



RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOCIO-CULTURAL CORRELATES OF STUDENT'S INTEREST IN ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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Abstract

English is the official language in Nigeria and a ubiquitous part of teaching and learning in the educational ecosystem. However, English as a second language in Nigeria has been fraught with many challenges. The purpose of this present study was to examine the sociocultural correlates of students' interest in ESL. Two hundred and thirty secondary school students (n=230) were conveniently selected from rural and urban schools in the Anambra States as the respondents. Data for the survey was collected using a self-report measure assessing interest in ESL. Linear regression analysis was conducted on the data, and the result showed that sociocultural context statistically significantly predicted interest in ESL. The study concludes that the sociocultural environment is a significant determinant of students' interest in ESL in Anambra State.

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Introduction:-

English is the official language in Nigeria (Mercy, 2019). It is a ubiquitous part of teaching and learning in the educational sector and beyond. The absence of a national uniting indigenous language has led to the English language's adoption as a medium of intra-national and inter-national communication (Fakeye & Ogunsiji, 2009). More importantly, English has become the spindle on which the educational wheel of Nigeria rotates. English functions as the language of education, instruction, evaluation, the media, government, politics, law, and legal documents in Nigeria (Adebileje & Akinola, 2020). English is the vehicle of interaction and an instrument of communication (Abubakar, 2018). The language is the standard of instruction for all school subjects from the daycare to the tertiary level and a compulsory school subject that must be passed at all levels of education in Nigeria. The teaching and learning of English are essential for Nigerian students (Mercy, 2019). It has also become the medium of social interaction in every sphere of our socio-world.

Effective communication is central and indispensable in the classroom teaching and learning process (Fashiku, 2017; Ismail & Idris, 2009). Classroom instructors are expected to communicate effectively and convey accurately for learning to occur. Hence, teachers' effectiveness is determined by communicating with the students (Brown, 2005). However, feedback from the learners through proper communication is essential in indicating learning and possible clarifications. Thus, English is critical in classroom communication because it describes the student's and teacher's interaction in the learning situation. Accordingly, a collapse in classroom communication negatively impacts teaching and learning outcomes. Indeed, teaching the English in the Nigerian classrooms has been fraught with challenges. Perhaps, achieving an effective classroom communication and accomplishing an efficient teaching-learning process (Cegarra & María, 2020) is threatened by students' interest in learning English as a second language.

English as a Second Language (ESL) describes the use of English by non-native speakers in an English-speaking condition. It denotes specialized approaches to language teaching designed for those whose primary language is not English. However, there has been an increasing concern about the students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language (Zulkefly & Razali, 2019). ESL in Nigeria's educational system aims to equip learners with multilingual ability critical in everyday activities. Also, learning ESL is implicated in reading and writing skills, including social adjustment and societal inclusion. Although children are exposed to English earlier in life, the fundamental objective of teaching and learning ESL at the early schooling in Nigeria is to equate verbal skills with reading and writing abilities.

Within the Nigerian educational landscape, English has been accorded priority as a second language (Afolayan, 2015; Ajibola, 2010; Ezekwesili & Chinedu, 2019; Fasanmi, 2011; Idogho, 2018; Mustapha, 2012; Nnyigide & Anyaegbu, 2020; Omidire & Adeyemo, 2015; Owolewa & Jimoh, 2018; Teilanyo, 2009), and have assumed the preferred language for communication. Consequently, researchers have underscored the high failure rate of students in the English examination across the country (Achike, 2016; Adejumo et al., 2014; Akunne & Anyamene, 2021; Faniran & Olatunji, 2011; Ojetunde, 2013; Olagbaju, 2021; Oyinloye & Gbenedio, 2010; Patrick et al., 2014; Sakiyo, 2015). Also, the inability of these students to communicate correctly using English has been emphasized (Emeka-Nwobia, 2016; Ghani et al., 2012; Okwudili & Opeyemi, 2019). Thus, suggesting a wide variation in students' interest in learning ESL in the Nigerian context.

Interest in ESL is operationalized as students' curiosity and eagerness to acquire ESL abilities, including effectively using English to communicate meaning in spoken and written contexts while adhering to the basic principles of grammar. Interest is a critical motivational variable that boosts learning, guides academic and career paths, and is essential in academic success (Harackiewicz et al., 2016). A student's interest has been widely conceived as a relatively long-lasting predisposition to commit to a specific learning situation. Improved knowledge, value, and positive affect have been connected with individual interest. Students bring to their academic experience a network of personal interests, some similar to and some incompatible with classroom learning. Researchers have sought to explore varying variables that influence interest in ESL. For instance, Students' and parental attitudes, teachers' didactic expertise, anxiety, mother tongue, and institutional failure have been implicated in the student's poor engagement in learning ESL (Ajibola, 2010; Emeka-Nwobia, 2016; Patrick et al., 2014). Perhaps, the linkage between the social and cultural variables and interest in ESL has not received much research attention in the Nigerian context. Hence, the need for this study.

The sociocultural context or milieu refers to the immediate physical and social setting where people live or develop. It includes the culture that the individual was educated or lived in and the people and institutions they interact with. To gain an in-depth and contextually situated understanding of students' interest in ESL, i.e., how social and cultural conditions are part of students' everyday lives. How they communicate with the mother tongue in their environments, this study draws on the sociocultural approach (Vygotsky, 1978). The socio-cultural perspective holds that learning is an interactional process in which social practices create a shared semiotic system for joint participation, modes of thinking, and learning (Kumpulainen & Renshaw, 2007). From this perspective, broader socio-cultural contexts shape and give direction to students' interest in learning foreign languages. Therefore, interest in learning ESL is culturally and socially embedded and informed by individual and collective values, beliefs, and attitudes. The present study also regards student's interest in ESL as situated and relational, framed by the possibilities for acting within a setting (Kumpulainen & Lipponen, 2009). From a sociocultural perspective, student's interactions within their immediate environment shape their experiences and interest in learning. Accordingly, sociocultural literature holds that diverse social contexts embrace different rules, purposes, directives and structures of people that mediate student's learning opportunities. The present study intends to investigate the role of the immediate social environment and cultural variability on student's interest in learning ESL.

Hypothesis:

Sociocultural context would predict student's interest in learning ESL

The sociocultural context in this paper entails rural and urban backgrounds. The assumption is that those who reside in rural settings are more likely to embrace their sociocultural heritages regularly reinforced by compelling homogeneity. Similarly, students within the urban ecosystem habitually interact in a nonuniform environment which compels improvement in English as a second language. Thus, the socio-cultural environment is argued to shape the increase or decrease in students' interest in ESL.

Method: -

The present study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Students in the post-primary education system in the Anambra State of Nigeria constituted the research population. A total of two hundred and thirty ($n = 230$) students within the age range of 12-18 years comprising male and female enrolled in senior science, and art classes were conveniently selected from rural and urban communities in the Anambra States.

Measures:-

Students' interest in ESL was measured with a scale developed by the researcher and designed to ascertain students' positive or negative beliefs, emotions, and responses towards learning ESL as a subject. The ten items Likert form scale contains three sub-dimensions. These sub-dimensions are: "conceptual knowledge of English language," "Feelings of likes or dislikes," and "behavioral contributions." The scale is graded in a four-point Likert-type response format ranging from 'very little' to 'very high.' The maximum score is 40, and the minimum score is 10. A higher score determines a higher interest in ESL. The instrument was validated following a pilot study .87 Cronbach's alpha was obtained. Notably, the sociocultural context was defined in the demographic section of the instrument.

Procedure:-

With research assistants, students from different public secondary schools within the urban centers and rural communities in Anambra State were recruited for the study. A total of 265 students were approached and asked to participate in the survey to understand their interest in the English language and how it affects them in the class. In total, 251 students out of the 265 approached agreed to participate in the study and were given a consent form. In particular, those who signed the consent form were handed the research questionnaire to fill at the spot. Indeed, the research assistants assisted where necessary. The two hundred and fifty-one (251) copies of the questionnaire administered were completed and retrieved on the spot. Nevertheless, only the satisfactorily filled questionnaires (i.e., 230) were used for the study. The study lasted between August and November 2021.

Result:-

Data from the cross-sectional survey was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS version 23). A simple regression model was employed to test the hypothesis. The result showed that the socio-cultural context (urban/rural) predicted the respondent's interest in ESL at $F(1,228), 213.71, P < .000$. The R^2 indicated that the sociocultural context explained about 23.2 of the variation in students' interest in ESL. Thus, the expectation that sociocultural context would predict interest in ESL was supported.

Table 1:- Table showing the result of the simple regression analysis conducted to examine sociocultural correlate of interest in ESL.

	B	SEB	β	R^2	t	Sig
Constant	1.85	.032			51.61	.000
Sociocultural context	-.74	.041	-.75	.232	-16.74	.000

Note. SEB = Standardized error of the coefficient; β = Standardized coefficient; R^2 = Coefficient of determination. * $P < .000$.

Discussion:-

The current study examined the student's interest in ESL based on sociocultural contexts. A convenient sample of two hundred and thirty secondary school students from urban and rural contexts responded to the research questionnaire. The simple regression analysis conducted on the data showed that the sociocultural environment statistically significantly predicted interest in ESL. The finding indicates that students' background relative to social and cultural exposures contributes to their interest in acquiring English as a second language. The result presupposes that most students from rural communities show little interest in ESL than those from urban centers. The probable explanation for this outcome may be the importance attached to social and cultural norms in many societies, especially in the Igbo-speaking societies in Nigeria. Indeed, dwelling in a social and cultural homogeneous context

as a younger person decreases motivation to acquire a foreign language. However, in a mixed context like in the urban centers, a balanced adjustment requires diversity in communication. Thus, the sociocultural environment can increase or decrease an individual's interest in ESL. Also, ESL teaching often exercises political and social pressure on the learners, and the acquisition usually occurs at the detriment of the first language and culture, creating an identity conflict (Granberg et al., 2017). Knowledge regarding the sociocultural correlate of students' interest in ESL is essential to furthering the current understanding of students' communication patterns, literacy learning, and well-being in contemporary society. The present study provides new insights into the interaction between the sociocultural environment and young children's interest in ESL learning opportunities, essential for research, practice, and policy.

Limitations, strengths, and future directions

Caution is advised in generalizing this study's finding due to the observed limitation it encountered that needed to be reported. For example, the study failed to determine causative factors in the relationship between sociocultural contexts and interest in ESL. Future research should utilize an experimental approach to examine cause-effect relationships. The data used for the study was exclusively based on self-report, which could raise the issue of common method variance. However, the current study contributes to the English literature by providing evidence supporting the predictive effect of sociocultural context in students' willingness to enhance their ESL. Also, the study helps provide relevant data to the education administrators and relevant stakeholders interested in promoting students' language acquisition. More so, research attempting to investigate the relationship between sociocultural environment and students' interest in ESL in Anambra State is scarce. Hence, justifying the present study. Future studies should consider the use of data from more inclusive sources and endeavor to utilize data triangulation.

Conclusion:-

The current study examined the contribution of the socio-cultural environment on students' interest in ESL. The data analyzed revealed that the sociocultural context contributed about 23.2% of the variance in students' interest in ESL in Anambra State. Thus, it is concluded that rural and urban contexts encompassing social and cultural trends determine students' eagerness to acquire ESL. Indeed, the result affirmed the study's expectation that the sociocultural context would predict interest in ESL.

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