

Influence of Nigeria Pidgin English on the Interest of Nnamdi Azikiwe University Students in English Language

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Abstract

This paper investigated the influence of Nigeria pidgin English on the interest of Nnamdi Azikiwe university students in English language. Two research questions were used. A purposive sample size of 264 English language Education students in Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka was used. The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire. The instrument was validated by three experts in the faculty of Education, Abia State University Uturu. Thirty students who were not part of the study were used for the reliability. A reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained using Cronbach's alpha reliability method, which confirmed the instrument's reliability. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The findings of the research questions revealed that Nigeria pidgin has a negative influence on students' Standard English in Nigeria Universities. It has affected the students' formal use of English language. It was therefore recommended that stakeholders in education should make it compulsory for students not to use Nigeria pidgin English within the school environment, to curb the incessant use of the language. It was also recommended that government should ban the use of Nigeria pidgin English in formal organizations especially in schools or any academic gathering to curb the negative effect this has on Students.

Keywords: Influence, Pidgin, Interest

Introduction

English language has always been the language of Education, and the only official language in Nigeria. English language remains the only language of instruction in schools apart from mother tongue which the National policy on Education (2003) stipulated should be used in the classroom within the first four years of a child's education. Most often nowadays, students probably out of the socio-cultural pressure in communication tend to use Nigeria pidgin English more often in their communication than they use English language and this tends to have a toll on their academic performance in English language as they tend to unknowingly bring it into their academic work. Nigeria pidgin English which was earlier seen as language of the illiterates is now gaining grounds as language of both the literate and the illiterate. As Akande (2008) succinctly puts it, the sociolinguistic reality in Nigeria today is such that Nigeria pidgin English is spoken by university graduates, professors, lawyers, and Journalists. At such, the assertion that pidgin is meant for the illiterate is no longer valid.

Language is dynamic, as people move around, they come in contact with people from different linguistic background, and since communication is inevitable, a certain make-shift language is bound to erupt. That is the case of Nigeria pidgin English. A pidgin language is a reduced language that comes up as a result of extended contacts between groups of people who share no common language. It is a combination of indigenous language and English language. It is often regarded as a bastardized language. Ifediche and Ifediche (2015) submitted that Nigeria pidgin English is an English-based creole, its lexicon is massively based on English language and, it employs many devices in enriching its vocabulary. Nigeria Pidgin English according to Garko (2021) is an English based creole language, that is widely spoken throughout Nigeria. It is another thriving English based creole that is widely spoken as a lingua franca across Nigeria. Nigeria is a multilingual nation with over 530 languages. Nigeria pidgin English is the only language that is common to all the ethnic groups in Nigeria, haven broken between different ethnic groups and all the sectors we have in a nation like Nigeria where there is no national language. It is not attached to any ethnic group identity but is mostly used by people residing around Delta and Edo state due to the level of language variations predominant over there.

Status of English language in Nigeria

English is a language of formal education; it is used as the medium of instruction from lower basic in primary school to the university level. It is the language of Education, media, judiciary, legislature etc. The national policy on education gave English language its pride of place when it stipulated that after the first four years of a child in school the language of instruction for all subjects shall now be English language except the mother tongue which shall be taught as a subject, and also without a credit pass in English language a student cannot gain admission into any university in Nigeria to read any course. According to Onyekwere and Nkoro (2007), this issue of passing English language at credit level before gaining admission into any tertiary institution has on its own dressed the language with the ‘aura of a colossus’ this therefore places the role of English language in our educational system at the top echelon. Essien and Okon (2003), succinctly stated that even the most ardent nationalist would not deny his children full access to English for the fact that it is the most used language in the world. English language is characterized by pupil/student teacher relationship. It is formal and official (Uwasombe, 2016). Nigeria places English language above all five hundred and fifty-five (515) local languages of the ethnic groups in the country. The FRN (2013: 8) in its language provision for upper basic stipulated that, “from the fourth year (upper basic), English language shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French and Arabic shall be taught as additional language/subject”. To Nigerian students who have to learn under challenging circumstances, English is not a very easy medium of communication because the learner has to grapple with a lot of factors, which include Mother tongue, environment, apathy to language, age, peer group pressure, parental influence, teacher induced error and so on. These impediments have not placed the Nigerian students on a good pedestal to speak and equally write effectively in English.

Status of Nigeria Pidgin English in Nigeria

Nigeria pidgin English, although being widely used by the majority population of Nigeria today has no official status in the country.. The status of Nigeria pidgin has been changing for some time now, from being regarded as language for the illiterates to language of both the literate and the illiterate to language of the media, adverts, music, jingles. Gogila (2010) opined that nowadays, the use of Nigeria pidgin English is more widespread even more than English. Indeed, using Nigeria pidgin English is increasingly popular among young people, many writers, politicians and musicians. It is now a course of study in University both for the graduate and the postgraduates (Ahmadu Bello University to be precise). Many linguistics in Nigeria and even beyond have been putting up struggles towards making Nigeria pidgin English an official or national language in Nigeria as it is the only language that unites our multilingual nation, more so where Nigeria is presently not having any national language. Akande and Salami (2010) observed that although as a major lingua franca in Nigeria, it has no official recognition: even without a policy statement. Goglia (2010) supported that no official status has been granted to Nigeria pidgin English in Nigeria, although some Nigerians have suggested that it would be a good candidate for national language status, since it retains the unique characteristics of solidarity and neutrality. Ehonder, (2020) opined that as pragmatic panacea, there have been several calls for the Nigeria pidgin English to be adopted as lingua franca in Nigeria and virtually the language of National communication to facilitate effective communication and peace in Nigeria. One notable thing about Nigeria pidgin English is that it has no ethnic foundation or origin. Ifediche and Ifediche (2015) supported that Nigeria pidgin English should be promoted as the national language since it is a neutral code, more so the English language has never been our mother tongue nor first language of any of the over 200 ethnic groups in Nigeria. Balogun (2012), observed that Nigeria pidgin English is a promoted language as well because it reflects national identity in Nigeria. It is used in the propagation of national ideas, values, political and socioeconomic development of peace and unity. It belongs to no ethnic region, therefore making it really national. Ehonder (2020) supported that Nigeria pidgin English is better positioned as an indigenous and national language worthy of being engraved, because nobody and everybody in Nigeria owns it. Deuber (2005) reveled that although Nigeria pidgin English is not a major lingua franca, it has no official recognition, even without any policy statement, it performs a growing range of functions, including for example. That of a medium of public broadcasting but no efforts have been made to develop it in order for it to be able to cope with these functions as has been done for the major and to some extent also for major languages. Okeh (2010) stressed that Nigeria pidgin English remains the only language that unifies the 186 million population in the country.

Before now, Nigeria pidgin English was regarded as language for the illiterate and low class people or people of low grade. It is being rejected by the elites, but as it gets re-enforced, people had no choice than to embrace it, both the literate and the illiterate, the high class and the low class. Akande (2008) noted that the sociolinguistic reality in Nigeria today is such that Nigeria pidgin English is spoken by university graduates, professors, lawyers, and Journalists. At such, the assertion that pidgin is meant for the illiterate is no longer valid. Akande (2008),

supports that it has been demonstrated that Nigeria pidgin English, is not only used in informal settings but also in offices and other formal settings. In other words, the claim that Nigeria pidgin English is the code of the non-illiterate does not seem to have validity as there lots of educated speakers in Nigeria who can use both standard English and Nigeria pidgin English. There is rapid spread of Nigeria pidgin English in all the facets of the country and across all ages and status. Farclas (2004) noted that over 140 million inhabitants of Nigeria are now fluent in Nigeria pidgin English, making it the most widely spoken language in Nigeria now as well as the indigenous African language with the largest number of speakers. Ehonder (2020) noted that it is noteworthy that the Nigeria pidgin has phonological and morphology structure distinct from broken English, which is actually “bad grammar” a deliberate fawned or failed attempt at speaking English language. Ehonder (2020) supported that Nigeria pidgin English cuts across all socioeconomic classes, ethnicities and literacy levels. Some students find themselves in a linguistically illiterate environment. The environment does not care for the use of correct English grammar, especially those area that highly dominated with many speakers of Nigeria pidgin English. English Language is carelessly spoken without regards to rules. These wrong grammars are also picked up by the students unconsciously. The Students tend to pick up and internalize these wrong grammars and produce them the way it is done in their immediate linguistic environment. The learning of English language as a second language is not palatable to the student\learners. It is a slow and demanding process especially where the socio-cultural context of the second language (English) and that of the socio-cultural environment are different. Adu-Boahen, (2020) in his research on the effect of pidgin English on the students’ academic performance in English language (the case study of Adventist senior high school, Bantama-Kumasi), found out that students believe that the use of pidgin English is simple, and at such uses Nigeria pidgin often and this makes them not to understand the simple principles of the standard English. His findings reveled that students struggle so much in studying English as they are used to using pidgin English vocabularies while using actually intending to make sentences in standard English. Ojitobome, in his research on the effect of the Nigeria pidgin English on the Academic performance of University students in Nigeria (A case study of National open University of Nigeria Students in Benin study center) revealed that Nigeria pidgin is gaining strong ground in educational environment instead of English language. It also showed that Nigeria pidgin English is substantially being used in communication between staff and students on a daily basis. This affects the flow of fluent English language communication in a learning environment and out of lecture rooms, at such has negative effect on students’ academic performance. Hassan (2015) in his investigation on the effect of pidgin English on students’ competence in Nigeria University: (case study of 300 level students of Modern European languages and Linguistics) observed that Nigeria pidgin is a formidable and unassailable indigenous language that co-exists with English language in Nigeria. The co-existence of these two languages is an educational problem in Nigeria, as it has some negative effects on the effective learning of English language. Nyarks and Usoro (ND) researched on the effects of Pidgin on Students’ Fluency in English language, and revels that, with the fast rate of student’s

acculturation and maintenance of a closer social distance with pidgin English, the English language will gradually become unfamiliar to the Nigerian society. This contributes to unsatisfactory poor performance of students in English language, which is vital to both their success and progress in education. Onuoha (2023) worked on the Impact of Nigeria Pidgin English on Students of Imo State University and University of Port Harcourt. The finding showed that students most of the time interacted with NPE, but it's usage among university students drastically affected their performance in standard English. Gunn and Abiaziam (2019) researched on the effect of Nigeria pidgin English on the academic performance of students in standard English using some selected Junior secondary schools in Warri south local government area of Delta state as case study. The findings proved that the orthography of pidgin English affects performance in standard English, that there is significant effect of pidgin English on standard English. Unachukwu, Kadiri and Nwuche (2020) investigate the influence of the Nigeria pidgin English on Eha-Amufu secondary school students' usage of standard English. The findings reveal that the use of Nigeria pidgin English is traceable to homes and peer group influence and this has grossly affected the students' English usage. Ogay (2020) worked on hindering the impact of Nigeria English and pidgin on Standard on learning and Standard English in Nigeria universities. He observed that standard English language co-existence with other Nigeria languages and other nativised Englishes. This leads to students of our universities being exposed to frequent and extended use of Nigeria English and Pidgin English. This hinders them from paying attention to learn the standard English as required in their academics and at such exert much negative impacts on sound learning and use of standard English.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria pidgin English which was at the initial stage termed a language of the illiterates is gaining grounds, and is now being used by both the literates and also media houses. Nigerian students are not left out in the evolving status of Nigeria pidgin. Most often students tend to be more comfortable communicating using Nigeria pidgin more than they do with standard English. This is envisaged to pose a problem in their academics especially the use of English language.

The study therefore investigated the influence of Nigeria pidgin English on Nnamdi Azikiwe student's interest in English language and how it interferes with their usage of English language.

Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study;

1. What influence does the use of Nigerian Pidgin have on Nnamdi Azikiwe students's interest of English language?
2. To what extent does the use of Nigeria pidgin interfere with Nnamdi Azikiwe students' formal English usage?

Methodology

The research design adopted for this study was descriptive survey Design. Purposive sampling technique was used to choose students of English language Education, because they are still students offering English language courses and are equally trainee teachers who will still pass down the knowledge to other students. Convenient sampling was used to administered the questionnaire to 264 students of English language Education seen as at the time of sharing the questionnaire. This design was appropriate as it allows for the collection of data from respondents who may have different characteristics. The instrument for data collection was a researcher-developed questionnaire title “The influence of Nigerian Pidgin on English Language Students” The questionnaire had 10 items of a modified four-point Likert scales. The response pattern was Strongly Agree (SA) - 4, Agree (A) - 3, Disagree (D) - 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1. Further, Very high extent (VEH) – 4, High extent (HE) – 3, Low extent (LE) – 2, and Very low extent (VLE) – 1. The instrument was validated by three experts from the faculty of education, Abia state university Uturu. A reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained using Cronbach’s alpha reliability method. Out of the 282copies of the questionnaire distributed, 264 was returned and well filled, and so used for the study. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer research questions.

Results

Research Question One: What influence does the use of Nigerian Pidgin have on Nnamdi Azikwe students’s interest of English language?

Table 1: Influence of Nigerian Pidgin on Students’ interest. n = 264

Impact of Pidgin	SA	A	D	SD	x	Decision
Pidgin English makes me forget some meanings in pure English language	124	64	42	34	3.05	Agreed
I speak pidgin when it is hard for me to explain myself thoroughly	119	72	42	31	3.05	Agreed
My spoken and written English has so much depreciated due to Pidgin English	132	41	53	38	3.01	Agreed
My fluency in English language has reduced drastically due pidgin English	128	74	33	29	3.14	Agreed
My school grade in English language has been affected greatly because of Pidgin English	129	58	32	45	3.02	Agreed

Pooled Mean

3.05

Table 1 revealed the influence of Nigerian pidgin on students' interest in English language. The table revealed that all items revealed mean scores above the criterion bench mark of 2.50 and a pooled mean of 3.05, which is an indication that pidgin English has an influence which is usually negative on the interest of students in English language in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. This is an indication that Nigerian pidgin English could contribute to lowering university students' interest in English language.

Research Question Two: To what extent does the use of Nigeria pidgin interfere with students formal English usage in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka?

Table 2: Extent Nigerian pidgin interferes in students formal English usage

Pidgin Interference	N = 264	VHE	HE	LE	VLE	x	Decision
I speak pidgin in formal communication unaware		58	77	88	41	2.57	Agreed
I am more suited to communicating in Pidgin when discussing with friends and peers		125	74	42	23	3.14	Agreed
I have a better understanding of concepts when explained with Pidgin English		83	65	62	54	2.67	Agreed
During classes, I could answer questions using pidgin English without knowing		79	67	66	52	2.64	Agreed
Pidgin is a more convenient way of communication to me due to influence from neighbors and society		101	65	48	50	2.82	Agreed
Pooled Mean						2.76	

Table 2 revealed the extent to which the use of Nigerian Pidgin interferes with students' formal English language usage in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The table revealed that all items revealed mean scores above the criterion bench mark of 2.50 and a pooled mean of 2.76, which is an indication that pidgin English interferes with students formal English to a high extent in

Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Furthermore, the finding is an indication that pidgin English interference is to a high extent in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of the research question one showed the influence of Nigerian pidgin on students' interest in English language in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study showed that Nigerian pidgin has a negative influence on students' interest in English language. The finding from the study is in agreement with Ogay (2020), who worked on the hindering the impact of Nigeria English and pidgin on Standard on learning and Standard English in Nigeria universities, the study found that standard English language co-existence with other Nigeria languages and other nativized English which led to students of our universities being exposed to frequent and extended use of Nigeria English and Pidgin English. This hinders them from paying attention to learn the standard English as required in their academics and at such exert much negative impacts on sound learning and use of standard English. In another study by Gunn and Abiaziam (2019) who researched on the effect of Nigeria pidgin English on the academic performance of students in standard English using some selected Junior secondary schools in Warri south local government area of Delta states as case study, it found the orthography of pidgin English affects performance in standard English significantly.

The finding from the research question two showed the extent Nigerian pidgin interferes with students' formal use of English language in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study shows that Nigerian Pidgin interferes in students formal use of English language. The finding from the study agrees with Hassan (2015) who worked on the effect of pidgin English on students' competence in Nigeria University: a case study of 300 level students of Modern European languages and Linguistics. The study found that there is so much interference in students use of formal English language. The observed that Nigeria pidgin is a formidable and unassailable indigenous language that co-exist with English language in Nigeria and this co-existence is an educational problem as it has negative effects on the effective learning of English language. The study is also in agreement with Nyarks, and Usoro (ND) whose study on the effects of Pidgin on Students' Fluency in English language revealed that with the fast rate of student's acculturation and maintenance of a closer social distance with pidgin English, the English language will gradually become unfamiliar to the Nigerian society. This implies that the interference Pidgin English has on students is extreme and has to be looked into as soon as possible.

Conclusion

The study concludes that Nigerian pidgin has a negative influence on students' interest in English language in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The study also concluded that Nigerian pidgin has a strong interference with students' use of English language. These conclusions are strong indications that pidgin English has negative influence on students' interest in English Language and their formal usage.

Recommendations

1. Stakeholders in education should make it compulsory for students not to use pidgin English in communicating as soon as they are in the school environment.
2. The government should ban the use of Pidgin English in formal organizations especially in schools to curtail its negative effect on students.

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