Oral Communication Anxiety and Interpersonal Skills among English Language Pre-service Teachers in South-western Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated levels of oral communication anxiety and interpersonal skills among English Language pre-service teachers in southwestern Nigeria. The study adopted the survey design of correlational type. Six colleges of education (one from each of the southwestern states in Nigeria) were randomly selected and six departments of English were enumerated. A total of 300 (50 per college) English Language pre-service teachers were selected using the simple random sampling technique. The instruments used were Oral Communication Anxiety Questionnaire (r = 0.78) and Interpersonal Skills (r = 0.76) Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, of frequency counts, mean and standard deviation.

x The results indicated that oral communication anxiety (x□=2.69) was high, but interpersonal skills (x□=2.47) were low, against the threshold of 2.50, respectively. Based on the findings, it was recommended that various measures should be taken to improve socio-affective stability of English Language pre-service teachers.

Keywords: Oral communication anxiety, Interpersonal skills, English language pre-service teachers, Colleges of education

Introduction

The development of pronunciation skill is the foundation for the mastery of good speech necessary for effective oral communication in English language. Its proficiency demands that users of the language should be sufficiently competent in the four basic skills. Actually, proper language use entails appropriate and effective demonstration of the knowledge of the four language arts skills, namely; listening, speaking, reading and writing. The acquisition of these basic language skills is vital, for they play crucial role in human learning and communicative abilities. Listening and speaking skills, also known as speech work, are taught before the other skills, because they are the expressive language skills that enables a learner to communicate orally and are more closely related to reading and writing (literacy skill). /

The acquisition of an effective speaking skill is the reason for the teaching and learning of phonetics and phonology at the pre-service teachers programme. Phonetics is concerned with how speech sounds are produced, used in spoken language and how sounds can be recorded with written symbols. While phonology deals with the grammatical properties of speech sound which second language learners must learn and master in order to communicate better in the language. These two are integral parts of the English language curriculum that focus on the study of speech; linguists have traditionally considered these as different areas of study.

These aspects are logically structured in order to equip the students with an adequate knowledge of the underlying principles of English pronunciation and speech patterns to enable the learner to communicate effectively in and outside school, listen effectively to any speech and lesson as well as speak fluently and intelligibly (Osisanwo 2012). The curriculum is also designed to ensure that students are able to understand a few things about the classification of English speech sounds in terms of pronounced correctly. Phonetics and Phonology (ENG 111) is taught as a compulsory course for all 100 level students of language education according to The National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE) (2012). The objective is to make the students become confident and competent users of English language for communication purpose and to function efficiently in the teaching profession. Hence, success or failure in it determines whether or not the students will graduate at the end of the programme.

Studies in phonetics and phonology, according to Maduekwe (2011), are meant to improve pre-service teachers' oracy skills. The skills include the mastery of the segmental and supra-segmental features of English language. Segmental features refer to consonants, vowels, and diphthongs, while stress and intonation pattern are supra-segmental features. Proficiency in the segmental and supra-segmental is what promotes good pronunciation and spoken English. The reason being to prepare the pre-service students for teaching and learning tasks after the teacher preparation training as they must carry out different communicative tasks such as discussions, oral presentations and explanations.

However, reports have revealed that the objectives of teaching and learning phonetics and phonology at the colleges of education seem not to have been achieved. Despite the recognition given to spoken English as a compulsory aspect of the English language curriculum for the secondary and tertiary levels of education, research findings had revealed that students' performance still falls below expectation as evident in Obadare (2011) who discovered that most students of colleges of education are deficient in the use of English thereby resulting in poor academic performance. Babalola (2016) explained that the problems of learning English language cut across all aspects of English language not excluding English pronunciation skills. Fakeye (2017) confirmed that students are deficient in English oracy skills. Banjo (2010) also attested that of all the language skills, speaking is the most basic and yet the most neglected in the teaching of English language in the school system, this neglect of Spoken English not only impairs the learning of the other skills but also makes it difficult for the forms of English spoken in Nigeria to qualify for social acceptability and international intelligibility. Marja (2008) asserts that students from secondary schools demonstrate narrow range of ability in the English language. Alo and Ogunsiji (2008) also attested to that fact that pronunciation is one area where most Nigerian

speakers and students of English language encounter problems.

Toki (2014) also reported that most Nigerian teachers of English could not articulate English segmental features correctly. As a result; they do not serve as good models to students. This, invariably, affects their lesson delivery. When teachers, who are supposed to have adequate content knowledge of English supra segmental features, do not possess the required knowledge, it stands to reason that they would not teach well. The result is that they would turn out on yearly basis, students who will have difficulty in making themselves intelligible to others in their oral communication. Also, much emphasis is laid on the British accent. Bello (2001) also confirms that students lack basic understanding of the phonological presentations of English sounds. This simply shows that students lack the mastery of good speech necessary for effective oral production. Adegbija (2005) observes that the development of effective aural and oral skills in English language in Nigerian colleges of education has been pretty low.

Reports emanating from the results on the performance of students in phonetics and phonology (ENG 111) revealed that pre-service teachers are deficient in learning outcomes in phonetics and phonology. Evidence of the students' poor performance in phonetics andphonology as revealed in their examination result for three years shows that in 2014/15 out of 188 candidates that sat for the examination in a government owned college of education in southwest, only 46 (31%) made pass grades, in 2015/16 out of 224 candidates that sat for the examination, only 49 (22%) made pass grades, while in 2016/2017, 256 candidates sat for the examination and only 68 (27%) students made pass grades. From the result, one can deduce that the poor performance of pre-service teachers is a recurrent problem that needs to be addressed.

Similarly, in 2014/15, out of 44 candidates that sat for the examination, in Mufu Lanihun College of education in Ibadan, only 13 (30%) students made pass grades, while in 2015/16 out of 45 candidates that sat for the examination, only 14 (31%) students made pass grades, and in 2016/2017, 48 candidates sat for the examination, only 13(29%) students made pass grades. The result shows that the pre-service teachers are actually weak in phonetics and phonology. Studies Okoro (2004) and Ikonta, (2008), revealed that stress and intonation patterns as important features of phonetics and phonology which also constitute a major problem for students.

Likewise, Akanbi, Araromi and Kolawole (2018) also stated that oracy skill is not receiving adequate attention; the result is that they would turn out on yearly basis, students who will have difficulty in making themselves intelligible to others in their oral communication. The general deficiency in Spoken English is however not limited to classroom or examination. Although a mastery of both spoken and written English is highly desirable, its teaching and learning is filled with some problems at the tertiary level. Meanwhile, oracy skills must be given proper attention Osisanwo (2005). Also, Aina (2014) put the responsibility on the teacher; he explained that for students to participate actively in oral English lesson the teacher has to avoid having the students freeze for fear of being corrected every time he opens his mouth.

This high failure rate has been traceable to a number of challenges ranging from incompetent teachers, poor teaching methodology, poor awareness of English language curriculum, Kolawole et al (2018).The dearth of teaching materials and the teaching and testing of Oral English, are not being geared towards communicative competence of students but (rather focused) towards linguistic competence Adedun (2010). Iddrisu (2011) affirmed that stress is a problematic area because it affects meaning and comprehension.

Efforts to solve these problems and improve performance in oral English at the secondary school level, as well as develop effective learning of phonetics and phonology among pre-service teachers, have led researchers to come up with studies on teachers' factors which include: teachers competence and attitude towards the teaching of oral English (Adeyemi 2014), Teacher commitment and subject mastery (Mojere, 2017), Teacher curriculum-awareness and students' achievement in English oracy skills (Akanbi et al, 2018), oral English teaching strategies (Yang 2010), audio-lingual and total physical response method on students achievement in Oral English Mabekoje, Amore, and Amusan (2016). Similarly, in the aspects of speaking and listening skills, Oyinloye (2010) investigates the effects of two variants of audio-lingual method as a determining factor in the learning outcomes among junior secondary school students.

Despite the contributions of these studies to the teaching and learning of phonetics and phonology, Students' proficiency in Spoken English is still quite low and failure rate is usually above 70% Fasanmi (2011) and Akanbi (2018). Factors that could be responsible for students' failure in phonetics and phonology as identified in literature include; poor study habit, anxiety, poor self-concept, and poor teaching methodology Mabekoje et al (2016). While it is evident that these studies are learners and in-service teachers centered, none of them takes into consideration the socio-affective stability of the pre-service teachers. Studies have reviewed some socio-affective factors that have strong link to academic success. They are: attitude, anxiety, self-concept, interpersonal skills and verbal fluency, among other, but this paper focuses on only oral communication anxiety and interpersonal skills.

Oral communication anxiety has been described as the determining factor in communicative behaviours such as stuttering, fewer utterances, nervousness, trembling and sweating (McCroskey, 1977). Researchers have demonstrated that communication performance is affected by psychological variables such as anxiety, low self-esteem, and apprehension, thereby leading to poor academic performance (Toth, 2010; Yang 2012; Anane, 2016).

Studies on various interventions aimed at addressing effects of oral communication anxiety on learners have been carried out. For instance, Amogne and Ably (2013) examined oral communication apprehension, competence and performance among marine engineering trainees. The study stated that there were apprehensions in EFL oral communication. Furthermore, many researchers have discovered that speaking in the target language is anxiety-provoking. Dar and Khan (2014) assessed Finnish and Swedish Secondary school students and

teachers' communication apprehension in English as foreign language classroom situation. The study reported that speaking in the class room contexts were experienced by both groups as the most apprehensive scenarios in English as second language classes.

People with communication anxiety defer communication because of the fear of the people and may disassociate themselves from communication encounters. Lucas (2009), states that nervousness is a common denominator in second language situation. Anxiety of pre-service teachers' may influence the extent and the way oral communication is used in classroom. It would be noted that oral communication anxiety is an important factor to be considered in pre-service teachers' readiness to succeed in classroom setting. Thus, very few studies have investigated the effect of oral communication anxiety and interpersonal skills, on teachers' trainee achievement in phonetics and phonology. The need to fill this gap necessitated interest in this study.

Another variable in this study is interpersonal skills, which are skills needed in order to communicate effectively. Among the skills are interactive skills, maintaining facial contact, social, and social competence skills. Interpersonal skill is goal-directed and it is to cause a desired state of affairs. (Sharon and Simpson, 2010) noted that to communicate and interact effectively with learners, teachers need interpersonal skills. Interpersonal skills are used in communicating and interacting with people verbally and non-verbally. Human beings have been described as social creatures that have developed many ways to communicate their thought non-verbally and it is influenced by verbal language. Developing interpersonal skills help in communication with others.

According to Ayodele and Adegbile (2014), the teacher matters a lot in determining whatever goes in the classroom situation whether a learner succeeds in learning, what is sets out to learn, or on the other hand fails woefully to master what is supposed to be learned, depends on the interpersonal skills of the teacher that happens to handle such a lesson, such that a learner can pick interest in a particular sensitive subject or finally gave up learning. Markovic and Axmann (2007) also assert that all teachers need good communication and interpersonal skills. Hence, there is need for learners to develop and acquire necessary interpersonal skills that will help in navigating everyday classroom interactions with the learners. Olaosebikan (2018) also confirmed that when positive relationships existed between the teachers and the students, the students would become motivated with school work and in turn, improve their learning outcomes.

Nevertheless, some studies such as Angeles (2012), reported that effective interpersonal skills are necessary in order to attain a successful outcome. Sharon and Simpson (2010) attested that poor interpersonal skills have resulted into students experiencing difficulties in relationship with others. In fact, the study also points that signs of depression; aggression and anxiety are consequences of poor interpersonal skills which in turns demonstrate poor academic performance.

While researchers have asserted the relationship between interpersonal skills and future academic success, many teachers go into academics without interpersonal and emotional skills. Pavri (2004) reported that many teachers lack social competence skills. This implies that when teachers lack interpersonal skills, there is no way they could impart such skills on the students and students are thereby referred to the school psychologists (Spitzberg and Cupach, 2002). Thus, teachers need interpersonal skills Sharon (2010).

Statement of the Problem

Phonetics and Phonology is taught at the pre-service teachers' programme to equip the teacher-trainees with adequate knowledge of the content of spoken English syllabus, and to develop in them linguistic skills needed for effective communication. Despite these, previous studies have shown that pre-service teachers have poor oracy skills and this accounts for their poor performance in the examination. Efforts were then geared towards various interventions on pedagogical approaches and instructional strategies among which are audio-lingual approach, situational approach and direct approach with little consideration for students' socio-affective factors. This study therefore, examined oral communication anxiety and interpersonal skills status of as pre-service teachers in colleges of education in southwestern Nigeria.

Research Questions

The study provided answers to the following research questi.ns:

(1) What is the level of pre-service teachers'
   a) Oral communication anxiety and
   b) Interpersonal skills

Methodology

This study adopted the survey research design of the correlational type. This is appropriate since the researcher has no direct control of the independent variables as their manifestations already exist. It involved the use of observation and rating scales as well as questionnaires to elicit responses from the pre-service teachers on the independent and dependent variables. The population of the study comprised colleges of education in Southwest, and all Pre-service teachers of English Language in 300 level in the same institutions in Southwestern geo-political zone of Nigeria multistage random sampling procedure. In the first stage, simple random sampling was used to select 3 out of 4 federal colleges of education, and three out of 8 state colleges of education all in the Southwestern Nigeria. States in the Southwestern geo political zone of Nigeria include: Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Lagos, Ondo and Ekiti states. In the second stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select School of Languages where students in the Department of English language were selected for the study. In the third stage, fifty (50) students of English language in NCE III on teaching practice in three federal and three state colleges of education were selected randomly for the study. A total number of 300 NCE English language students participated in the study. This is because the students had been taught phonetics and phonology at both 100 and 200 levels which serve as a pre-requisite to a proper understanding of the spoken skills chosen for this study. Instruments used were Pre-service Teachers' Interpersonal Skills Rating Scale (r=0.76), Oral Communication Skill Questionnaire(r=0.78) and Phonetics and Phonology Achievement Test (r= 0.78)

Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics, of frequency counts, mean and standard deviation.

Results

Research question 1a: What is the level of pre-service teachers' oral communication anxiety?

Table 1 shows the level of pre-service teachers' oral communication anxiety as expressed in descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentages, mean score and standard deviation. The result indicated that the weighted mean of 2.69 higher than the standard mean value of 2.50. This implies that majority of the pre-service teachers' oral communication anxiety was high.

Table 1: The level of pre-service teachers' oral communication anxiety

S/N	Items	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	S.D
1.	I always feel that the lecturer will give me negative feedback about my spoken English.	164 55.4	117 39.5	15 5.1	-	3.50	.59
2.	My thoughts become confused and jum bled during discussions due to lack of confidence in my English pronunciations.	139 47.0	109 36.8	37 12.5	11 3.7	3.27	.82
3.	I feel apprehensive of the received pronunciation when speaking English language.	106 35.8	144 48.6	33 11.1	8 2.7	3.19	.74
4.	I am very calm and relaxed when I am called upon to express my opinion in English Language.	121 40.9	128 43.2	29 9.8	17 5.7	3.19	.83
5.	I enjoy speaking in public.	113 38.2	136 45.9	35 11.8	11 3.7	3.18	.78
6.	When speaking English, I am always nervous of m y listeners' assessment of my pronunciations.	124 41.9	108 36.5	53 17.9	11 3.7	3.16	.84
7.	I feel confident that I can speak English like a native speaker.	108 36.5	132 44.6	46 15.5	10 3.4	3.14	.79
8.	I feel comfortable when I understand what the lecturer is saying in the spoken English class.	92 31.1	153 51.7	42 14.2	8 2.7	3.11	.74
9.	I am afraid of making pronunciation mistakes when communicating in English language.	89 30.1	159 53.7	35 11.8	13 4.4	3.09	.76
10.	I am always ready to improve my spoken English from those who speak it well.	103 34.8	122 41.2	50 16.9	21 7.1	3.03	.89
11.	I am confident I can achieve good speech performance in English language.	43 14.5	83 28.0	99 33.4	71 24.0	2.33	.99
12.	I avoid talking during small group meetings because I feel my English fluency is not appropriate.	47 15.9	70 23.6	99 33.4	80 27.0	2.28	1.0
13.	I am afraid my course mates might make jest of me because I pronounced English words the way they are written.	44 14.9	70 23.6	108 36.5	74 25.0	2.28	1.0
14.	I fe el confident each time I place stress appropriately on the right syllable.	35 11.8	74 25.0	119 40.2	68 23.0	2.25	.94
15.	Oral aspect of English Language has been the most difficult for me.	44 14.9	69 23.3	94 31.8	88 29.7	2.23	1.0
16.	Due to my accent, I am of the opinion I do not pronounce English words correctly.	39 13.2	66 22.3	112 37.8	78 26.4	2.22	.98
17.	I am afraid of the lecturers pointing out intonation mistakes or deficiencies in my spoken English.	35 11.8	70 23.6	112 37.8	79 26.7	2.20	.96
18	I am usually uncomfortable during classroom interaction in English language.	33 11.1	69 23.3	107 36.1	86 29.1	2.16	.97
19.	I do not feel tense when I am interacting with my peers in English language.	34 11.5	47 15.9	119 40.2	94 31.8	2.07	.96
20.	I do not have confidence in myself when speaking English due to my inability to apply appropriate rhythm and stress patterns.	31 10.5	45 15.2	86 29.1	133 44.9	1.91	1.0
	Weighted Mean =2.69						
	Threshold= 2.50						

Research question 2b: What is the level of pre-service teachers' interpersonal skills?

Table 2: shows the mean breakdown of the rating of the pre-service teachers' interpersonal skills as expressed in descriptive statistics of frequency count, percentages, mean score and standard deviation. The result indicated that majority of the pre-service teachers' interpersonal skills was poor.
The table showed the weighted mean of 2.47 which is lower than the standard mean value of 2.50.

Table 2: The level of Pre-Service Teachers Interpersonal Skills Observation Scale

S/N	Area of component skill to be rated	Excellent	Good	Poor	Very Poor	Mean	S.D
1	Ability to maintain eye contact	131 44.3	139 47.0	23 7.8	3 1.0	3.24	.66
2	Ability to display appropriate self-expression skill	156 52.7	84 28.4	43 14.5	13 4.4	3.23	.87
3	Ability to maintain facial cues	149 50.3	97 32.8	34 11.5	15 5.1	3.22	.86
4	Ability to recognise pupils feelings and perspectives	117 39.5	141 47.6	35 11.8	3 1.0	3.21	.69
5	Ability to use body posture, movement and gestures appropriately	120 40.5	131 44.3	35 11.8	10 3.4	3.21	.78
6	Ability to develop additional facts relevant to the topic.	123 41.6	107 36.1	50 16.9	14 4.7	3.15	.87
7	Ability to use appropriate gestures to disseminate knowledge	92 31.1	130 43.9	59 19.9	15 5.1	3.01	.84
8	Ability to communicate effectively	87 29.4	95 32.1	87 29.4	25 8.4	2.77	.95
9	Ability to interact with the learners	81 27.4	116 39.2	80 27.0	19 6.4	2.72	.88
10	Ability to change intonation and pitches	73 24.7	116 39.2	59 19.9	48 16.2	2.62	1.0
11	Ability to show responsiveness to the pupils conversation	61 20.6	111 37.5	91 30.7	33 11.1	2.57	.92
12	Ability to move within the classroom	63 21.3	92 31.1	73 24.7	68 23.0	2.40	1.0
13	Ability to communicate with learners in simple English.	37 12.5	102 34.5	98 33.1	59 19.9	2.39	.94
14	Ability to know how to assess the students' performance in the classroom.	43 14.5	89 30.1	101 34.1	63 21.3	2.37	.97
15	Ability to provide social support for the students.	39 13.2	76 25.7	113 38.2	68 23.0	2.29	.96
16	Ability to take precautions in determining individual differences of the students.	42 14.2	67 22.6	119 40.2	68 23.0	2.28	.97
17	Ability to provide immediate feedback to the students.	38 12.8	65 22.0	114 38.5	76 25.7	1.22	.97
18	Ability to achieve lesson objectives.	25 8.4	72 24.3	125 42.2	73 24.7	1.16	.89
19	Ability to sustain students interest over the period of stated classroom interaction	26 8.8	72 24.3	114 38.5	82 27.7	1.14	.92
20	Ability to maintain appropriate comportment.	24 8.1	68 23.0	122 41.2	81 27.4	1.11	.90
	Weighted Mean =2.47						
	Threshold =2.50						

Table 2: shows the mean breakdown of the rating of the pre-service teachers' interpersonal skills. The table showed the weighted mean of 2.47 which is lower than the standard mean value of 2.50. This implies that majority of the pre-service teachers' interpersonal skills was poor.

Research question 3: What is the level of pre-service teachers' verbal fluency in phonetics and phonology?

Table 3: shows the level of pre-service teachers' verbal fluency in phonetics and phonology. The result shows a weighted mean of 2.26 and a threshold of 2.50. This implies that the level of pre-

service teachers' verbal fluency in phonetics and phonology was poor, because the weighted mean is lower than the threshold.

Discussion of Findings

Level of pre-service teachers' on oral communication anxiety

This result showed that the level of the sampled pre-service teachers' oral communication anxiety was high. This is probably because many of the pre-service teachers in the selected colleges of education in southwestern are jittery of communicating in English language. Thus they are afraid of negative evaluation by others. This is probably because the students learned English Language for the sake of passing examination and not for developing skills such as listening and speaking. This signifies that pre-service teachers of English language need to be motivated and encouraged to have a positive self-image and good perception about themselves in their efforts to attaining competence in English language. This finding supports the report of Araromi and Olaseinde (2017) which established that the fear of negative evaluation level of pre-service teachers' foreign language anxiety was high. In a similar vein, Mustapha (2010) observed a high level of communication anxiety in most English as second language students.

Level of pre-service teachers' interpersonal skills

It is apparent from this result that the pre-service teachers' interpersonal skills were poor. This means that the pre-service teachers' did not display appropriate interactive and self-expressive skills during the teaching practice exercise. Their expressions were fraught with the use of inappropriate gestures in disseminating knowledge. Also, some of the pre-service teachers observed do not have positive interaction with the students and were unable to sustain the students' interest over the period of stated classroom interaction. The reason for this could be that the pre-service teachers' high communication apprehension level negatively influenced their social interaction skills.

This attests to the submission of Khan (2015) who reported that learners who demonstrated communication apprehension feel uncomfortable when required to communicate orally in the target language in front of others. In contradiction, the finding of this study negates the reports of Clark, Serena and Tancock (2017) which established a significant increase in pre-service teachers' self-efficacy. The contradictions in the finding of this study and that of Clark, Serena and Tancock (2017) might be owing to differences in the location of the studies. While this study took place in southwestern Nigeria, that of Clark, Serena and Tancock (2017) was conducted in Kenya. Possibilities for improving interpersonal skills of pre-service teachers in Nigeria are increasing daily with emerging research findings.

Conclusion

The study investigated oral communication and interpersonal skills, in phonetics and phonology among pre-service teachers in southwestern Nigeria. From the analyses carried out, it was revealed that the investigated variables in this study have an important role in predicting pre-service teachers' achievement and teaching skills in phonetics and phonology. It was also revealed that the pre-service teachers' oral communication anxiety was high, and their interpersonal skill was low. This signified that the two independent variables are viable factors which could predict pre-service teachers' learning outcomes in phonetics and phonology as well as effective teaching skills.

Therefore, it can be concluded from this study that oral communication anxiety and interpersonal skill are important factors which could influence achievement and teaching skills in phonetics and phonology among pre-service teachers in southwestern Nigeria.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made.

1) The pre-service teachers should be exposed to self-development schemes that could enable them develop and improve upon their classroom practices through the internet by watching videos and listening to audios of great speakers of English language.
2) They should also seek personal professional improvement or development that can improve their communication competence for teaching and learning situations.
3) The fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension by the peers should not be allowed to inhibit their achievement in phonetics and phonology.

   Spoken English teachers should also give attention to students that have speech defect or withdrawal problem. They should ensure that help is given to such students to restore their confidence.

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