

*Full Length Research Paper*

# The attitude of teachers towards the teaching of English language sounds

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Accepted 25 February, 2016

The study investigated the attitude of (male and female) teachers towards the teaching of English Language sounds. A sample of two hundred teachers (one hundred and twenty females, eighty males) was randomly selected from public secondary schools in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State. A twenty-two item, two-point scale questionnaire on Teachers' Attitude towards the Teaching of English Sounds (TATES) was used to collect data. Analysis of data using percentages revealed that teachers have negative attitude and that there is no difference between the male and female teachers' attitude towards the teaching of English sounds. Suggestions for improvement of their attitude towards the teaching of English sounds, among which are the organization of seminars and workshops to motivate teachers and the provision of language laboratories, were proffered.

**Keywords:** Gender, Attitude, Teachers, Teaching, English Language

## INTRODUCTION

Every language has its own sound system. People generally have various forms of communication through a system of sounds and symbols. In fact, for any human language to survive, it must be primarily oral. Modern structural linguists have rightly accorded spoken utterance the pride of place as the primary manifestation of language. The primacy of oracy is highlighted in many critics' recommendation that, in the course of teaching any language, the procedure should be:

### HEAR-SPEAK-READ-WRITE.

In Nigeria, English language has gained so much prominence that it has become the language of instruction at all levels of the educational sector. A glance at the secondary school curriculum reveals the great importance attached to English language, with special emphasis on listening and speaking skills.

The secondary school Oral English curriculum is intended to enhance the listening and speaking skills of the students' language development level. The students are expected to learn to listen to sound discrimination, develop ear and memory association, sustained listening

and remembering of oral information which are achieved through watching the television, listening to radio, play acting, debates, discussions, poem recitation, etc. They are expected to take cognizance of their speaking articulation, voice modulation, intonation, stress, fluency of speech, thought presentation through activities like newscast and speech giving.

The syllabus stresses the primacy of oracy by giving primary position to audio-lingual skills. However, there is a wide gap between teaching and the practice of the curriculum. Can this gap be attributed to teachers' attitude towards the teaching of English sounds?

Attitude has to do with likes and dislikes for something. Positive attitude to any task often yields positive outcomes and vice versa. The attitude of English language teachers towards the teaching of the phonetic aspect of English language can promote or mar the effectiveness of teaching it.

According to Silvestri (1997), instruction in pronunciation is not given priority in the second language classroom and this can affect the students' confidence, motivation and comprehensibility. In a related vein, Enaibe (2005) put it that many English language teachers

are often scared or disinterested in teaching of the Oral English section of the syllabus; the relative uses and effectiveness of the tape recorder, (television and language laboratory) for Oral English teaching have not been put into practice even though they are very relevant to the learning of audio-lingual skills. That these are not available in the schools points to the fact that the teachers (and school authorities) show negative attitude towards the effective teaching of this important aspect of English language and such attitude is often transferable to the students.

Motivation is the root of learning and a means of igniting students' attitude and so it is more effective than criticism and ridicule which are inimical to learning. Researches reveal that gender issues underline numerous classroom activities (Manjari, 2005); a low correlation coefficient between attitudinal scores and Oral English test scores can be attributed to factors like teachers' aggressiveness to students' mistakes (Kolo, 1992); there is a relationship between attitude and achievement (Ojogan, 1990); many primary school teachers have negative attitude towards science teaching and there is no difference in the attitude of male and female primary school teachers towards primary science teaching (Ajuar, 2002).

On the other hand, Kolo (1992) discovered that males' attitude towards Oral English was statistically significantly better than females; Grigoryadis (1989) noted that females did better in English as a foreign language than males and so the relationship between achievement scores and gender was significant; Buwa-Sado (2002) observed that female (students) have more positive attitude to language studies than the (few) males in the school of languages.

The purpose of the study was to find out:

- a. The attitude of teachers towards the teaching of English language sounds.
- b. If there was any difference between the attitude of male and female teachers towards the teaching of English sounds.

The following research questions were formulated for the study:

- a. What is the attitude of teachers towards the teaching of English language sounds?
- b. Is there any difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards the teaching of English sounds?

## METHODS

The population comprised secondary schools teachers in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta state. A sample of two hundred secondary school teachers (One hundred and twenty females and eighty males) was selected using the stratified random sampling technique.

A questionnaire on Teachers' Attitude towards the Teaching of English Sounds (TATES) containing twenty-two items on a two-point scale was developed by the

researcher and used to collect data for the study. The TATES questionnaire was subjected to content validation by three experts in English language.

The researcher personally administered the TATES questionnaire to all the teachers and collected them back on the same day. The data collected on the research questions were analysed using percentages. The results are presented in Tables 1 and 2 below:

## DISCUSSION

**Research Question 1:** What is the attitude of teachers towards the teaching of English Language sounds?

The results in Table 1 show that teachers' attitude towards the teaching of English language sounds is negative. That answers research question 1.

Reactions to items 1, 2, and 3 to which the subjects' negative responses constituted 90%, 75% and 77.5% respectively reveal their negative attitude towards Oral English teaching. They do not regard Oral English (or speech) as a major aspect of instruction in the English Language curriculum nor do they find anything interesting in teaching English sounds. They are not enthusiastic about teaching the sounds.

The negative attitude may be responsible for their disinterest in getting the students motivated or excited during Oral English lesson as depicted in their 80% negative response to item 4 and 60% positive response to item 16. This is in agreement with Kolo (1992), who attributed low performance to teachers' aggressiveness to students' mistakes.

Many teachers tend to teach sounds of English theoretically as revealed in their positive response to items 5, 6, 7 and 8, instead of practically. They also consider it time wasting to improve upon their skills or to make the students use the sounds in varied activities in class as revealed in their negative responses to items 14, 15, 17 and 19 and positive responses to item 18. This negative attitude observed is in line with Silvestri's (1997) report that pronunciation is not given priority in the second language classroom. Their negative attitude is further buttressed by their positive reactions to items 20, 21, and 22 to which they asserted that the sounds of English are abstract and difficult and so they force themselves to teach them because it is customary for them to do so.

As teachers of English language, they ought to know the importance of language laboratory and other materials to the effective teaching of speech. Even though there is no provision of language laboratory by the government as indicated in their response to item 11, or provision of adequate materials by the school authorities to teach English sounds (item 9) but a positive attitude would pave way for improvisation.

However, their 88.5% negative response to item 10, 77% to item 12 and 60% positive response to item 13 and 56% to item 18 depict their negative attitude towards

**Table 1:** Teachers' Attitude Towards the Teaching of English Language Sounds.

| S/No | Statements on Attitude  | Teachers' Responses |      |     |      |
|------|---|---------------------|------|-----|------|
|      |   | Yes                 | %    | No  | %    |
| 1    | Do you think that Oral English should be a major aspect to be taught in the curriculum?                   | 20                  | 10   | 180 | 90   |
| 2    | Do you find the teaching of English language sounds an interesting exercise?                              | 50                  | 25   | 150 | 75   |
| 3    | I am enthusiastic about the teaching of English sounds.   | 45                  | 22.5 | 155 | 77.5 |
| 4    | Are your students excited when you want to teach the English language sounds?                             | 40                  | 20   | 160 | 80   |
| 5    | Do you find it more interesting to teach the English sounds theoretically rather than practically?        | 170                 | 85   | 30  | 15   |
| 6    | Do you encourage your students to write and memorise the English symbols rather than to sound them?       | 140                 | 70   | 60  | 30   |
| 7    | I find it better to teach the English sounds to the students than to allow them to speak in class.        | 110                 | 55   | 90  | 45   |
| 8    | It is time wasting to allow students to produce the English sounds orally while teaching them.            | 120                 | 60   | 80  | 40   |
| 9    | Does your school have instructional materials for teaching English sounds?                                | 20                  | 10   | 180 | 90   |
| 10   | Do you improvise materials for teaching English sounds?   | 23                  | 11.5 | 177 | 88.5 |
| 11   | Is there a language laboratory in your school?  | 0                   | 0    | 200 | 100  |
| 12   | Does lack of language laboratory in your school hamper your teaching of English sounds?                   | 46                  | 23   | 154 | 77   |
| 13   | I would prefer to use charts rather than electronic gadgets and real objects to teach English sounds.     | 120                 | 60   | 80  | 40   |
| 14   | Is the participation of students in a phonetic class necessary for meaningful teaching of English sounds? | 94                  | 47   | 106 | 53   |
| 15   | Do you encourage students' involvement in oral activities during English language lesson?                 | 78                  | 39   | 122 | 61   |
| 16   | I criticize and ridicule students when they pronounce English sounds wrongly.                             | 120                 | 60   | 80  | 40   |
| 17   | Do you think that students' activity will help you to teach English sounds better?                        | 77                  | 38.5 | 123 | 61.5 |
| 18   | Is there too much problem involved in using different methods to teach English sounds?                    | 112                 | 56   | 88  | 44   |
| 19   | Do you create enough time to see how you can improve upon the teaching of English sounds?                 | 58                  | 29   | 142 | 71   |
| 20   | Are English sounds too difficult to teach?  | 155                 | 77.5 | 45  | 22.5 |
| 21   | Do you teach English sounds because you are obliged to teach them to cover the syllabus?                  | 142                 | 71   | 58  | 29   |
| 22   | Are English sounds too abstract to teach?   | 138                 | 69   | 62  | 31   |

Source: Field Work, 2009.

English sounds teaching. This is in agreement with the opinion of Enaibe (2005).

**Research Question 2:** Is there any difference in the attitude of male and female teachers towards the teaching of English sounds?

From the responses to Table 2, it can be delineated that there is no difference between male and female teachers' attitude towards the teaching of English sounds. That is to say that both male and female teachers have negative attitude toward the teaching of English sounds.

The Table 2 shows 65 (81.2%) males and 115 (95.8%) females' negative responses to item 1, 93.7% males and 62.5% females' negative responses to item 2 and 97.5% males, 64.2% females' negative responses to item 3.

The males' and females' negative responses to items 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 19 and positive responses to items 5, 13, 18, 20, 21 and 22 indicate negative attitude towards the teaching of English sounds.

The males responded 50% - 50% to item 6 on whether or not they encourage their students to memorise English symbols rather than sound them but they find it better to

**Table 2:** Male and Female Teachers' Attitude towards the Teaching of English Language Sounds.

| Item   | RESPONSES |      |    |      |         |      |     |      |
|--------|-----------|------|----|------|---------|------|-----|------|
|        | Males     |      |    |      | Females |      |     |      |
| Number | Yes       | %    | No | %    | Yes     | %    | No  | %    |
| 1      | 15        | 18.8 | 65 | 81.2 | 5       | 4.2  | 115 | 95.8 |
| 2      | 5         | 6.3  | 75 | 93.7 | 45      | 37.5 | 75  | 62.5 |
| 3      | 2         | 2.5  | 78 | 97.5 | 43      | 35.8 | 77  | 64.2 |
| 4      | 4         | 5    | 76 | 95   | 36      | 30   | 84  | 70   |
| 5      | 65        | 81.2 | 15 | 18.8 | 105     | 87.5 | 15  | 12.5 |
| 6      | 40        | 50   | 40 | 50   | 100     | 83   | 20  | 17   |
| 7      | 60        | 75   | 20 | 25   | 90      | 75   | 30  | 25   |
| 8      | 38        | 47.5 | 42 | 52.5 | 82      | 68.3 | 38  | 31.7 |
| 9      | 7         | 8.8  | 73 | 91.2 | 13      | 10.8 | 107 | 89.2 |
| 10     | 2         | 2.5  | 78 | 97.5 | 21      | 17.5 | 99  | 82.5 |
| 11     | 0         | 0    | 80 | 100  | 0       | 0    | 120 | 100  |
| 12     | 12        | 15   | 68 | 85   | 34      | 28.3 | 86  | 71.7 |
| 13     | 43        | 53.8 | 37 | 46.2 | 77      | 64.2 | 43  | 35.8 |
| 14     | 24        | 30   | 56 | 70   | 70      | 58.3 | 50  | 41.7 |
| 15     | 26        | 32.5 | 54 | 67.5 | 52      | 43.3 | 68  | 56.7 |
| 16     | 30        | 37.5 | 50 | 62.5 | 90      | 75   | 30  | 25   |
| 17     | 32        | 40   | 48 | 60   | 45      | 37.5 | 75  | 62.5 |
| 18     | 50        | 62.5 | 30 | 37.5 | 62      | 51.7 | 58  | 48.3 |
| 19     | 10        | 12.5 | 70 | 87.5 | 48      | 40   | 72  | 60   |
| 20     | 75        | 93.8 | 5  | 6.2  | 80      | 66.7 | 40  | 33.3 |
| 21     | 70        | 87.5 | 10 | 12.5 | 72      | 60   | 48  | 40   |
| 22     | 68        | 85   | 12 | 15   | 70      | 58.3 | 50  | 41.7 |

Source: Field Work, 2009.

teach English sounds than to allow students to produce them in class (item 7; 60/75%); 62.5% of them responded to item 16 that they do not criticize and ridicule students who make mistakes in their pronunciation. Even though the participation of students in a phonetic class is not necessary for meaningful teaching of English sounds (item 14; 50/70%), they feel it is not time wasting to allow students speak orally while teaching (item 8; 42/52.5%) as this may help to while away the time and hide some traits of non-proficiency in them (Buwa-Sado, 2002).

The females responded (83%) to item 6 positively to indicate their undue emphasis on memorization of rules of phonetics; hence they feel it is better to teach the sounds and not allow students to speak (item 7; 90/75%). Also, they feel it is time wasting to allow students to produce the sounds (item 8; 82/68.3%). They criticize and ridicule students' pronunciation mistakes (item 16; 90/75%) hence they feel participation of students in an Oral English class is unnecessary (item 14; 70/58.3%)

since they may not be patient enough to listen to such speech errors.

All the comments on the male and female responses to the items portray their negative attitude towards the teaching of English sounds.

## CONCLUSION

The result of the study revealed that many teachers have negative attitude towards the teaching of English Language sounds. Also, there is no difference in the attitude of the male and female teachers. However, training of the teachers can bring about a positive change in their attitude.

No doubt, with good spoken English models, students' spoken English would improve greatly and so teachers should serve as models to students as students easily model their performance on teachers.

The major contribution to knowledge from this study is

the implication that if the teachers' negative attitude towards the teaching of English sounds is not arrested, more students with low intelligibility level of spoken English will be produced and the objectives of effective Oral English skills will not be achieved.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- a. Seminars and workshops should be organized on regular bases for English Language teachers to up-grade and up-date their oracy proficiency skills and to motivate them.
- b. Language laboratory and relevant Oral English teaching materials, equipment and facilities should be provided by the government for all schools.
- c. Oral English specialists should be trained in adequate number and posted to all schools to man the language laboratories.

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