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Updates**THE PROBLEMS OF TEACHING ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN IKERE-EKITI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, EKITI STATE****<sup>1\*</sup>Emmanuel IROH (Ph.D), <sup>2</sup>Mrs. Christiana Olubunmi AJAYI****\*Correspondence: Emmanuel IROH (Ph.D)***\*\*Detailed author information and related declarations are provided in the final section of this article.***Article Publication Details**

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**ABSTRACT**

English language is the most widely spoken language in the world and is the official language in Nigeria used for social, economic, political activities. It is a compulsory subject in secondary school. Candidates are expected to have a credit pass in the senior secondary examination before gaining admission into higher institution. The study aims at exposing the challenges militating against the teaching and learning of this very important subject. The study is hinged on Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory which recognizes the multi nature composition of the class with multiple intelligences. It is a quantitative study. The data comprised of 50 respondents of both teachers and students randomly selected for the study. The data was collected through questionnaires organized and computed according to the research questions and analyzed in simple mathematical percentage. The analyzed data are presented in tables and percentages of response. The result identified that inadequate qualified English teachers and poor teaching conditions of teachers, lack of language laboratory and inaccessibility of library facility by the students, overcrowded class size, making close teacher attention difficult and no assignment or home lesson for students to improve English proficiency and the confusion between grapheme (combination of letters that represents a single sound) and phoneme (distinguishing speech sound) affect understanding of English language as well as the short period /time allocated to the teaching of English language as some of problems militating against the teaching and understanding English language in Ikere–Ekiti LGA of Ekiti State. The study recommended for the use of teaching methods and theories that are flexible and adaptable to modern devices and technology.

**Keywords:** Problems, Teaching, English Language, Secondary Schools

## Introduction

The importance of language to human development cannot be overemphasized as it assists in the actualization of human thoughts, feelings and needs. In education, particularly during teaching and learning, language serves as a medium of instruction and assists in receiving feedback. English language is next to mother tongue and is the second language (L2) with many varieties. Mother tongue according to Encarta dictionary is the first language somebody learns as a child; Original language: a language from which other languages developed” (np). In other words, mother tongue is the first language a child picks up. It is not learnt but acquired through imitation. It is the language that encodes early concepts of the child. Mother tongue is regarded as ‘A’ or ‘L1’. It is one’s native language. Mother tongue peculiarities are very noticeable in other regions of the country and create another problem in English language teaching and learning.

Nigeria is made up of over three hundred and fifty diverse tribes with native mother tongues, “multiplicity of many people speaking different languages” (8). English language has remained the official language since we gained independence from Britain, our colonial masters. It has been used in all important government sectors including trade commerce, education and law. English language is also the official language of Ghana, Liberia, Uganda and other African countries colonized by Britain. To underscore the importance of English language, at the global level, the Encyclopedia Americana states that more than half of the world’s scientific research and technical journals as well as newspapers are printed in English. Three fourth of the world’s mail is written in English and English is the language of three fifth of the world’s radio station (417). Supporting the above, Intakhab Alam Khan positS that:

English is globally important in general and library language and medium of instruction in particular. Its importance can never be underestimated in the present circumstance. English has occupied the place of lingua franca of the world and medium of teaching at higher level in general and in disciplines like medicines, engineering, computers etc in particular (900).

From the above, it is evident that English is one of the most widely spoken languages in the world and that it enjoys a powerful status when compared with other languages. This is further evidenced by the importance attached to English language as a medium of communication and instruction in Nigeria’s higher institutions and policy makers who made it compulsory that any candidate to be admitted into higher institutions Nigeria must have a credit pass in English language. Thus every Nigerian student struggles to learn how to speak and write English.

“Teaching is communication” (Emmanuel Iroh 89) It “involves sharing or impartation of knowledge from one person (the giver) to another (the receiver)”. “It is a pedagogical process which involves bringing desirable changes in an individual” (212). The teacher after preparing his lessons imparts and shares his knowledge with his students who are expected to understand and store the lessons for future use. The methods and materials used by the teacher makes the lesson to be attractive, interesting and understandable because they will “directly address and appeal to the five senses so the chances of forgetting become less and process of learning becomes more effective” (10). Teaching method is “a way of doing the teaching business, the procedures, orderliness in planning and execution of teaching proper with the appropriate integration of instructional materials to achieve the objectives at the classroom level”(Nkpa, 105). Izuagba and Ezenwa, further contend that “unless the learner-centered approaches that incorporate active and collaborative learning strategies are used in teaching, the skills and competences couched in the curriculum (particularly of civic education) will not be achieved” (216).

Teaching method adopted by the teacher and appropriate selection of content as well as adequate preparation for delivering the lesson are important variables that may promote or hinder learning. This is corroborated by Onwuka where he posits that the method of teaching “adopted by the teacher may promote or hinder learning” (168). The lack of necessary teaching materials and positive environment hinder effective teaching and learning which may frustrate both the teacher and the students. It is those factors that hinder effective teaching and learning that this work seeks to expose.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Teaching and learning of English language would have been a joyous enterprise for the teacher and student but challenges such as mother tongue interference, lack of correspondence between phoneme and grapheme, lack of language laboratory, equipped libraries, time allocated to the teaching of the subject among others, make it burdensome to teach and learn the subject.

Again, students come from different social economic background and literacy of their parents, guardians, sibling and relations differ. In most cases, teachers of English language are not English specialists or certificated trained teachers. This makes it impossible for the adoption of student friendly methods to teach the subject thus making it boring and uninteresting for the students.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This work is hinged on Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence theory. According to Microsoft Encarta, intelligence is derived from a 14<sup>th</sup> century word *intelligentia* which means “the ability to think and learn facts and skills and apply them, especially when this ability is highly developed” Gardner sees intelligence as ability to solve problems. The

theory according to K T Tamilmani is chiefly concerned with “how we come to know what we know about our world, how we learn, process, and understand information? And what is the process by which we acquire knowledge? ([www.ugchrdcd.edu.org](http://www.ugchrdcd.edu.org).) The theory shows multiple intelligence as different ways of learning using innate ability, talent or skill. Gardner observes that there is a relationship between the styles used to learn and intelligence. Before this theory, the major learning styles are auditory-ear, visual-eye, tactile/kinesthetic-moving. However, Gardner in his postulations identified eight learning styles in a human being as: visual/spatial, verbal/linguistic, logical/ mathematical, bodily/kinesthetic, musical/rhythmic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalist intelligence.

According to Gardner, auditory learners learn best through listening to what others say, lectures, and discussions. They use tone of voice, pitch speed and other distinctions to interpret meaning. In class, such categories of learners are active note takers and listeners. Visual learners learn through watching the teacher’s demonstrations, bodily language and facial expressions. They are more in love with colours, diagrams, charts and videos. Tactile/ kinesthetic which simply means learning through bodily movement and touch. In this category, learners learn through explorative and interactive activities. They are inclined to activities that involve them directly such as acting out, working with concepts and improvisations. They create songs, musical tones, charts and easily formulate acronyms around lessons to aid recall.

On the other hand, visual/spatial intelligence learners possess artistic capabilities. They enjoy and excel in painting, sculpting. They like to draw, create images and pictures. Graphic description of events is their strong point. However, verbal/linguistic learners are smart in words, good in reading, speaking, storytelling, good vocabulary. They learn best through verbal representation and they communicate effectively and have the ability to manipulate words. Logical/mathematical intelligence learners are endowed with the ability to understand numerical relationship and patterns and are active when presented with a problem. They use critical thinking and problem solving skills to attend to problems and tend to ask a lot of question, use abstract symbols, think in numbers and are more analytical in their processes. Bodily/kinesthetic learners use their body in a skilled way to learn and are highly coordinated. They are body smart and good at dancing, acting, athletics. These categories of learners like role play, dancing and choreography. Musical/rhythmic intelligence learners enjoy music. They have a good sense of rhythm and melody. They like to sing, rap, listen, read, write and create music. They master musical instruments and vocal techniques faster than their peers.

Interpersonal intelligence learners are good at making friends and learn by interacting with others and environment. They easily make and maintain friends. They understand and respect others, lead and organize others, resolve conflicts and like to work with others. On the other hand, intrapersonal learners understand self (strengths and weaknesses), his motivations and has the ability to regulate and control himself. They are good at self-reflecting. In contrast to the above, naturalist intelligence are aware of the natural surroundings and are good at classifying and sorting. They are endowed with observational skills and are inclined to the care of animals and pets. From what Gardner has postulated, it can be deduced that each person possesses ability in all eight intelligences in certain degree

which is exclusive to the individual possessing it; if given appropriate encouragement, enabling environment and instruction, everyone has the capacity to develop all eight intelligences to a reasonable level and that there are many ways to be intelligent within and out of each category. It is evident that Gardner's Multiple Intelligence theory is a cognitive theory which is concerned with the way knowledge is acquired by the use of reasoning, intuition, or perception and categorizes learning processes into different intelligence cadres. Cognitive psychology when applied to education from instructional approaches help learners to reflect upon their learning processes.

From the above theory, it is evident that levels of intelligence overlap each other as learning involves the intelligences in varying proportions in learners. Consequently, there is need for the classroom teacher to take into consideration, the multi nature composition of the class and strive to accommodate all the intelligences during their teaching and through the use of appropriate teaching method. To achieve this, the method adopted by the teacher must be flexible, dynamic and accommodating as to reach out to emerging trends in teaching methods.

To effectively use methods that will incorporate all the intelligences, Thomas Armstrong advises teachers to draw on their colleague's expertise, "regard your colleagues as important sources of assessment information about students' multiple intelligences" (41) and meet with them periodically to compare notes, entrust responsibilities on the students to express their ideas, and most importantly, to be creative and make up your own story, song, or play for teaching the idea of multiple intelligences," (52) and use of available technology like tape recordings of music, picture oriented video tapes, calculators. Teaching methods which are participant-oriented help the learner to build self confidence; motivate them to recognize, respect the feelings and uniqueness of others in the class. By varying the teaching methods, it creates the opportunity for the students with unique and similar intelligence to work together. This results to self-fulfillment and realization of the student's goal

## Literature Review

Many scholars such as Adeyanju (1983), Adekunle (1985), Bamgbose (1994), Sabe (1995), Fakeye and Ogunjimi (2009), Ajibola (2010) have stressed the importance of English language in Nigeria's social, economic and political life. In a study on teaching English in Adverse and peculiar situations: the English language teacher in Nigerian primary schools, Ndukwe, N.K identified limited textbooks, overcrowded classrooms, mixed ability in a class, short duration of language lesson, monolingualism/bilingualism/multilingualism as problems militating against successful teaching of English language and called for a change in the teaching method where English topics could be taught in mother tongue advising that teachers should adopt the use of immersion and sub-immersion methods. Concluding, the researcher recommended that "learners can dramatize, mime and giving the meaning in MT or L1 and later in English" (50).

Similarly, Ejie Ifelunwa Margaret and Edhere Uzezi Joyce in a study on English Language Teaching and Learning in Secondary Schools in Isoko North Local Government Area of Delta State: Problems and Prospects submitted that impact of mother tongue on students' poor academic performance in English language, poor methods of teaching, inability to purchase English textbooks, language background and lack of professional growth and development of teachers are the problems affecting the teaching of English language in delta state. They advocated that:

English should be used as a medium of communication within and outside the classroom; Teachers need to adopt proper teaching methods and approaches like the communicative or eclectic approach to second language teaching and learning; Appropriate instructional materials should be utilized to complement teachers' knowledge; Well-equipped libraries should be put in place where there is none; Teachers must continually update knowledge within their discipline and make their teaching more effective (62-63).

In the opinion of Akram Inanloo Khajloo “problem occurs when we do not learn the basic principles of something” and that any system without foundational standing will not hold. In a study on the Problems in Teaching and Learning English for Students in Iran, Khajiloo submits that apart from lack of basic foundational principles, most English teachers lack the proficiency in the English Language, lack of concentration in class, lack of concentration occasioned by Fatigue and insomnia, environment and family problems are some of the problems militating against the teaching of English language. They recommended that a combination of programmed teaching, lectures and practical display through educational medium of programmed teaching, lectures, and practical display on TV will aid the understanding of English language by students

In the submission of Esther Chikaodi Anyanwu, there is “need for schools to equip and network their institutions” (1). According to her, “technologies are needed in English classes for meaningful, innovative and effective education programs” (1). Concluding, the researcher called for restructuring of the conventional method of teaching and for the Nigerian government, individuals, teachers, students and corporate bodies to utilize fully the tremendous impacts of pedagogical integration of Information Communication Technology in English and for professional development of teachers in the “effective use of digital tools for teaching and learning, including the use of digital tools to promote writing” (6).

Closely related to the above is the submission of Thotapally Anjaneyulu that effective teaching and learning of English language depends on use of suitable teaching aids and teachers competence. He recommended the setting up of Language laboratory to develop language skills in the students; the training of teachers to employ new methods and approaches to teach English language as well as the provision of essential teaching aids to capture the attention of learners and acquiring skills of language.

Stephen A. Lagu argues that “Teachers of English at all levels of the educational system need to be specially and professionally trained” (np) to perform optimally. He regretted that graduates of History, Sociology or Political Science teach English in our primary and secondary schools (np). He recommended that language teachers should be sponsored to attend both local and international seminars and workshops on recent teaching methodologies and be a specialist, well trained and equipped with other necessary qualities that are needed to do the job.

**Research Questions**

1. Is it true that a teacher’s level of training can influence method of teaching?
2. Does the absence or inadequate language laboratory affect the teaching learning of English language?
3. How does grapheme and phonemes of English language affect understanding of English language?
4. Does the population of the class prevent close teacher attention?
5. Does the short time allocated to the teaching of English language affect understanding of the lessons?

**Population of the Study**

The population of this study comprise of both teachers and students. Ten schools were chosen for the study, made up of five public (government) and five privately owned secondary schools in Ikere Ekiti LGA of Ekiti State. The population comprises of ten teachers and forty students selected as represented in the table 1 below

**Table 1**

S/N	NAME OF SCHOOL	TEACHER	STUDENTS
1	Bobas High School, Ikere	1	5
2	Amoye Grammar School Ikere	1	5
3	St Louis Grammar School Ikere	1	5
4	Annunciation High School Ikere	1	5
5	Comprehensive Grammar School Ikere	1	5
6	Eleyo High School Ikere	1	5
7	Demonstration High School Ikere	1	2
8	Ajolagun Grammar School Ikere	1	3
9	Hallelujah High School Ikere	1	3
10	Ikere High School Ikere	1	2
	TOTAL	10	40

**Sampling Procedure and Data Collection**

The researchers employed simple random sampling as sampling techniques where every student and teacher was given equal opportunity to be chosen for the study. Teachers of English language and Senior Secondary School 3 Students were used for good understanding of the questionnaire.

The instrument for data collection used by the researchers was structured questionnaires for both the teachers and students. Seventy five copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the respondents, twenty to teachers and fifty to students. Twenty five were either voided or not returned while fifty were returned and used for the study. The respondents were required to tick yes or No to any of the questions as they desired and based on how they understand them. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents by the researchers and collected after twenty four hours. The questions and how to answer them were also written clearly to avoid ambiguity and wastage.

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**

The data collected from the questionnaires were organized and computed according to the research questions and analyzed in simple mathematical percentage. The analyzed data are presented in tables and percentages of response.

**Table 2**

S/N	Questions	No of Respondents	YES	%	NO	%
1	Is it true that a teachers level of training can influence method of teaching	50	34	68	16	32
2	Does Poor teaching condition affect teaching and learning of English language?	50	30	60	20	40

In table 2 above, is on whether a teacher’s level of training can influence method of teaching English language. Total number of respondents was 50. 34 said yes, representing 68%, while those who disagree were 16 resulting 32%. This confirms that a teacher’s level of training can influence method of teaching English language. Table 2:2 centered on whether poor teaching condition affect teaching and learning of English language. 30 respondents said yes, representing 60 % while 20 other respondents said no, representing 40 %. From this, it is revealed that poor teaching condition affect teaching and learning of English language. Though the margin is relatively low, there is need to improve teaching conditions of teachers to improve the teaching and learning of English language

**Table 3**

	Questions	No of Respondents	YES	%	NO	%
3	Does the absence or inadequate language laboratory affect the teaching learning of English language?	50	35	70	15	30
4	Do students have free access to the library?	50	20	40	30	60

Table 3 is on if the absence or inadequate language laboratory affect the teaching/ learning of English language, 35 respondents representing 70% saying yes while 15 respondents representing 30% saying no, thus confirming that a teacher’s level of training can influence method of teaching English language. Table 3:4, is on if students have free access to the library. 20 respondents representing 40 % answered yes, while 30 respondents representing 60 % answered no. it shows that students the students do not have free access to use the library and hence it affects their understanding of English lessons

**Table 4**

	Questions	No of Respondents	YES	%	NO	%
5	Does Class size/ population is too big for close teacher attention	50	45	90	5	10
6	Do you think assignments and home lectures after school help the teaching and learning of English language	50	10	20	40	80

In Table 4 above, do class size/ population affect teacher close attention to the students? 45 respondents representing 90% answered yes while 5 respondents representing 10% answered no . This shows that teachers do not give one on one attention to the students and hence no close relationship with the students. This invariably affects the understanding of the lesson. Table 4:6, the question is on if assignments and home lectures after school help the teaching and learning of English language, 10 respondents representing 20% answered yes while 40 respondents said no, representing 80%. This result should not discourage home assignments. Teachers are encouraged to give assignments and those who can afford home lessons should be encouraged to have them.

**Table 5**

	Questions	No of Respondents	YES	%	NO	%
7	How does the impact of grapheme and phoneme affect your understanding English language?	50	40	80	10	20

8	Does the short time allocated to the teaching of English language affect your learning?	50	30	60	20	40
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Table 5. How does the impact of grapheme (combination of letters that represents a single sound) and phoneme (distinguishing speech sound) of English language affect your understanding English language? 40 respondents said yes, representing 80 % while 10 respondents representing 20% said no. The feedback shows that most students are confused with English sounds when in class. This may result from the influence of L1(mother tongue on L2 learned language- English) Table 5:8 question is on the time allocated to the teaching of English language, 30 respondents representing 60% agreed that the time is short while 20 respondents representing 40 % said no. This result exposes the need for our curriculum planners to to adjust school timetable and allocate more time to the teaching of not only English language but other core subjects like mathematics.

**Conclusion**

From the result of the investigation, it is evident that the work has exposed some of the problems militating against the teaching and learning of English language. Some of the problems include:

- i. Inadequate qualified English teachers and poor teaching conditions of teachers.
- ii. Lack of language laboratory and inaccessibility of library facility by the students.
- iii. Overcrowded class size, making close teacher attention difficult and no assignment or home lesson for students to improve English proficiency.
- iv. The confusion between grapheme (combination of letters that represents a single sound) and phoneme (distinguishing speech sound) affect understanding English language as well as short period /time allocated to the teaching of English language

It is the opinion of the researchers that the application of the Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligence theory to the teaching of English language will make adaptation to other teaching aids and materials like technology, tape recordings of music; picture oriented video tapes easy for both the teacher and the student. This is because; the theory recognizes the multifaceted composition of the class and categorizes learning processes into different intelligence cadres. This way everybody is accommodated.

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