	Differences in English and Hausa Consonant sounds cause difficulties for the Hausa native speaker that is learning English as a second language.	SA	47	56.63%
		A	29	34.94%
		D	04	4.82%
		SD	03	3.61%
13	Mother tongue interferes with my pronunciation of the English sound system.	SA	35	42.17%
		A	33	39.76%
		D	08	9.64%
		SD	07	8.43%
14	Audio visual aids are used in teaching oral skills in my institution so as to ignite/excite the interest of the students.	SA	37	44.58%
		A	31	37.35%
		D	12	14.46%
		SD	03	3.61%
15	English Language students in Bauchi state tertiary institutions are exposed to the use of language laboratory in teaching and learning of pronunciation of English sounds.	SA	40	48.19%
		A	24	28.92%
		D	10	12.05%
		SD	09	10.84%
16	Most of the students of English have positive attitude in learning pronunciation of English sound system.	SA	26	31.33%
		A	50	60.24%
		D	05	6.02%



		SD	02	2.41%
17	Use of drills, learning of minimal pairs, pronunciation and short conversations improves good pronunciation of the English sound system.	SA	48	57.83%
		A	28	33.73%
		D	04	4.82%
		SD	03	3.61%
18	Learners of English as a second language produce speech that is native language-accented rather than English accented.	SA	32	38.55%
		A	46	55.42%
		D	02	2.41%
		SD	03	3.61%
19	When pronouncing English sound, I first pronounce it in my native language before thinking the right English pronunciation.	SA	30	36.14%
		A	20	24.10%
		D	16	19.28%
		SD	17	20.48%
20	I experience difficulty in trying to pronounce English sounds during lessons in my institution.	SA	42	50.60%
		A	34	40.96%
		D	03	3.61%
		SD	04	4.82%

Key: SA = Strongly Agreed, A = Agreed, D = Disagreed, SD = Strongly Disagreed.

Looking at the table above, it can be understood that the combined result shows little or no difference in the view of students of all the three

institutions on the hypothesized points with regards to availability of functional language laboratories and their roles in helping students to



develop proficiency in the spoken aspect of the English language. Almost all the respondents virtually agreed with all the hypothesized points. High number frequencies were recorded in agreement with the points indicating that students agreed that English pronunciation is best be taught in the language laboratories than in the class room and they have positive attitudes towards readiness to learn in such laboratories.

The students' responses on the questionnaires show that mother tongue has a great negative influence in their spoken form of English. This is in line with Onotere's (2007) position that the major cause of errors in the English of Nigerians can be attributed primarily to interference of the mother tongue systems. The responses equally agreed with the position of Job (1992) who pointed out that when a learner hears a sound in a new language, he may wrongly associate it with a sound or word in his own language.

Lecturers' interview reveals that the Phonetics and Phonology of English course contents in the three tertiary institutions in Bauchi State, Nigeria, are available, adequate, and relevant and also have covered areas of English sound system (segmental and supra-segmental features). The findings of the study also confirm that teachers highly considered that some language skills will be more effectively taught in language laboratories; however, several obstacles occur, such as, outdated equipment, unskilled teachers to operate the devices, less teaching

resource, time allotment, among others

The test administered show that Hausa native speakers of English language in the tertiary institutions in Bauchi State, Nigeria, are exposed to the use of language laboratory in teaching and learning of pronunciation of English sound system. However, the students have difficulty in differentiating similar vowel sounds of English language. For example, /a/ and /a:/ as in "pack and park", also in /ɔ/ and /ɔ:/ as in "pot and port". The supra-segmental feature of English, that is the Stress and the Syllable, is taught, learned and understood by the students. But it was however found out that students have some difficulty in understanding the concept of intonation.

Generally, the findings proved that using effective language laboratory in oral English is essential in teaching, listening and mastery of speaking. However, it was discovered that the use of language laboratory in teaching and learning of oral English is improving learning performance.

Conclusion

It is evidently clear that the students of English as a second language particularly the Hausa native speakers face a lot of problems in an attempt to perfect themselves in English language. There are so many reasons to this. Firstly, the two languages in question are not from the same geographical background. While Hausa is an indigenous language, English is a foreign



language. Another problem is that the two languages do not share the same speech sounds. Although there are areas of similarities, there exist a lot of differences. Added to this, there is the problem of first language influence on the second language. The second language learner transfers certain features of his first language into the second language particularly the Hausa native speaker.

There is no doubt therefore that the teacher of English sound system (segmental and supra-segmental features) has a lot of challenges in an attempt to teach his students the correct pronunciation of English sound system. There is also no doubt that the students of English whose mother tongue (Hausa language) has certain impact in their pronunciation and speech will be the future teachers of English language in our Schools and Colleges. Although it is not possible for second language learner to speak the same way the first or native speakers do no matter how hard a person tries, certain features or accent of the mother tongue most appear. This is so, as we can identify an Indian, Ghanaian, Nigerian, Sudanese, German or even a Chinese speaking English language from their accents. Even in the same country like Nigeria, you would find English spoken in Hausa accent, Yoruba accent, Igbo accent etc. In the same Northern Nigeria too; you will identify a Fulani man speaking English from his accent, Hausa man, Kanuri man etc. Moreover, it is also important for teachers to understand the language differences and pattern of English and Hausa, for example

while Hausa is a tonal language with even vowel length, English is not. So, the teacher must expect certain pronunciation differences by the learner because of the influence of his first language (Hausa) in to the second language (English).

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