



EMPOWERING DELTA STATE ENGLISH TEACHERS ON ORAL ENGLISH PROFICIENCY IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

Every language has oral and written forms. Proficiency in oral English is a dire necessity in the Nigerian multilingual classroom. Like other second language learners, Delta State English Language learners face some challenges. These include those arising from lack of proficiency in oral English. To that end, this study examines the impact of empowering Delta State teachers on oral English language proficiency in the Nigerian multilingual classroom. Data were drawn from questionnaire, observation and library and internet textual materials. Ten (10) respondents each were randomly selected from the twenty-five (25) Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Delta State. The 215 questionnaires used for analysis were those duly filled and returned out of the 250 administered to the respondents. The analysis shows that empowering teachers on oral English proficiency greatly impacts on students in learning and using oral English. The teachers too gain expertise, acquire and demonstrate mastery of oral English proficiency and perform better in and outside the classroom. Their students undoubtedly tap from these. The study concludes that empowering the teachers on oral English proficiency implies arming them for competence and efficiency in teaching oral English and building learners' proficiency. The study recommends that government and financially buoyant organisations should give priority to teacher education and consistently organise and fund empowerment programmes for teachers.

Keywords: Oral English, Proficiency, Teacher education, multilingual Classroom, Delta State, Impact, Empowering

Introduction

Studies often decry students' poor performance in English Language internal and external examinations alike, and in daily communication in and outside the school environment. Lack of proficiency in English Language is one of the factors responsible for the poor performance. Lack as well as poor proficiency in English applies to both learners and teachers, with that of the former being worse than that of the latter. The linguistic plurality (multilingualism) in Nigeria makes English Language to be very essential in daily communication, interactions and transactions among Nigerians (Dibie & Robert, 2018; Nzeagwu, 2018; Emeka-Nwobia, 2015; Monday & Eze, 2012; Nwankwegu & Nwode, 2012). Although English is no Nigerian's mother-tongue, it takes precedence and prominence over all Nigerian languages (Dibie & Robert, 2018; Nzeagwu, 2018). Dhillon and Wanjiru (2013) make same observation about English Language in Kenya. Nevertheless, there is a sustained advocacy for development and use of mother-tongue in the multilingual environment (Gottlieb, 2022). The advocacy with statutory backing thereby puts English as Second Language (ESL) teachers in a dilemma. Nevertheless, the teacher still has the onerous task of teaching English Language efficiently to second language (L2) learners.

English Language obviously serves various purposes that the indigenous languages with their dialects cannot serve in the multilingual Nigerian setting. First, it unifies the different Nigerian peoples for communication, transaction, interaction and relationship purposes. Next, being the Lingual Franca of Nigeria, English is the medium of instruction in all Nigerian educational institutions (Nzeagwu, 2018; Monday & Eze, 2012). English Language is the first most used language across the globe, with billions of native and non-native speakers. The special place of English Language in different spheres of life cannot be over-emphasised. It is the language or instrument of politics, social interaction, education, business transactions, intergroup and interpersonal relations, international relations and diplomacy, etc. The use of English in various spheres requires that both its native and non-native speakers should learn and master the language to a reasonable level. They ought to acquire and show proficiency in it. Proficiency in English as well as any other languages of the world is at both oral and written phases. As a language of instruction, the Nigerian learners of the English are usually faced with the different challenges encountered in second language learning (Juliana, 2017; Okunrinmeta, 2013; Adegbite, 2009; Bamgbose, 1978).

Abolaji (2012) and Trifonovitch (1981) consider the early acquisition of the first language as the bane of the challenges encountered by students in second language learning. Language education is required to know, understand, master and overcome the inherent constraints to second language learning, teaching and use. In learning the second language, the child most often than not transfers the learnt processes, skills and elements of the language that he/she had learnt first, internalised and familiarised with to the second language (Nzeagwu, 2017 & 2018). Dealing with the trend of mother-tongue transfer and other error sources in second language learning and use requires intensive teacher education. The essence is for the teacher to get well equipped with what he/she needs to pass on to students in the classroom. It is in view of the foregoing realities that this study concerns itself with empowering Delta State English teachers on oral English proficiency. The implication is that to build on Delta State students' proficiency in oral English, teachers' proficiency in it has to be examined and worked on, so as to get them well equipped (empowered) with the skills needed for the proficiency.

In view of the foregoing, this study is intended to find out Delta State teachers' and students' level of proficiency in oral English, drawing evidence from selected primary and secondary schools in the State. The study proposes the empowerment of Delta State English Language teachers with oral English proficiency, towards attaining better or excellence, erudition, efficiency and significant academic achievement among teachers and students alike. It seeks to prove its central position that empowering these teachers implies equipping both them and their students with the essentials of oral English in order for them to become proficient in oral English as well as English as whole.

Statement of the Problem

Delta State is a typical multilingual State in Nigeria, where issues of multilingualism obtain at peak. That is why Pidgin and Creole are dominating, silencing and eroding the indigenous languages in the state (Dibie & Robert, 2018). Generally, learners of second language face different language problems that adversely affect their learning and academic achievement in the classroom. The problems encountered include those from mother-language interference, errors from inter-language, the target or second language inherent complexities, teachers' incompetence and teaching lapses, students' frailties arising from various factors, multilingual situations, and so on. In the same vein, learners of

the English Language face these problems. Thus, this study was informed by the need to address these problems to the barest minimum through empowering Delta State English Language teachers on oral English proficiency. The essence is to build the teachers' proficiency and competence in oral English, so as they could impart same expertise knowledge of oral English into their learners.

It is an indisputable fact that most English Language teachers in Delta State currently have poor proficiency in oral English, while some of them lack the proficiency. In order for English learners in Delta State to be proficient in oral English, the teachers have to be empowered meaningfully so as for them to be able to acquaint the students with the needed skills for proficiency in oral English. The implication is that where English Language teachers are not proficient in oral (and/or written) English, the students are bound to lack proficiency in Oral (and/or written) English too. Given the forgoing points, it is understandable that the English Language teachers in Delta State currently lack the ideal level of proficiency in oral English and thereby need to be empowered with the requisite skills for showcasing, attaining and imparting proficiency in oral English. The need for finding lasting scholarly solutions informed this research work.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to show how and the extent to which empowering Delta State English Language teachers on oral English proficiency can impact significantly on them and their students in the multilingual classroom. The specific objectives are to:

- i. Assess Delta State English teachers' level of proficiency in oral English;
- ii. Examine problems faced by the teachers in teaching oral English to Delta State students;
- iii. Determine the impact of teachers' proficiency in oral English on students' proficiency in it;
- iv. Describe how and the extent to which empowering the teachers would reasonably address commonly faced teaching-learning problems arising from lack of, or poor, proficiency in oral English.

Research Questions

The following research questions are designed to guide the study:

- (i) What level of proficiency in oral English language do Delta State English teachers possess?

- (ii) What problems do the teachers face in teaching oral English?
- (iii) Does teachers' proficiency in oral English impact on students' proficiency in it?
- (iv) How and to what extent would empowering the teachers on proficiency in oral English reasonably address the commonly faced teaching-learning problems arising from poor/lack of proficiency in oral English?

Review of Literature

A recent study by Jacob (2020) investigates the challenges faced in the administration of English Language programme in senior secondary schools in Abaji Area Council, Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The study involved 80 English teachers and school administrators in Abaji. Using plausible mixed methods, techniques and tools, the data gathered were analysed accordingly. The results of the analysis indicate the following challenges to effective administration of English language programme in Abaji secondary schools: insufficient fund, inadequate instructional materials, deficient English laboratory, scarce competent and qualified English teachers, insignificant motivation, and poor training and development of the teachers. Given the findings of Jacob's (2020) study, empowering English teachers in Delta State of Nigeria for the attainment of proficiency in oral English is one viable way of tackling the challenges to effective administration of English Language programme in Nigerian schools.

The study by Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021) establishes teaching-learning challenges faced by teachers and pupils, using the translanguaging pedagogical practices in a multilingual grade 1 class of Lundazi District. Translanguaging is defined as 'the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages' (Baker, 2011, p. 39). The analysis of the data drawn from 41 pupils and 1 teacher of literacy shows that using translanguaging practices to teach literacy in a grade 1 multilingual class was associated with challenges of the mismatch between the language of instruction and the learner's first language; rigid language policy upholding monolingualism all through; strict monolingual based assessment that only tested skills in the regional language; and inadequate teaching and learning materials. The study recommends that the concerned authorities should revise the national language guidelines to reflect the current linguistic composition of

the language zones, where the study was carried out. Parathi and Nagasubramani (2018) discuss the need to be effective in both written and oral forms of communication, particularly in English Language, and even in other languages in general. They discuss the challenges to effective written and oral communication and highlight the strategies for attaining the deserving efficiency. Thus, they lend credence to our proposal for empowering Delta State English teachers to attain proficiency in oral English. Attaining the proficiency in oral English implies attaining efficiency in teaching oral English.

Most Nigerian schools lack modern technologies, such as audio and video tapes, language laboratories, e-textbooks, flash cards, internet facilities, newspapers, etc. Rather, teaching-learning of English is basically done through the use of textbooks, dictionaries, chalkboards, workbooks and posters (Jacob, 2020). Being that most of the schools lack teaching materials for oral English, poor proficiency in oral English is an indisputable fact. Augustine's (2013) study on the challenges faced by English teachers in Aniocha South Local Government Area of Delta State reveals the factors behind the poor use of English Language by school leavers and graduates. The factors include indiscipline and laziness on the part of the students, teachers' ineffective teaching and deficient teaching methods, inadequate coverage of course contents, insufficient and poor use of teaching materials, the failure to train and develop teachers in various facets of their profession, etc. Given the foregoing realities, it is imperative to empower Delta State English teachers so as to train and acquaint them with oral English proficiency. After the training, they would do same to their pupils and students. Chein and Goh (2011) discuss the challenges faced by teachers in teaching oral English in English as Foreign Language (EFL) or English as Second Language (ESL) context. They note that beyond external constraints (e.g. class sizes, lack of teaching materials, etc.), EFL teachers are faced with their own lack of proficiency in oral English and pedagogical knowledge. To that end, Chein and Goh (2011) express the need for training and retraining of teachers on proficiency in English, particularly proficiency in oral English. Their call thereby lends credence to ours and justifies our demand for the empowerment of English Language teachers in Delta State with oral English proficiency, as empowerment targeted at training the teachers on the nitty-gritty of oral English. Neeta and Klu (2013) also show that teachers' professional knowledge has a significant place in second language education. That is, teachers' erudite knowledge impacts on second language education (L2 teaching and learning). Be it so, the proficient knowledge of the

English Language teacher would undoubtedly impact significantly on the proficiency of the learners in oral English. The difficulties faced by non-native English learners are affirmed by different studies (e.g. Juliana, 2017; Femi, 2016; Fatiloro, 2015; Usman, 2014).

Students' incompetence in oral English poses a challenge to the English teacher in the multilingual classroom. Both teachers and students know that the EFL students lack reasonable competence in English Language, particularly competence in the oral form of the language. The flaws of ESL learners in Nigerian higher institutions of learning are attributed to the problems brought forth to these institutions by graduates of secondary schools. These include lack of the requisite knowledge needed by tertiary institutions, poorly executed school and English language department curricula, inflexible teaching methods, and meagre internal and external motivation to learners (Derin et al., 2020; Teevno, 2011). Hammad, Ghali and Abughali's (2015) study explores the factors behind student teachers' high level of speaking anxiety. The study reveals that the anxiety is caused by inappropriate practice by instructors, the fear of unfavourable evaluation, and sensitivity to instructors' comments. These findings tall with those revealed by Gan's (2012) study on student teachers' faced challenges to strengthening their speaking skills. The challenges identified are inadequate vocabulary, the desire to speak with grammatical accuracy, the constraints posed by intonation, lack of opportunities to speak English in class, not focusing on the curriculum on language improvement, and environmental factors or influences outside the classroom.

Thus, empowering teachers on oral English proficiency is not just beneficial to them alone, but also to students. Many teachers are reported to show willingness to receive training design and implement effective tasks that can motivate students' engagement in oral English activities. The foregoing concerns make teacher education imperative, as to address oral English problems faced by teachers and students alike (Aifuwa, 2013). The necessity for having proficiency in English Language is highlighted by Fakeye (2014), who holds that proficiency in English Language is a predictor of academic achievement among EFL learners in Nigeria. It follows that where English is the language (medium) of instruction in schools, it serves as what predicts students' performance and the academic achievement that follows their performance. Fatiloro (2015) is of the view that second language learners face linguistic problems because they encounter unfamiliar language features of the second language, which clash with the

familiar features of the first language that they had internalised before learning the second language. The unfamiliar features existing in the second or foreign language learnt by L2 learners cause various errors across all levels of language analysis. The major levels of language analysis, which apply to all languages of the world, are syntax/grammar, morphology, phonetics and phonology, semantics, and pragmatics. It is observed that mother-tongue and second language share some similarities (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014).

Studies show that additional to issues arising from multilingualism and mother-tongue transfer are teacher's incompetence, shortage of qualified and competent teachers, lack and/or shortage of teaching-learning materials, individual differences and varied backgrounds, issues of comprehension level, social factors, co-education system of gender mix, wave of globalisation and the negative trends of new media language with its deviant linguistic features (Nwode, 2022; Nzeagwu, 2018; Nzeagwu, 2015; Sa'ad & Usman, 2014; Nwankwegu & Nwode, 2012). Nzeagwu (2017) observes that the patterns of communication students are exposed to at home do not significantly affect their performance in written English. This observation gives an insight to students' performance in oral English. The implication of the foregoing is that such patterns affect their performance in oral English, not written English. Nzeagwu (2018, p. 12) implicitly agrees that empowering English language teachers, who teach English as second language to L2 learners, would acquaint them with the skills and ideals of the language, such that they would do well and impart the right knowledge of English language into their students. Doing so includes improving on the students' proficiency in oral English, since they had been empowered in that regard before getting into the (multilingual) classroom. Nzeagwu (2018, p. 18) expresses optimism about solving the problem of inefficiency, including poor or lack of proficiency in oral English, with the error analysis approach.

Reierstam's (2020) thesis presents the results from two research projects on teachers' assessment beliefs and practices in multilingual education. The results of her two separately conducted studies indicate that although teachers said language is not part of the assessment, they maintain that students need to use language to show proof of critical thinking and more advanced analytical skills. All the teachers expressed the need to cover course content. They also expressed concern about 'how to construct assignments where language does not represent a hindrance to show content knowledge' (Reierstam, 2020, p. iv). Teachers were found focusing primarily on subject concepts, not general academic language. All

teachers used oral follow-up to remedy poor written results (Reierstam, 2020, p. iv). These findings make Reierstam's study very important to this present one. It becomes crystal clear that being empowered on oral English proficiency is necessary for Delta teachers to be able to duly use oral follow-up to proffer solution to poor written results. The implication of the poor written results is that poor mastery as well as performance in oral language has a bearing to the written form of the language.

Again, Reierstam's (2020) study proved teachers' beliefs and practices to be closely related to the character of the subject. 'Teachers with a dual language and subject content certification showed significantly higher results in relation to all activities involving visible language pedagogy' (Reierstam, 2020, p. iv). Most teachers were found to uphold a monolingual Swedish language norm, disregarding the statutory advocacy for mother-tongue use. It is important that the study underscores the need for 'a shared language policy and pedagogy across subjects and school contexts' (Reierstam, 2020, p. iv). It also underlines the need for empowered, responsible and erudite teachers capable of providing 'equal access to subject content and validity and comparability in assessment in multilingual schools' (Reierstam, 2020, p. iv). Thus, her study justifies the advocacy of this present study, which considers empowerment of teachers on oral English proficiency as the panacea to issues of poor and lack of proficiency in oral English. The study also emphasises the need to promote mother-tongue teaching-learning, enrich subject contents, evolve and enliven language policy guiding language education in the multilingual setting, and build as well as improve on teachers' efficiency, which would in turn impact on students' proficiency in it.

Dhillon & Wanjiru (2013) carried out a study on urban multilingual primary school in Kenya, focusing on challenges and strategies for teaching and learning English as a second language (ESL) in primary schools. The study makes valuable empirical contributions to language education and ESL pedagogy in the multilingual context. First, the study reveals teachers' concerted efforts in grappling with the challenges encountered by learners in the multilingual classroom, which were found to arise from unresolved national language policy, mother-tongue-interference, and examination-oriented education system. These found causative factors also apply to the case under study. The examined Kenyan teachers were found to make use of several pragmatic strategies to grapple with the challenges. These included using varied instructional approaches, creating a

warm classroom environment freed from threats to L2 acquisition, allowing for group based interactions, and individual reinforcement strategies were found to be efficient. Of these four strategies, the first two are to teachers. The other two were proven to be the most common learner strategies. The reinforcement strategies included keeping vocabulary notebooks. These findings shall be of immense value to Delta State teachers and students, as they imbibe them and attain betterment in both teaching and learning English Language.

Dhillon and Wanjiru's (2013, p. 14) study submits that 'school-based research can give teachers and learners a voice in the development of successful language teaching and learning strategies for complex and challenging multilingual environments.' Thus, their study underlines the importance of TETFUND's institution-based research in contemporary Nigeria, which informed this present study. It also lends credence to the impact reality of the empowerment proposal, which would undoubtedly improve and bring to place oral English proficiency in both teachers and students in Delta State, South-South, Nigeria. The differences between L1 and L2, as in their established linguistic patterns, pose severe challenges to the L2 learners as well as teachers (Asfaha & Kroon, 2011). The differences in patterns and contexts lead to linguistic adaptation and mix of languages with their codes (Pitt, 2005). Clegg and Afitska (2011) indicate that learners as well as teachers lacking fluency in a common language, as in English, usually resort to bilingual practice to allow for teacher-learner communication in the multilingual classroom. Resorting to bilingual practice in the classroom has been captured by Gorman (1968), who considered it as a practice that could allow for communication between Kenyan pupils and teachers in their multilingual classroom environment, where English had become the medium of instruction. Gorman (1968) thereby expressed the importance of proficiency in English for social mobility, and stressed the need for educators and the government to take up the role of providing the mechanisms for attaining proficiency in English in a multilingual environment. As shown by Hornberger and Vaish (2008), multilingualism, English Language dominance and the need for proficiency in English do not apply to Nigeria and Kenya alone, but also to India, Singapore and South Africa, among others. The dominance of English is a disposition of its superimposition on Africa and its nations by the colonialists (Rassool & Edwards, 2010), for which the implementation of multilingual education policies (Mazrui & Mazrui, 1992) have become unavoidable. Wray (2006) has observed that in this situation, there is need to develop modalities and systems with which language

learning processes could be understood well. By implication the empowerment of teachers with oral English proficiency is one good step in that direction, as doing so implies developing a concrete means or system of understanding and using oral English in and outside the learning environment.

Studies, such as those by Jacob (2020) and Tetteh & Nuobeikaa (2015), identify the problems commonly affirmed by English teachers as what pose threats to teaching the English as a second language (ESL). These include teachers not being given intensive on-the-job training; lack of teachers' Handbooks for English and teaching materials for learners; and lack of parental engagement and support to their children, as regard home work and encouraging them to study what they have been taught at school. Others include lack of motivation; some learners cannot read in English; some of them cannot construct even simple sentences in English; and most of them cannot speak English well or at all in most cases. These findings underline the need for empowering English teachers in Delta State to so as to help address some of the major challenges they face in teaching English to their Delta students, who are L2 learners. Additional to those identified above, Tetteh and Nuobeikaa (2015) also identified other problems faced by ESL teachers to be: serious shortage of competent and qualified teachers, nonchalant attitude of some teachers and students, over-crowded curriculum, the defects of the examination system, and youthful exuberances and the trend of youth subculture.

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was employed in the survey study of oral English proficiency in English Language teachers in Delta State, South-South, Nigeria. In line with this design, a reduced concise population of 250 was designed and drawn from among primary and secondary schools in each of the 25 Local Government Areas (LGAs) of the state. That is, in each LGA, 2 primary and 3 secondary schools each were randomly selected. 2 respondents each were drawn from each of the two selected primary schools in each of the 25 LGAs. 3 respondents each were drawn from each of the 2 secondary schools selected from each LGA. That is, 4 respondents from 2 primary schools and 6 of them from the 2 secondary schools in each of the LGAs summed up to the 10 respondents from each LGA. The 10 multiplied by the 25 LGAs summed up to the 250 total respondents, to whom questionnaires were administered. This was done using

the random sampling technique. The distribution of the respondents is as follows:

2 respondents per 2 primary schools in each LGA

3 respondents per 2 secondary schools in each LGA

10 respondents per LGA

$10 \times 25 = 250$ respondents

$\therefore 2+2+3+3 = 10 \times 25 = 250$.

The questionnaire used for this study was of closed and open-ended, and structured and unstructured formats. It has the four-point Likert scale items (Oppenheim, 2000). The scaling and the four-point system were designed to allow respondents the freedom to choose (e.g. 'Strongly Agreed', 'Agree', 'Strongly Disagree' and 'Disagreed') from the provided options, while at the same time providing any other additional information on the blank spaces provided. To state categorically, mixed methods were employed. Qualitative, quantitative, descriptive and analytical methods, content analysis, four-point Likert scale coding, simple percentage, figures and words were employed in sourcing and analysing the data.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Here, the questionnaire data are presented and analysed accordingly.

Table 1: What is the oral English proficiency level of Delta State English teachers?

Variables	Responses	Percentage
High	-	-
Low	165	76.8
Average	50	23.2
Below Average	-	-
Total	215	100%

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

Despite being those directly involved, the respondents were objective and honest. For most of them (165 of 76.8%), their oral English proficiency level was low rather than high. This means that their proficiency level falls short of standard, as teachers. That is, as teachers, they are supposed to possess high level of proficiency in both oral and written English. Regrettably, as teachers who are non-native speakers that are rarely exposed to in-service training, their

proficiency level in oral English is not high. This backdrop has grave implications to their professionalism and personality, and the learners under them.

As such, empowering them on oral English in order for them to become well equipped with oral English skills is a dire necessity. The situation is such that some of the teachers (respondents) indicated that the oral English proficiency level of Delta State English teachers was average rather than low. For them (50 of 23.2%), the proficiency level was not below average, low or high, but AVERAGE, as at the time of the field survey. Although this other rating highlights the worrisome state of the competence and qualification challenge to second language education, the figures are inconsequential compared to those for LOW. Thus, from quantitative or statistical approach, the result is adjudged to be that the oral English proficiency level of Delta English teachers is low. More highlights on the above finding will be made under discussion of results, as applicable to other findings drawn from data in all the other tables.

Table 2: Have you received any in-service training for English Language?

Variables	Responses	Percentage
Yes	54	25.1
No	161	74.9
Can't recall	-	-
Indifferent	-	-
Total	215	100%

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

Data contained in the above table clearly reveal that teachers in Delta are rarely exposed to or offered in-service training. The implication is the disposition of the negligence of manpower training and development by the Delta State government along with its agents in the state Ministry of Education, who head the Ministry. The consequence of the lack or inadequate training and development of its manpower is the poor service delivery typified by English teachers in the Delta multilingual classroom, whereby they exhibit poor proficiency in oral English. The extended effect or consequence manifests in students' poor performance and lack of or poor proficiency in oral English as well as written English. Therefore, empowering English teachers in this state implies increasing the number of teachers exposed to in-service training. The training involved in the empowerment would undoubtedly arm the teachers with the

essentials of oral English, with which they would teach and impact on learners better than they used to before the empowerment.

Table 3: How would you rate your learners' level of proficiency in oral English?

Variables	Responses	Percentage
High	-	-
Low	-	-
Average	33	15.3
Below Average	182	84.7
Total	215	100%

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

From the above table, it is quite clear that Delta State primary and secondary learners of the English Language currently have poor proficiency in oral English. They were rated BELOW AVERAGE, with 182 responses of 84.7%. Only 33 respondents, representing 15.3%, rated them otherwise, as having AVERAGE level of proficiency in oral English. The implication of the result is that the learners currently have BELOW AVERAGE level of oral English proficiency, because of their teachers' current low level of proficiency in oral English. Therefore, empowering their teachers on oral English proficiency implies empowering them too, as the empowerment would improve on their proficiency level and that of their teachers too. As that of their teachers get improved, theirs too would get improved by virtue of the professional or pedagogic impact their teachers would exert on them in the course of imparting the newly acquired knowledge of oral English into the learners.

Table 4: What problems do the teachers face in teaching oral English?

Variables	Responses	Percentage
Mother-tongue interference, intra-language complexities inherent in English, shortage of relevant materials, curriculum pressure and inadequacies, class size, lack of teacher motivation, lack of modern oral aids and communication gadgets etc.	----	----

Ineffective teaching methodology, lack of constant practice of oral skills, teachers' incompetence and nonchalant attitude, learners' self-created language systems, students' background, students' and parents' misdeeds, environmental influences or factors, etc.	----	----
All of the above	215	
None of the above	----	----
Total	215	100%

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

As shown above, unanimous responses were got for question 4 above. All the respondents (215 of 100%) indicated 'All of the above', meaning that the options 1 and 2 were the combined variables that apply to the situation, or answer the question. In other words, the identified problems in columns 1 and 2 were confirmed to be the challenges faced by English teachers in the course of teaching oral English, as largely applicable to what they face in teaching written English.

Table 5: What strategies do the teachers use for teaching oral skills?

Variables	Responses	Percentage
Question and answer, role-play, discussion (conversation), paired talking, story-telling, songs and rhymes, poems recitation, dramatisation, reading texts and passages in class, class work, home work, debates, competition, literary and media events and presentations, etc.	----	----
Audio-visual aids, flash cards, pictures/photographs, textbooks, newspapers, magazines, crossword puzzles, vocabulary tree, etc.	----	----
All of the above	215	
None of the above	----	----
Total	215	100%

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

Again unanimous responses were got for question 5, as shown above. All the respondents (215 of 100%) indicated 'All of the above', meaning that the identified strategies making up variables sets 1 and 2 are all used by teachers for teaching oral English. These are devised strategies for surmounting the challenges faced in teaching English in general and oral English in particular. More illustrative comments on the above finding will be made under discussion of results.

Table 6: Which of these oral English skills do your learners find more problematic?

Variables	Responses	Percentage
Pronunciation of sounds, intonation, stress and speaking	215	100
Listening, auditory awareness and vocabulary	----	----
All of the above	----	----
None of the above	----	----
Total	215	100%

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

As seen above, all the respondents (215 of 100%) indicated that pronunciation of sounds, intonation, stress and speaking are the oral English skills their learners find more problematic. This revelation was borne out of experience and careful observation of their learners for many years now, as teachers of English Language in the multilingual Delta State. These four problem areas are listed according to their order of difficulty. Pronunciation of sounds, particularly English specific sounds lacking in the learners' mother-tongues, is the number one most problematic area for learners. It usually poses serious difficulty to the ESL learners as well as some teachers.

The next difficult aspect is intonation. This is so in that most, if not all, African languages are tonal rather than intonation languages. Thus, these learners are used to tonal features rather than those of intonation. Stress is closely related to intonation and is lacking in Nigerian and most other African languages. Tones (tone marks), verbalising and voicing are indicators of the equivalent stress features in the indigenous languages of these Delta learners. As such, they mostly encounter difficulty with stress. The aforementioned difficulties couple with other inherent complexities, including the cumbersome nature of English

Language with most of its constituent elements, make learning of oral English difficult for most of the learners.

Table 7: Does teachers' proficiency in oral English impact on students' proficiency in it?

Variables	Responses	Percentage
Yes	196	91.1
No	-----	-----
Somewhat	19	8.9
Can't tell	-----	-----
Total	215	100%

Source: Researchers' Field Survey, 2022

Data gathered on the above question answer research question 4. Since it is confirmed above that teachers' proficiency in oral English impacts on students' proficiency in it, the finding demonstrates that empowering the teachers on oral English proficiency would reasonably address the commonly faced teaching-learning problems arising from poor/lack of proficiency in oral English. This is because with the empowerment, the teachers would become well armed with what they need to acquaint learners with in oral English. Upon doing so, the learners are bound to become reasonably proficient in oral English.

Discussion of Results

Different challenges are realised to be confronting learners. One of them is the failure to reinforce language policy in the school setting. Most learners make use of their mother-tongue elements in place of their English equivalents that are either unfamiliar or difficult to them, or do not exist in their mother-tongues. For example, some English sounds (e.g. θ, ɔ̃, ʃ, ʒ, ə) are not found in Delta indigenous languages. The practice of mixing language by teachers and learners during English lessons affects their efficiency, proficiency and fluency in English. Pidgin English largely interferes with the Standard English, following the variances applicable to them. Teaching English and indigenous languages simultaneously has no adverse effect on learning English Language. Rather, both English and the indigenous languages are equally promoted and developed, and there is the possibility of attaining a better understanding of the English Language. Curricular deficiencies and operation issues also found to pose challenges to teachers and learners. For example, critical, creative and innovative language teaching is inhibited by the pressure from curriculum demands to meet targets. Most teachers come to the class well prepared, though they still face several challenges, some of which are from students, English inherent complexities, and shortage or

lack of teaching aids. The students' home backgrounds also infuse in them what constitutes some challenges to effective learning of English, as L2. For example, learners from illiterate background are bound to face some difficulties learning, speaking and writing English as supposed.

The rigid approach to language learning, which targets the examination system of reading and writing skills alone, does not avail students opportunities for speech communication and critical thinking (Nursafira, 2020; Muthwii, 2004). This means that of the four main language skills, reading and writing are given more attention than speaking and listening. Yet, teaching and learning involve listening. The learners listen to teachers. Students are rarely taught how to listen well. They are just assumed to be listening. Getting students to listen well in the classroom requires some skills. Speaking is the least used language skill by the learners. Learners are not given enough time to speak. Oral drills and other speech activities that require the learners to speak are not given utmost attention. Writing and reading skills are emphasised and given utmost attention, while speaking and listening skills are not given utmost attention. This present study sees to that and rouses deserving attention to this backdrop in language learning processes. Also, shortage of English teachers, class population or number of students, class workload, timeframe, and some learners' negative attitude to learning are some of the factors found to militate against effective teaching-learning of the English language in Delta State, as in elsewhere (Gottlieb, 2022; Nyimbili & Mwanza, 2021; Dansieh, 2018; Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013; Edwards, 1994).

Considering the numerous challenges to second language learning in the multilingual environment, there are strategies to surmount or reduce the challenges to the barest minimum. Lartec et al. (2014) identify the following strategies used by teachers in teaching ESL: translating from English to mother-tongue; utilising multilingual teaching; utilising lingua-franca; improvising instructional materials written in mother-tongue; remediating instruction; and utilising literary piece written in mother-tongue for motivation. The Delta State English Language teachers make use of the aforementioned strategies found efficient by Lartec et al. (2014). That is to say the findings of this current study tally with those of Lartec et al. (2014) in terms of these strategies used by teachers ESL teachers in Delta State. Also, teaching methods and language instructional approaches are good strategies. These require the teacher to check regularly and reconsider the teaching methods and instructional materials that are more suitable and efficacious. Another strategy is that regarded as learning by word and doing (aka total physical response). This strategy involves letting learners to learn being part of the teaching and learning process, as they take active part in the exercises. They use words and actions to showcase their comprehension of what has been (or is being) taught. This strategy crosses the limit of the traditional system in which learners only listen, write and read for

examinations and tests. It involves verbal rehearsals and repetition and all the language skills in language learning processes.

Grouping students for academic tasks is another strategy, which gets them fully involved in language processes. By this, they learn how to work in group and cooperate with group members. Another one is group work, which serves as a good strategy for peer support or mentoring. Many learners learn better and easily from their peers than teachers. Thus, teachers have to encourage peer support or mentoring. Effective and guided use of new media, with a focus on multimedia, is another workable strategy. Using this strategy incorporates all the four language skills, and exposes learners to learning opportunities beyond the traditional classroom. Teaching language learning strategies to learners is another viable strategy. This involves teaching them how to listen, speak, read and write effectively. Exposing learners to the strategies associated with or for each of the four language skills goes a long way to arm them for good or better performance and meaningful academic achievement. In practical demonstration of the strategies they are exposed to, learners should be allowed to own language learning initiatives, through which they become creative and make meaningful contributions to learning.

Realising that they are given the chance to own language learning initiatives, learners are bound to be engaging, creative, critical, self-tasking and productive. Being so, the strategy of giving learners English language home work and class work is bound to work well, because the learners are poised to doing academic tasks given to them, in order to be part of the teaching-learning processes, as they have a space in the processes by virtue of owning their initiatives. Another workable strategy to employ is teaching based on situational context. By so doing, the English teacher meets diversity and situational needs of the learners, which vary. This strategy takes cognisance of differences arising from different situations and contexts. Bearing these in mind, it becomes easy to manipulate situations that pose challenges to language teaching-learning. To sustain learners' good or maximal performance in English, it is necessary to teach and reinforce good use of English in all curriculum subjects.

Another strategy is that of being friendly to learners, which encourages them to seek help whenever they face language difficulties. This involves using various positive interactive techniques and activities. These include guidance and counselling learners outside the classroom, making positive comments about them, encouraging them to take even the seeming most tedious tasks, and allowing for recitation, poems, songs, story-telling, short performance (drama), riddles, jokes, speeches, etc. from learners, among others. Putting up school debates, clubs, literary events, broadcast station, competitions, etc. would also create avenues for learners to learn and better their performance in English, including proficiency in oral English. Also, forbidding the use of vernacular for interaction and communication while in school is another strategy for dealing with the challenges to teaching second language in the multilingual environment.

The viability of the above highlighted strategies for efficacious teaching of second language to L2 learners is confirmed by studies such as Gottlieb (2022), Nyimbili and Mwanza (2021), Dhillon and Wanjiru (2013), Grainger (2004), and O'Malley and Chamot (1990), among others.

Learners are found to employ some learning strategies to surmount the problems they face in L2 learning. That is, learners employ such strategies to ease their learning of L2 and improve on their proficiency in English. As O'Malley and Chamot (1990, p. 17) have noted, using strategies in language learning helps learners and teachers to overcome the inherent challenges. This revolves around using favourable 'thoughts and behaviours' that ease teaching-learning process, which involves coding and decoding communication content on language acquisition. For Brown (2000, p. 122), the strategies employed in language learning and teaching are the 'moment-by-moment techniques' employed to solve problems resulting from L2 input and output.' The strategies employed by learners are said to be of two major categories. These are individual level strategies and group level strategies. The individual level strategies include comprehension tactics, keeping vocabulary notebooks and using dictionaries. On the other hand, the group level strategies include working in groups, peer teaching, role-play, group translations and group word games (Gottlieb, 2022; Nyimbili & Mwanza, 2021; Dhillon & Wanjiru, 2013; Grainger, 2004; O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

Conclusion

So far, this study has proven the proficiency level of Delta State teachers and students in oral English to be currently deficient, for which the teachers need to be empowered on oral English proficiency. The empowerment is confirmed to be of immense benefit to both the teachers and the learners. The challenges encountered by teachers and learners in the multilingual classroom are discussed. Conversely, the strategies for surmounting them, as affirmed to be used considerably by the teachers and the learners, are highlighted. On the whole, given the analysis with its revealed results, the study submits that empowering the teachers on oral English proficiency implies arming them for competence and efficiency in teaching oral English and building learners' proficiency through the teachers' built proficiency. The study basically recommends sustained empowerment and training of teachers for quality and productive teaching and learning of ESL. The identified challenges should be addressed by all parties concerned. Effective legislations would ensure compliance to established modalities.

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