

# Impact of Teachers' Subject Mastery and Questioning Behaviour on Students' Performance in English Language in Selected Senior Secondary Schools in Ikere Metropolis

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## Abstract

The performance of senior secondary school students in English language has been dwindling for many years in Nigeria. The problems have been blamed on the way the teaching and learning of English are handled in the classroom by the teachers. Among the predominant teacher related factors that are adduced as of influencing students' performance are teachers' subject mastery and teachers' questioning behaviour. In mainstream education, teachers had been acknowledged to have a great impact on student learning outcomes and so these factors call for a closer scrutiny. However this study was born from this premise that the teacher remains the first resource in teaching and learning processes and that no educational program can rise above the level of its teachers. To carry out the study, relevant literature considering the teacher related factors in English language teaching and learning process were reviewed and the descriptive research design of the survey type was adopted for the study. A total of 500 students and 10 teachers constituted the sample selected through simple random sampling procedure. The major instruments for the study were: Teachers' Questioning Behaviours Observations Checklist (TQBOC), Teachers' Subject Mastery Observation Checklist (TSMOC) and Achievement Test in English Language. (ATEL) Three research questions were raised and the results collected from the findings were collated and coded with descriptive statistics as well as multiple classification analysis. It was therefore revealed that there is (I) a positive relationship between teachers' subject mastery and students' performance in English language. It was also revealed in the study that teachers' questioning behaviour is not a significant determinant of students' learning outcomes in English language among senior secondary schools students in Ikere metropolis.

**Key words:** Impact, Teacher related, Subject mastery, Questioning behaviour, Performance.

## Introduction

English language remains a subject to be mastered for students to make progress academically, particularly from above the primary school level. Indeed, the importance of English language in the process of education in Nigeria has remained largely undiminished. (Ohia, 1997). However, English language appears to be the school subject with which students experience the greatest learning problems. This is a major source of concern to almost all the stakeholders in education. A good number of scholars (Adesanoye (1976), Kolawole 1998) have variously attested to this.

In spite of the important roles of English language in the Nigerian schools, some scholars have observed that the performance of Nigerian Senior Secondary School Students in English Language has not been encouraging. Fakeye and Ogunsiji (2009) and Onukaugo (2002) observed that performance of learners in achievement test, and it was revealed that learners performed very poorly in English language and other school subjects. Abari and Alivar(2010) also corroborated this dismal performances stressing that if not immediately arrested, it will further precipitate the fallen standard of education in the country.

Teachers are the most important refined human species that skilfully identify, develop and nurture the potentials of productive citizenry for meaningful creation of wealth, pleasure and services which will sustain quality of life. Relevance of teachers to individual and national development is wholly dependent on their pervasive role in providing functional education and training to the learners within and outside the school setting. The teachers has the unique responsibility to show the light in all the sciences and humanities to the country's youths who are to actualize the knowledge gained from the teachers in order to develop themselves and their society. The rate and level of development of any nation depend largely on the level of maturity and experiences, pedagogical awareness, knowledge creation and currency of her teachers. Thus, it is apparent that education system of any country cannot rise beyond the quality of its teacher.

It is a frantic search for solution to the poor performance of students in English language that made academic scholars to carry out different researches on teachers related factors influencing students performance. Teachers must be knowledgeable in their area of study. In truth, if a teacher is not enlightened in his/her subject

then any hope of effectiveness goes right out of the window. Hence, effective teaching could be measured by the level of a teachers' subject matter competence which Mulleins (1993) regarded as a prime predictor of students learning. Most teachers do not possess the mastery of the subject. The reason for this may be that English language is a second language. They may have not acquired and master the language. Anderson (1991) opined that the teacher must possess the knowledge and skills needed to attain the goal and must be able to use that knowledge and skills if the goals are to be achieved.

It has been established that there is a high correlation between what teachers know what they teach. Thus, the ability to teach effectively depends on the teachers' knowledge of the subject matter. Teachers' are handicapped if they are unfamiliar with body of knowledge taught and teachers' characteristics is subject specific. Therefore, one can conclude that a teacher who is knowledgeable of subject matter uses clearer language; his discourse is more connected and provides better explanations than the one whose background is weak.

Questioning behaviour which is another variable of interest in this study has to do with the nature and manners a teacher ask questions in the course of lesson, and this is considered an important factor in improving students learning outcomes in English language. Fakeye (2007) argues that an important aspect of classroom interaction in ESL classroom is teachers' questioning behaviour which plays significant roles in ESL instruction. Cotton (2001) asserts that questioning as a teaching strategy has consequent potential for influencing students' learning. Classes where students were asked more of recall questions did slightly better on the recall tests, where all classes did equally well on integrative questions, no matter what percent were asked in the class. In additional analysis reported in Wilen (1991), it was found that low ability students did best with factual questions, and without probing and redirection, whereas high ability student did best with probing and redirection.

Good questions, effectively delivered, facilitate students' learning and thinking as they serve to motivate and focus students' attention, provide opportunities for practice and rehearsal and provide the opportunity for teachers to assess how well students are mastering content. Questioning is a core function of both learning and teaching; questions can stimulate students to think at higher cognitive levels, Dillon (1988).

Morgan and Saxton (1991) stress that teachers ask questions for several reasons which include:

- The act of asking questions help teachers to keep students actively involved in the lessons;
- While answering questions, students have the opportunity to openly express their ideas and thoughts;
- Questioning students enables other students to hear different explanations of the materials by their peers;
- Asking questions help teachers to place their lessons and moderates students' behaviour.
- Questioning students helps teachers to evaluate students' learning and revise their lessons as necessary.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There has been a substantial theoretical and practical shift of emphasis, mostly in mainstream education, towards acknowledging that teachers are among the principal components of any pedagogical program. In the past ten years, a burgeoning research base has increasingly shown that teachers are among the most important players influencing student achievement according to Akbari and Allvar (2010) and that they hold the key to sealing the gaps in students performance. Evidence available shows that most students do not perform well in the senior secondary school certificate English language examination, as shown in their WAEC results. Their inability to perform well in the examination has been attributed to various reasons, one of which is teacher related factors. These factors include majorly teachers' subject mastery and teachers' questioning behaviour. Studies have shown that these factors have the potential of influencing learning outcomes especially in subjects such as sciences and vocational subjects. The extent to which teachers' subject mastery and teachers' questioning behaviour could correlate students' performance in English language in Ikere metropolis is a major preoccupation of this study.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relative contribution of teachers' subject mastery to students' learning outcomes in English language?
2. What is the relative contribution of teachers' questioning behaviour to students' learning outcomes in English language?
3. What is the joint contribution of teachers' subject mastery and teachers' questioning behaviour to students' learning outcomes in English lang

The study covers Ikere local government in Ekiti State. Five schools were selected in the study. The study investigated the relationships between two independent variables which included teachers' subject mastery and teachers questioning behaviour with students' performance in English language.

### **Significance of the Study**

The study would provide empirical information on the teacher-related factors that could predict students' academic achievement in English language. The study would also contribute to research efforts geared towards finding a permanent solution to the problem of poor performance of students in English language. It will also serve as an eye opener to teachers and other stakeholders on which of the teacher related factors could most predict students' learning outcomes in English language.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey research design that sought for the impact of teachers' subject mastery and questioning behaviour on student performance in English language in selected senior secondary schools in Ikere metropolis.

The population of the study comprised all English language teachers and their students in Senior Secondary School, class two (SS2) in Ikere local government in Ekiti State.

A sample of 5 schools in Ikere-Ekiti Local Government Area of Ekiti State were selected through random sampling. Two English language teachers were selected for observation from each school, making a total of 10 teachers that participated in the study. A sample of one hundred students were randomly selected among the Senior Secondary Schools, Class 2 students from each of the five schools for the performance test, making a total of 500 students that participated in the study.

In order to provide answers to the research questions, the following instruments were developed by the researcher for the collection of data. Teachers Questioning Behaviours Observation Checklist, Teachers' Subject Mastery Observation Checklist, and English Language Achievement Test.

The classroom observation checklist is entitled Teachers' Questioning Behaviour Observation Checklist (TQBOC). It has 12 items that are either ticked Yes or No by the researcher in a classroom situation.

Teachers' Subject mastery observation checklist, The Classroom Observation Checklist is entitled. Teachers' Subject Mastery Observation Checklist (TSMOC). It has 10 items that are either ticked Yes or No by the researcher in a classroom situation.

The English language Achievement Test (ELAT) was a 25-items instrument which was made up of two sections. Section A sought information about some demographic details on the students. Section B was in three parts. Part I was a reading passage. Part II was a test on Vocabulary (Word and Opposite). Part III was a test on English Sounds (Vowel and Consonants). Students were required to choose the correct answers from the options.

The instruments for the study were developed by the researchers and were subjected to content and face validity by experts in Language unit in the department of teacher education. Their objective criticisms and suggestions on the appearance of the items in the instruments were applied to the instruments. The researchers obtained the scheme of work of the students and set questions on the selected topics. The Achievement Test reflected reasonably what they have done in class.

In order to ascertain the reliability of the instruments, the Achievement Test was trial tested on two schools and the Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to determine the internal consistence of the test getting 0.81 which is considered reliable for this kind of study. The researchers then administered the Teachers' Questioning Behaviour Observation Checklist and the Teachers' Subject Mastery Observation Checklist Rating Scale on students in similar situation different from the samples used in the study while as inter-rater mode was used to determine the consistency of the instruments.

The study was conducted with the help of two research assistants. The researcher trained the research assistants on how to administer each of the instruments used in the study. The five sampled schools in Ikere local government of Ekiti State were visited by the researchers and his assistants in order to brief the principals and staff (especially SS II teachers of English Language) of the purpose of the visit. With the help of these teachers the researchers administered the English Language Achievement Test on 5 schools and after administering the test in each school, the researcher observed the teachers during their lessons. The same process was also used in the other schools, a total of 10 teacher were observed. While the researchers was observing the teachers' They administered the Teachers' Questioning Behaviour Checklist, the Teachers' subject mastery Checklist and questionnaires on teachers' qualification and teachers teaching experience.

Data collected from the study were analyzed using Descriptive Statistics of Frequency counts, mean and percentage with inferential statistics. In addition, Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA) was used to determine the extent of relationship between the independent variable and dependent variables.

### Research Finding

The results of the data collected and collated in this study are presented in line with the research questions raised in the study.

### Research Question 1

What is the relative contribution of teachers' subject mastery to students' performance in English language?

**Table 1:** table of relationships between subject mastery an students' learning outcomes in English language

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	r-cal	r-tab
Teachers' subject mastery	100	1.92	.2472	99	1.425	0.195
Students' learning outcomes	500	50.00	15.145			

Table 1 above shows that r-cal value of 1.425 is greater than the table value of 0.195 at 0.05 level of significance. Also, the degree of freedom 99 and the standard deviation of 0.2472 in teachers' subject mastery compared with the standard deviation of 15.145 students' learning outcomes indicated that there is significant relationship between teachers' subject mastery and students' learning outcomes in English language. In other words, teachers' subject mastery is significant and necessary to students' learning outcomes in English language.

### Research Question 2

What is the relative contribution of teachers' questioning behaviour to students' learning outcomes in English language?

**Table 2: Table of relationship between teachers' questioning behaviour and students' performance**

Variables	N	X	SD	Df	r-cal	r-tab
Teachers' questioning behaviour	100	1.67	1.38	99	0.065	0.195
Students' learning outcomes	500	50.00	15.145			

**Source:Field work (2013)**

Table 2 shows that r-cal value of 0.065 is less than the tale value of 0.195 at 0.05 level of significance. Also, the degree of freedom 99 and the standard deviation of 1.67 by teachers' questioning behaviour compared with the standard deviation of 15.145 by students learning outcomes. Consequently there is no significant relationship between teachers' questioning behaviour and students' learning outcomes in English language.

In conclusion, teachers questioning behaviour does not matter in students' learning outcomes in English language.

### Research question 3

What is the joint contribution of teachers' subject mastery and teachers questioning behaviour to students' performance in English language?

**Table 3: Summary of one way ANOVA showing the joint contribution of teachers' subject mastery and teachers' questioning behaviour on learning outcomes in English language**

Source	Sum of squares	Mean square	df	F	P
Between groups	19.25	16.63	3	.58	>.05
Within groups	237.69	21.51	17		
<b>Total</b>	256.94		20		

Table 3 above revealed that there is no significant joint contributions of teachers' subject mastery and teachers' behaviour on learning outcomes in English language since  $(F(3,17) = .58; P > .05)$ .

### **Discussion of Findings**

It was revealed that in the study that teachers' subject mastery is significant and necessary to students' performance in English language. The study came in line with the submission of Adediwura and Bada (2007) who reported that subject mastery is significant to learning outcomes due to strong relationship between students' perception of teachers' knowledge of subject matter and students' academic performance.

Also it was revealed from the study that teachers' questioning behaviour does not matter in students' learning outcomes in English language. This submission is in contrast with the report of Cotton (2001) who stressed that teachers' questioning as a teaching strategy has consequent potential for influencing students' learning.

The difference was due to the category of schools that is; coeducational or single sex factors. However, the learners that fall in the hands of an opposite sex seem to see questioning a threat to their person.

### **Conclusion of Study**

It is worth of note that the quality control of the teachers which is reflected in the subject mastery goes a long way in determining the performance of learners in English language.

Finally, the regression analysis of the questioning behaviour of the teacher in teaching English language is not significant to the performance of learners in the subject.

### **Recommendations of the Study**

It is therefore recommended based on the findings of this study that:

- i. Teachers' professionalism should be taken seriously for efficiency at this level.
- ii. Teaching should not just be for a dick and harry but for the trained especially from a recognized institutions.
- iii. Quality control and monitoring team should be at work for teachers' developmental needs in subject mastery.
- iv. Training and retraining programmes that focused on teachers' efficiencies should be in place which should be initiated by the government.
- v. Self-reflection should be encouraged with incentives to foster an indepth teaching proficiency and enhance teachers' questioning behaviour.

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