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## **EDITORIAL**

Every academic environment is sustained by learning through rigorous methods. Research is one and the focal point for assessment. A serious member of the academic community is measured by the quality and number of academic articles.

In spite of the desire to acquire many research reports, this edition has insisted on standards and quality. It is important to note that many articles have been rejected for not meeting our requirements.

The first and most obvious task of our journal is to provide a level playing field for researchers all over the globe in language-related disciplines, which is the vehicle for conveying knowledge. In this edition, seventeen (17) articles have undergone academic scrutiny from our blind reviewers.

To our esteemed contributors and readers, thought-provoking articles are expected and we are ready to publish them in the next volume.

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### **Manuscripts Submission**

Three hard copies of the article with text, charts, tables, figures, plates or any other original illustration should be sent to the editor-in-chief JAJOLLS, Taraba State University, Jalingo, Taraba State Nigeria. Submission should either be in English, French, Hausa, or Arabic languages. Articles should be typed in double line spacing with a wide margin on each side only on A4 sized paper not exceeding 15 pages including abstract with not more than 6-7 keywords. Articles are to be submitted with Five Thousand Naira (N5,000) assessment and handling charges. By submitting an article to JAJOLLS, the author(s) agree that the exclusive rights to produce and distribute the articles to the publisher.

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### Okpanachi Dorothy Aye



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#### **An Overview of Challenges in Learning English: A Case Study of Selected Senior Secondary Schools in Ankpa, Kogi State.**

##### **Abstract**

*The paper discusses the challenges of learning English with particular reference to senior secondary school students in Ankpa, Kogi East. The aim of this study is to find out the problems students encounter in the learning of the English language at the senior secondary school level. 96 respondents were selected for the study, consisting of 11 English language teachers comprising 7 male and 4 female, 85 students including 40 male and 45 female. Questionnaire and group discussion methods were used. The questionnaires were administered to respondents and they were also involved in focus group discussion. It was found that most of the teachers were not trained to teach English, adequate facilities were not provided; curriculum was not adequately followed to meet the needs of students and students' unseriousness due to heavy reliance on examination malpractice. Teaching and learning of English in Ankpa, Kogi East is based on the system of grammatical patterns and there is a trend of formal and bookish language, students just produce sentence and focus on reading and writing. These factors hindered the learning process of the English language. We can conclude that generally in Ankpa, Kogi State, there are many hindrances in the learning of English at the senior secondary school level, which include overcrowded classes, use of traditional methods, faulty examination system, and non-availability of required facilities etc. In Ankpa, by extension Kogi State, the situation is not satisfactory, particularly in the rural areas. Therefore, this study is an attempt to find out challenges faced by the students at the senior secondary school level in learning the English language. This study will also help to find out the actual practices of learning and teaching in the classroom and also suggests some important measures to improve the quality of learning the English language at the senior secondary school level with special reference to Ankpa in Eastern part of Kogi State.*

**Keywords:** Ankpa, Kogi State, challenge, importance, questionnaire, group discussion.

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## 1.1 Introduction

English enjoys wide usage and it is the most spoken language globally. Over 80 percent international organizations in the field of international relations make use of English (Teevno, 2011). According to Behroozi and Amoozegar (2014) it is important that learners of English keep pace with modern world. And that English has emerged as the most important global language and also evolved to be a language of science and technology. Furthermore, Scrase (2003), earlier on, maintains that, English is not only important in getting a better job; it is used for social interaction. Ibrahim (2013) opines that English in Nigeria occupies a very important position and enjoys prominence or what Ayotunde (2008) in Ibrahim (2013:98) technically terms 'dominance configuration'. In addition, learning of the English language is not only as a means to an end but as an end in itself. Long after independence, English in Nigeria still continues to enjoy its primacy in educational system as medium of instruction, language for economic growth, and the English language is still instrumental to the fragile unity that Nigeria enjoys currently. Adegbite (2004) opines that English should provide an expected coordinating role as a way of inter-ethnic and international communications. It is obvious that English performs an influential role in the formation of national values and integration of the Nigerian nation through its status as the official language. English is a cosmopolitan language. Its significance cannot be ignored. As earlier noted, English is predominant in most domains; e.g. science, technology, media, global trade, economics, information technology etc. learning English is important and compulsory in Nigeria, if one must function well. English as L2 (Second Language) is unavoidable in the Nigerian educational system. The four language skills namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing are the four potentialities that enable a learner to assimilate, construct and make use of the language in communication meaningfully. Therefore, the teacher is expected to combine these skills or techniques in the process of learning as well as apply them to aid the proficiency and self-confidence of the students (learners). Nigeria is a multi-linguistic country, with the English language as an official language and the language of education as such learning the English language has become a necessity. In schools, the English language is taught as a second language with different approaches or methods. However, there are some major challenges in learning the English language. The present paper discusses the challenges of learning English with particular reference to senior secondary school students in Ankpa, the Eastern part of Kogi State. The current reality is that many learners at the senior secondary school level especially in the rural areas perform poorly and have low proficiency in the English language.

Ama (2022) opines that English language learners in African countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, Zambia, Malawi and other African countries encounter a lot of



challenges due to the fact that English is not the first or native language of these countries and that these challenges include, unqualified teachers, the most significant and most over looked, limited learning environments, inadequate learning materials, students do not take their studies seriously, over use of native language in the classroom, students becoming too dependent, intelligent students dominate the class. Grayathri (2021:1) asserts, learning a language is not an easy task for many people that “English as a second language comes with many challenges, especially in terms of pronunciation, context and cultural norms. All languages have their idiosyncrasies and learning English may be daunting to learners for many reasons. In the same vein, Excel (2018) avers that learning a new language can be difficult, and that the most common challenges students face when learning English as a second language are pronunciation, spelling, slang and colloquialism etc. Samantha (2022) is of the opinion that, one of the challenges in learning English is that it is difficult for learners to distinguish between similar sounding words (e.g. ship/sheep). In addition, that English phonemes are often not pronounced in the same way as in the learner’s first language (L1). Wold (2006) asserts the role of the first language (L1) in the learning of the second language (L2). The first language (L1) has a high effect on the learning of the L2, in this case, learners or students in Ankpa, Kogi East, learning English as L2. There are varieties of challenges encountered by the second language (L2) learner, even in the best of learning situations. The most basic of these is first language (L1) interference or negative transfer, the psycholinguistic tendency to rely on familiar forms of expression when the intent is to develop a new form of the second language. Implications include the need for basic sound training for senior secondary school students. Krug, Shafer, Dardick, Magalis, and Parente (2002) affirm that, learning English as a second language poses specific challenges for students whose first language bears little similarity or resemblance to English in sound, appearance, and phonological or orthographic structure, and these learners might be at a disadvantage in their learning of English as a second language. Since second language learning skills are closely related to the skills used in learning the first language, learners whose first language learning skills do not match those which would be useful in English second language (ESL) learning can be expected to experience relative difficulty in learning English. More specifically, ESL learners whose first language is not alphabetical and who did not learn their first language in an alphabetically coded manner will have particular difficulty in learning English. It is obvious from the above opinions that second language learners of English differently put, learners of English as second language encounter some challenges or problems which include, unqualified teachers, limited learning environments, inadequate learning materials, students’ unseriousness, over use of native language in the classroom, brilliant students dominating the class, pronunciation, difficult for learners to distinguish between similar sounding words, context and cultural norms, spelling, slang and colloquialism etc.(see Ama, 2022; Grayathri, 2021; Excel, 2018; Samantha, 2022). Other challenges are first language interference or negative transfer, as well as the dissimilarity of the first language to English (see Wold, 2006; Krug, Shafer, Dardick, Magalis, and Parente, 2002).

However, in learning English as a second language, learners tap on the skills they used to learn their first language. English is an alphabetic language with phonological and orthographic rules that do not exist in non-alphabetic languages like Igala and other Nigerian languages, as such English second language learners like Igala and other Nigerian language speakers, whose first language is non alphabetic and who learned their native language without the need for phonological and orthographic

rules might have a much lower phonological and orthographic awareness than ESL learners who learned their first language with an alphabetic system or whose first language is alphabetic. Nevertheless, it is difficult to learn a language with a phonology that differs from one's first language (L1) because it is entirely different though it is possible to do so through dedication, careful listening, and continuous practice. For example, English has a larger number of phonemes than many other Nigerian languages, Igala inclusive. This can make it difficult for learners to distinguish between similar sounding words (e.g. ship/sheep). In addition, English phonemes are often not pronounced in the same way as in the learner's first language. All of these can pose difficulties for L2 learners. It can be difficult for L2 learners to master, as the phonological patterns of their L1 are often different. All of these phonological difficulties can have a negative effect on L2 learners, affecting their ability to learn and communicate effectively in English. In fact, modern linguists have paid increased attention to the role of phonology in second language (L2) acquisition. From the foregoing, it is obvious that, learners of English as a second language face a series of challenges. Some will be common to other language learners; others will be more personal in nature. Some of the common English language learning challenges include unqualified teachers, limited learning environments, inadequate learning materials, lack of students' seriousness to their studies, over use of native language in the classroom, intelligent students' dominance in the class, pronunciation, difficult for learners to distinguish between similar sounding words, context and cultural norms and negative interference, and dissimilarity of the first language to the English language.

### **1.2 Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges senior secondary school students in Ankpa, Kogi East encounter in learning English. Specifically, the study sets out to examine:

1. the problems learners face in learning English as a second language and what modern language learning facilities are provided for teaching and learning of English at the senior secondary school level.
2. the existing practice of teaching English at the senior secondary school level in Ankpa, Kogi State, as well as to suggest some important measures that will help to improve the quality of learning of English at senior secondary school level with particular reference to Ankpa, and Kogi East zone at large.
3. to identify the strategies or techniques use by teachers in teaching English.

### **1.3 Research Question**

Four research questions were formulated to guide the study. These are:

1. What are the challenges or problems that students in senior secondary school in Ankpa, in the eastern part of Kogi State face in learning English?
2. What method or methods do teachers use in teaching English?
3. Are there modern facilities provided for learning English?
4. What needs to be improved in the existing practice in learning English at the senior secondary school level in Ankpa, Kogi East?

### **2.1 Methodology**

Ninety-six (96) respondents comprising eleven (11) English language teachers, seven (7) male and four (4) female, eighty-five (85) students constituting forty (40) male

and forty-five (45) female were selected using random sampling method. Classrooms were also observed. This study was carried out in five (5) secondary schools, three (3) public and two (2) private in some villages in Ankpa Local Government Area and Ankpa town. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics. The instruments used to collect data were questionnaire and participant observation. The questionnaire items such as Sex: male, female, For teachers: Level of formal education attained a. Primary school ( ) b. secondary school ( ) c. College of education ( ) d. Polytechnic ( ) f. University ( ), Language or Languages you can speak a. Igala ( ) b. Ebira ( ) c. Igbo ( ) d. English ( ) e. Any other (please indicate); how often do you communicate in English with members of your family a. Never ( ) b. rarely ( ) c. sometimes ( ) d. always ( ); The language of you communication is generally a. Igala ( ) b. Igbo ( ) c. English ( ) d. Any other (please indicate) ( )

Indicate the language you normally use at school

1		Igala	Mother tongue	Ebira	English	Any other combination (please be specific)	
1.	Talking informally to your teacher						
2.	Talking to your seniors						
3.	Talking to your juniors						
4.	Talking to your classmates						
5.	Talking to your fellow students generally during break						

Indicate your reason for learning English

- I consider it an important language ( )
- Knowledge of English is important for educational advancement ( )
- I love English speakers ( )
- I wish to be identified with the English speakers ( )
- To enable me function properly globally ( )

Is there provision of modern language facilities in your school, and are they used for teaching?

State the advice you would like to give the government concerning the learning of the English language.

Since the aim is to find out the actual problems students face in the learning of English, the availability of modern language facilities for teaching and learning process, classrooms and the teaching of English at the senior secondary school were also observed. For qualitative part, focus group discussion was organized so as to obtain the opinions of the respondents as regard the subject of our investigation.

Through classroom check list existing practices of teaching and learning of English were observed. In focus group discussion more perceptions of teachers and students were sought about learning English. As earlier mentioned, data was collected from five (5) secondary schools, which include three (3) public and two (2) private in some villages in Ankpa Local Government Area and Ankpa town.

### 3.1 Result

The results of findings on the challenges in learning English at senior secondary school by students in Ankpa.

**Table 1: Description of Sample**

<b>Demographic characteristics</b>	
<b>Sex</b>	<b>No. of Resp.</b>
<b>Teachers</b>	
Male	7
Female	4
<b>Students</b>	
Male	40
Female	45
<b>Age</b>	
10-20	85
30-40	6
41-50	5
<b>Education</b>	
Secondary education	85
Tertiary education	11
<b>Occupation</b>	
Student	85
Teacher	11

**Table 2 Teachers' Area of Specialization**

English/Education	English without Education	Others	Total
28%	49%	23%	100%

**Table 3 Teachers' Training and Refresher Courses (Teaching of English)**

Periodically	Rarely	None	Total
20%	55%	25%	100%

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. It can be deduced from Table 2 that high percentage of the teachers (77%) studied English but (49%) have no teaching qualification, since they did not study education. Also from Table 3, it is evident that the teachers either do not avail themselves of refresher courses like seminars and workshops or that the refresher courses are not made available as only 20% reported they attend some refresher courses on modern and improved methods of teaching English as second language (L2).

**Table 4 Awareness and Use of Communication Method (teachers)**

Yes	No	Total
30%	70%	100%

Table 4 indicates, only 30% of the teachers use communication gadgets like projector and tapes. While 70% of the teachers still use only the traditional method without including the use of modern language gadgets.

**Table 5 Use of English as Medium of Instruction**

100%

Table 5 shows that all the respondents, both teachers and students reported that English is used as medium of instruction. That is English is used to teach the students.

**Table 6 Students Using English as a Medium of communication**

English	English/Other Language(s)	Total
45%	55%	100%

45% of the respondents (students) use English as medium of communication always while 55% use English and other languages for communication as indicated in Table 6.

**Table 7 Pair - work or Group work Techniques**

Practiced	Not Practiced	Total
28%	72%	100%

Table 7 above indicates that the pair-work or group work technique is not a common practice among the respondents; since only a small percentage of 28% are involved in the practice. And 72% of the respondents do not practice Pair– work or Group work techniques.

**Table 8 Creativity among Students by Take Home Assignment**

	Not often	Rarely	Total
Always			
32%	58%	10%	100%

Only 32% of the respondents reported they do give and are given take home assignments. 58% of them do not often give and are not often given take home assignments and while 10% rarely give or take-home assignment.

**Table 9 Provision and Use of Modern Language Facilities**

Yes	No	Total
15%	85%	100%

As low as 15% only can boast of a few provisions of modern language teaching facilities; others do not have as shown in Table 9.

**Table 10 Over-crowded Classes**

Over –crowded	Ideal	Total
65%	35%	100%

Table 10 shows that 65% of the classrooms were over-crowded and they are mostly public schools.

**Table 11 Lesson Planning**

	Sometimes	Total
Always		
85%	15%	100%

Majority of the teachers reported they always write their lesson plan while 15% reported they sometimes do.

**Table 12 Use of Audio Visual. Aids**

Yes	No	Total
25%	75%	100%

A very high percentage of the respondents as high as 75% do not use A.V. aids and as low 25% reported they do.

**Table 12 Use of Reading Skill**

Practiced	Not practiced	Total
85%	15%	100%

85% practice reading skill while 15% do not.

**Table 13 Students Ask Questions**

Yes	No	Total
35%	65%	100%

Greater percentage of the students do not ask questions in the classroom as seen in the Table above.

**Table 14 Teaching Experience in ELT**

Yes	No	Total
25%	75%	100%

75% of the respondents claim to have long experience of teaching English while 25% are new in the field.

**Table 15 Availability of Computers**

Yes	No	Total
20%	80%	100%

As Table 15 indicates only 20% of the schools have a few computers. Most of the schools have no computers.

#### **4.1 Discussion of Findings**

There are some major challenges discovered in the learning of the English language at the senior secondary school level which include; poor pronunciation among students, wrong use of grammar, low knowledge of vocabulary, unfamiliar connotative and denotative meanings of words. There was a significant relationship between the challenges faced by the students in pronunciation, learning of grammar,

knowledge of sentence pattern, rectification of homework, and memorization without understanding. Many of the students have problems in pronouncing the sounds or words correctly. The mother tongues of the learners influence most part, the degree and the types of difficulty the students encounter in their teaching and learning situation. That is to say, even in the best of learning situations, the most basic of these (challenges) is first language interference or negative transfer, the psycholinguistic tendency to rely on familiar forms of expression when the intent is to develop a new form of the second language. It is difficult to learn a language with a phonology that differs from one's own because it is entirely different. However, it is possible to do so through dedication, careful listening, and continuous practice.

Furthermore, structural differences between English and Nigerian languages have also been identified as another problem faced by the students in learning English. Grammar is essential for effective communication and is important in learning the English language. English grammar is complex and has to be used logically. It includes learning of theories, rules which can be acquired only through practical application. Usage of grammar in English is very important, it gives one the knowledge to use the language accurately; as it incorrect usage results in confusion and comprehension becomes difficult. English of all languages has one of the largest vocabularies. Vocabulary difficulties arise when the complexity of word is much more than the dictionary definition. Inadequate knowledge of grammar and incorrect pronunciation also leads to difficulties in vocabulary. As regards unfamiliar connotative and denotative meanings of words, the English language teacher can create activities for improving the listening, reading and comprehension skills in class for the students to enhance their language development as a result overcome the challenges faced in learning English.

In addition, it was found that most of the teachers were degree holders but unqualified to teach, since they did not have the pedagogical knowledge of teaching English nor did they study education. This is mostly ignored problem but very important factor because whatever the teacher says, correct or incorrect is taken as correct by the learners. The trained teachers were becoming obsolete due to lack of update and refresher courses. In addition, most of the teachers were not aware of communicative teaching method coupled with inadequate (and in some cases no) learning materials. A few teachers use pair work and group work techniques. Though majority of the schools had no library but the few that had, none of them had the provision of English newspapers, no computers and audio-visual aids. Poor learning environment was also found to be one of the challenges. Most of the classes were overcrowded and not conducive for learning. English was taught as a subject not as a language. Lesson planning, insufficient time allocation, classroom management; improper inspection system in the learning of the English language in the senior secondary schools were also some of the challenges found. Lessons should not be conducted mindlessly because students have a difficult time processing spoken language. Thus, all instructions, even basic directions for classroom procedures, are written on the board whenever possible. The teaching experience of the teachers was encouraging but most of the students do not ask questions and their emphasis is on reading skill. Most of the student's study English from the examination point of view, so they are not able to produce even a single sentence without grammatical error. In summary, the English language learning is far from being satisfactory in Ankpa in Kogi East.

The investigator has analysed several problems in learning English because for Nigerians, English has a special place. It is not a foreign language; it is a second language. Knowledge of English is necessary if one wants to be successful in life.

Besides being a link and official language in Nigeria, it is major window of the modern world.

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Language learning programmes are not according to the needs of learners. These views also tell us that in Ankpa, mostly only traditional methods of teaching are being used. We know that method is essential for any kind of development in any language especially for learning a second language. In this context the use of modern methods in Ankpa, Kogi East for learning English has been the dream because most of the teachers teaching English have no knowledge of modern methods. After all the above discussion, we can conclude that generally in Ankpa, Kogi East there are many hindrances in the teaching and the learning of English which include over crowded classes, use of traditional methods, faulty examination system, and non-availability of require facilities etc. It is difficult for the teachers who are not the native speakers to teach English effectively without modern language learning facilities. The situation is not satisfactory, particularly in rural areas the situation is not as good as it should be.

### **5.2 Recommendations**

The Government should provide adequate funding for education. There should be adequate and modern language learning facilities and enabling environment. Teachers should try to encourage students to use English as medium of communication not only in the class but also at home. There must be a conscious effort on the part of the learners to learn the language. The teachers should also try to learn and use modern methods of teaching including communicative method in the classroom. Students should be given creative home work. Teachers should also try to encourage students to read English newspapers and same be provided in schools. Teachers should prepare lesson plans and should deliver them with the help of audio-visual aids which could create realistic situation for learning of English. Curriculum should be reviewed periodically. The administrators should try to provide professional assistance for the teachers.

According to Scrase (2003), English is not only important in getting a better job, it is everywhere in social interaction. Second language acquisition plays enormous role in a person holistic development. It has covered the entire aspect of person development.



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