

Teachers' Perception of the Use of Language Laboratories in English Language Teaching and Learning in Obio/Akpor LGA

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Abstract

The study appraised teachers' perception of the use of language laboratories in English language teaching and learning in Obio-Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. The design of the study was survey with a sample size of 168 English teachers from private and public schools. Four research questions and four hypotheses guided the study. Two instruments were used for the study: a checklist and a self-developed instrument titled, "Teachers' Perception of the Use of Language Laboratories (TPULL) questionnaire". A reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained for TPULL using Pearson product correlation. Frequency table, Mean and standard deviations were used to answer the research questions, while t-test was used to test the null hypotheses. The findings of the study revealed that language laboratories were rarely available in both private and public secondary schools. The findings established that language laboratories facilities were lacking in both private and public secondary schools. The findings indicated that English language teachers have low competence in using language laboratories. The findings also revealed that English teachers barely used language laboratory in their teaching. Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, it was recommended that Government and school administrators should ensure compulsory building of language laboratories at all levels of education. Government and school administrators should ensure adequate provision of language laboratory facilities needed for language teaching and learning in secondary schools, ensure that competent teachers are employed to teach English language in secondary schools and also carryout training and retraining of teachers in the effective utilization of language laboratory in teaching English language.

Keywords: *Teachers' Perception, Language Laboratory, English Language, Teaching and Learning*

Introduction

Language laboratory is an audio or audio-visual installation used as an aid in modern language teaching and learning especially for teaching and listening and speaking skills. They can be found, amongst other places, in schools, universities and academies. Perhaps the first laboratory was at the University of Grenoble in 1908. In the 1950s up until 1990s, they were tape-based systems using real-to-real or (latterly) cassette (Roby, 2004). This era is characterized as the primitive form of the language laboratory (the conventional laboratory) (Barson and Debski, 1996). The teacher plays the tape and the learners listen to it and learn the pronunciation. As it is used in a normal classroom setup, it is prone to distractions and this type of language patterns all the time through their headsets instead of mimicking other students who may be pronouncing incorrectly. Current installations are generally multimedia computers. The original language laboratories are now very outdated. They allow a teacher to listen to and manage student audio via a hard-wired analogue tape deck based systems with 'sound booths' in fixed locations (Wilson & Thayalan, 2013).

The language laboratory is an extremely helpful tool for language learning, improving language skills, and particularly practicing and evaluating students' speech in any language. It offers a facility which let the students to listen to a model native speech, repeat, record, listen to their performance and compare it with that model, plus do self assessment. Many modern language laboratories are flexible and do not necessarily require a teacher all the time so that they give the learners of any language a freedom to study at their own. The language laboratory also permits every member (student) his or her privacy to speak and listen. As we live in multilingual and multicultural world, language laboratory can greatly help students to learn language of their choice, as it will allow students to learn at their own pace. They can record and assess their performance to make sure that they are paying attention to all aspect of phonetics such as pronunciation, accents, etc. The language laboratories provide access to native-speaking via audio-visual aids so that they learn correctly (Dwyer, 2010).

Language laboratory provides equal opportunity to all the students to hear the instructor irrespective of place where they are seated (Singh, 2013). There will be less miscommunication because of direct nature of the sound transmission. It also provides the privacy that encourages the shy students to speak without any hesitation. In addition instructor can speak to individual or group of students in privacy without interrupting rest of class. Language laboratories motivate students to talk freely and lose the shyness when talking in front of their friends. Attention on subject is increased resulting in better retention of the concepts (Hmoud, 2014). Furthermore, Roby (2004), noted that it develops the listening and communication skills, since they hear correct pronunciation through their headphones. Learner will show more enthusiasm and excitement in learning lesson because of learning laboratory system. Teacher can look after each student, which is not possible in case of the regular classroom. In a laboratory instructor can communicate with many students by pressing a mouse key in order to talk with students. Efficient use of time and learning efficiency is much more than usual classroom learning (Singh, 2013). This set up fosters more interactive session between students and teacher. The language laboratory brings variety in teaching learning process instead of boring verbal centered teaching. The student's progress can also be monitored regularly so that teacher can provide feedback based on individual pace and ability. Finally, the students can learn the lesson at their own pace thus allowing the classroom as student-centered approach (Roby, 2004).

In the present language laboratory, the teacher is provided with an exclusive Digital Software System which offers efficient, result oriented and fool proof means to enrich the English spoken learning process (Stack, 2010). It enables teachers to run an impressive range of language learning exercises and activities, and support the students individually. It also empowers teachers simply walk-in and teach using any and all of their existing program materials (Cuban, 2001). Teachers are able to discreetly monitor student activities even when students are working with live video content. Teacher can also create her/his own study materials with the help of advanced tools (Beatty, 2003).

In the same way, Cuban (2001) noted that language laboratory enables the student to listen to model pronunciations or question; repeat/answer/record the same if required, listen to his own performance and compare the same with the model for self assessment which is the key to fast learning (Garret, 2003). It enables the learner to get effective guidance and individual attention from the teacher. It empowers students to work at their own pace and privacy. It helps students' cognize the language in a veritable context. It enables the student to master the language with ease and flow on his own (Randall, 2006).

Language laboratory (Harmer, 2001) can be used mainly for developing the skills of listening and speaking. Several activities can be given to the students as laboratory exercises.

The activities such as production of a sound, use of words and phrases, mastery of structural item, comprehension exercises meaningful drills and problem solving can be done more effectively at a language laboratory. The learners can listen to the taped material on pronunciation, stress, intonation and rhythm in speech or conversation.

Similarly, Frayer (2005) observed that language laboratory is a very helpful tool for practicing and assessing one's speech in any language. It provides a facility which allows the student to listen to model pronunciation, repeat and record the same, listen to their performance and compare with the model, and do self-assessment. Since the language laboratory gives every learner of any language freedom to learn at their own pace, it is flexible and does not necessarily require a teacher all the time. At the same time, it is possible for teachers to provide assistance individually and collectively. The language laboratory allows every participant his or her privacy to speak and listen (Barson and Debski, 1996).

Conversely, Nuboko (2004), argued that it is very expensive to set up language laboratory in schools due to the fact that it is capital intensive, as such language classes are usually conducted as theory. Morsel (2002) accentuate that the laboratory can engage maximum of 60 students hence space is also difficult for school. He also noted that these days student does not have enough patience to listen to pronunciation and practice them, so the recording of pronunciation is useless. As the teacher listens to students randomly the response can be unorganized and ineffective as there are many students to attend to.

Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann (2009) noted that language laboratory facilities are usually not available in schools due to poor educational funding. Also, Hamilton-Ekeke (2013) reiterated that unavailability of language facilities is as a result of weak government interest and lack of adequate capital. According to Nunan (2007) there are growing evidences that English language teachers do not exhibit behaviour which are complementary to achieving the stated objectives which are occasion by inadequacy or absence of well-equipped language laboratories; inadequacy of resources; quantity and quality of teachers.

Hamilton-Ekeke (2013) reiterated that the integration of modern language education is still being faced by the general apathy on the part of both learner and teachers. Thus, Hamilton-Ekeke opined that no adequate teaching can take place without effective and competent teachers to handle the programme. According to (Dina, 2001; Brenes, 2006) many English teachers neither use the language laboratory nor inspire students to use it due to ignorance and unavailability of facilities. This was supported by Beder (2008) who said that teachers are handicapped by their ignorance of how language laboratory may be put to effective educational use, since they have no experience of it during their own school days. Educause (2010) however, discovered that many English teachers are yet to upgrade or familiarize themselves with modern digital language laboratory.

Statement of the Problem

Language learning is quite different from learning any other subject. It is not limited to writing an examination paper and getting marks or award. The four skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing have to be put into practice since having the ability to communicate well is the central purpose in learning any language. Communication entails the student's capability to listen attentively to the exact meaning and to respond with appropriate words and with clear pronunciation. The use of the language laboratory has helped many students to practice good listening abilities plus speaking skills and has become a helpful learning device. Language laboratory is one of the teaching aids that put into application in the domain of language

teaching and learning; it has become the need of the day in any foreign language learning process which is due to its efficiency in enhancing learners listening and speaking skills.

Therefore, the language laboratory acts as the key role in the language learning process especially in improving one's listening skill. As it is a technological support for learning, it has many advanced services that can facilitate learning a language and improving students' listening abilities with a proficiency to communicate. The introduction of language laboratory into educational institutions gives a lot of support to (English) language teacher to make the students confident in acquiring an alien (English) language.

However, in Nigeria, irrespective of the great impact achievable with language laboratory, students have continued to register poor performance in English Language both in written aural and oral speech articulation. Also, the West Africa Examination Council Chief Examiner's Report (2009-2014), Sa'ad and Usman (2014) and Oribabor (2014), lend credence to this lack luster achievement in English language. The above claim has leaved many questions to be answered. Thus, one then pauses to ask, to what extent do English teachers make use of language laboratories in schools? The problem of the study is to examine teachers' perception of the use of language laboratories in enhancing students' performance English language?

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study is to appraise teachers' perception on the use of language laboratories in English language teaching and learning in JSS in Obia/Akpor L.G.A.

The specific objectives are to:

1. Find out English teachers' views about extent of availability of language laboratories in secondary schools.
2. Ascertain English teachers' opinion about the type of the language laboratory facilities available in secondary schools.
3. Ascertain English language teacher's opinion about their level of competency in using language laboratories facilities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. What is the English teachers' view about the extent of availability of language laboratories in secondary schools?
2. What is the English teachers' opinion about the types of language laboratory facilities available in the schools?
3. What is the English teachers' opinion about their level of competency in using language laboratory facilities?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance in this study:

- H₀₁:** There is no significant difference between the view of teachers in public and private schools in relation to the availability of language laboratories.
- H₀₂:** There is no significant difference between the opinion of teachers in public and private schools in relation to the types of the language laboratory facilities available.
- H₀₃:** There is no significant difference between the opinion of male and female teachers in relation to their level of competence in using language laboratories facilities.

Methodology

The design of the study was descriptive survey. It was used because it permitted the researcher to study small sample and later generalized the findings on the whole population. The population of the study consisted of 520 English language teachers in both registered private and public secondary schools in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State. A total of 60 teachers in 14 private schools and 108 teachers in 14 public schools totaling 168 teachers were selected using simple random technique. Data was collected through observational checklist. The instrument was validated and a reliability coefficient of 0.77 was obtained for the study using Pearson product moment correlation. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while the null hypotheses were tested with t-test at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1

What is the English teachers' view about the extent of availability of language laboratories in secondary schools?

Table 1: Observational Checklist showing teachers' opinion about language laboratories available in secondary schools in Obio/Akpor LGA

Private Secondary School							Public Secondary School						
S/N	Institution	Yes	%	No	%	Remark	S/N	Institution	Yes	%	No	%	Remark
1	School 1	0	0	46	100	NA	1	School 1	0	0	108	0	NA
2	School 2	0	0	46	100	NA	2	School 2	0	0	108	0	NA
3	School 3	0	0	46	100	NA	3	School 3	0	0	108	0	NA
4	School 4	0	0	46	100	NA	4	School 4	0	0	108	0	NA
5	School 5	0	0	46	100	NA	5	School 5	0	0	108	0	NA
6	School 6	0	0	46	100	NA	6	School 6	0	0	108	0	NA
7	School 7	0	0	46	100	NA	7	School 7	0	0	108	0	NA
8	School 8	0	0	46	100	NA	8	School 8	0	0	108	0	NA
9	School 9	0	0	46	100	NA	9	School 9	0	0	108	0	NA
10	School 10	0	0	46	100	NA	10	School 10	0	0	108	0	NA
11	School 11	0	0	46	100	NA	11	School 11	0	0	108	0	NA
12	School 24	5	10.87	41	97.21	A	12	School 12	0	0	108	0	NA
13	School 25	6	13.04	40	96.65	A	13	School 13	0	0	108	0	NA
14	School 18	4	8.70	42	97.77	A	14	School 14	0	0	108	0	NA

NB: NA = Not Available; A = Available

Table 1 shows that out of 28 public and private secondary schools sampled for the study in Obia/Akpor LGA, only 3 private schools had language laboratories. None was found in public schools.

Research Question 2

What is the English teachers' opinion about the types of language laboratory facilities available in the schools?

Table 2: Observational checklist showing teachers' opinion about the various types of facilities available in language laboratories in Obio/Akpor LGA

S/N	Private schools				Public schools		
	Description of items	Qty	%	Remark	Qty	%	Remark
1	Console control,	2	1.19	A	0	0	NA
2	IWBD	8	4.76	A	0	0	NA
3	Lingua phone	9	5.36	A	0	0	NA
4	Head microphone	300	178.6	A	0	0	NA
5	Students boots	41	24.0	A	0	0	NA
6	Tape-Recorder	8	4.76	A	0	0	NA
7	Computer software	20	11.9	A	0	0	NA
8	Audiotape	21	12.5	A	0	0	NA
9	Desktop	30	17.9	A	0	0	NA
10	Laptop	80	47.6	A	0	0	NA
11	CDROMs	25	14.9	A	0	0	NA
12	Projector	6	3.57	A	0	0	NA
13	Television	8	4.76	A	0	0	NA
14	Teaching software	10	5.95	A	0	0	NA
15	Functional generator	9	5.36	A	0	0	NA

NA = Not Available, A = Available (but not adequate for students' learning)

Table 2 shows that item 4 had moderate provision of head microphone of 178.6%, while items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 revealed that console control, IWBD, lingua phone, students boots, tape recorder, computer software, audiotape, desktop, laptop, CDROMs, projector, television, teaching software and functional generator were poorly available in private schools. However, none was established in public secondary schools.

Research Question 3

What is the English teachers' opinion about their level of competency in using language laboratory facilities?

Table 3: Observational checklist showing teachers' opinion about the level of teacher competence in language laboratories in Obio/Akpor LGA

S/N	Item	Private school			Public school		
		\bar{X}	SD	Remark	\bar{X}	SD	Remark
1	Console control	1.98	0.95	Low Extent	1.20	0.40	Low Extent
2	IWBD	2.04	1.01	Low Extent	1.05	0.21	Low Extent
3	Lingua phone	1.93	0.80	Low Extent	1.01	0.10	Low Extent
4	Head microphone	2.04	0.99	Low Extent	1.52	0.50	Low Extent
5	Students boots	2.02	0.93	Low Extent	1.46	0.50	Low Extent
6	Tape-Recorder	1.91	0.89	Low Extent	1.01	0.10	Low Extent
7	Computer software	1.59	0.61	Low Extent	1.24	0.43	Low Extent
8	Audiotape	1.09	0.28	Low Extent	1.01	0.10	Low Extent
9	Desktop	1.93	0.95	Low Extent	1.01	0.10	Low Extent
10	Laptop	1.83	0.90	Low Extent	1.52	0.50	Low Extent
11	CDROMs	1.78	0.87	Low Extent	1.01	0.10	Low Extent
12	Projector	2.02	0.93	Low Extent	1.21	0.41	Low Extent
13	Television	1.91	0.89	Low Extent	1.01	0.10	Low Extent
14	Teaching software	1.83	0.81	Low Extent	1.19	0.29	Low Extent
	Cluster Mean	1.85	0.84		1.18	0.27	

Table 3 indicated that the cluster mean of (1.85 & 1.18) and standard deviation (0.84 & 0.27) were below the cutoff point (2.50). Thus, all the items (1-14) assessed had mean scores between (1.01 and 2.04) and were rejected. This indicates that Language teachers have low proficiency level of language laboratories.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the view of teachers in public and private schools in relation to the availability of language laboratories.

Table 5: Summary of t-test analysis comparing teachers' opinion about the availability of language laboratories in both public and private schools

Schools	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Private	60	70.00	94.76	166	1.852	1.960	Not Significance
Public	108	14.00	16.97				

Table 5 shows the t-calculated (1.852) is less than the t-critical (1.960) at 0.05 alpha level. Hence, the null hypothesis was upheld, which states that there is no significant difference between public and private schools in relation to the availability of language laboratories. This implies that language laboratories are lacking in both private and public secondary schools.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the opinion of teachers in public and private schools in relation to the types of the language laboratory facilities available.

Table 6: Summary of t-test analysis comparing teachers' opinion about the types of the language laboratory facilities available to private and public secondary schools.

Schools	N	\bar{X}	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Private	60	19.80	11.821	166	1.259	1.960	Not Significance
Public	108	9.80	6.596				

Table 6 shows the t-calculated (1.259) is less than the t-critical (1.960) at 0.05 significant level. Hence the null hypothesis was upheld. This implies that both private and public secondary schools are lacking the needed language laboratory facilities for English teaching.

H₀₃: There is no significant difference between the opinion of male and female teachers in relation to their level of competence in using language laboratories facilities.

Table 7: Summary of t-test analysis comparing teachers' opinion about the level of competence possessed by private and public teachers in using language laboratories

Schools	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Male	37	1.97	0.291	166	1.708	1.960	Not Significance
Female	131	1.78	0.065				

Table 7 shows the t-calculated (1.708) less than the t-critical (1.960) at 0.05 alpha level. Hence, the null hypothesis was upheld.

Discussion of Findings

The finding of research question 1, Table 1, revealed that only three (3) out of 14 private secondary schools had language laboratory; while none was observed in twenty-three public secondary schools. Hypothesis 5 t-test analysis shows that language laboratories were rarely available in both private and public secondary schools. The findings concur with Nuboko (2004), who noted that it is very expensive to set up language laboratory in schools due to the fact that it is capital intensive, as such language classes are usually conducted theoretically. Moreover, Morely (2001) accentuate that the language laboratory can engage maximum of 60 students hence space is also difficult for schools.

The result of the findings is in research question 2 and hypothesis 5 shows that language laboratory facilities were rarely available in secondary schools. The finding is in line with Molka-Danielsen and Deutschmann (2009), who noted that language laboratory facilities are usually not available in schools due to poor educational funding. Also, Hamilton-Ekeke (2013), reiterated that unavailability of language facilities is as a result of weak government interest and lack of adequate capital. Nunan (2007) reported that there are growing evidences that English language teachers do not exhibit behaviour which are complementary to achieving the stated objectives which are occasioned by inadequacy or absence of well-equipped language laboratories; inadequacy of resources; quantity and quality of teachers.

The findings of research question 3 and hypothesis 3 indicated no significant difference between opinion of male and female teachers in relation to their level of competence in using language laboratories facilities. This finding is in compliance with Hamilton-Ekeke (2013) who pointed out that no adequate teaching can take place without effective and competent teachers to handle the programme. A similar finding was reported by Educause (2010), which indicated that many teachers are yet to upgrade or familiarize themselves with modern digital language laboratories. In view of the above, it can be inferred that the integration of modern language education is still being faced by the general indifference on the part of the teachers.

Conclusion

The study concludes that though language laboratories are designed to equip learners with aural comprehension and articulation of oral and written proficiency; on the contrary it was found that language laboratories were not available in secondary schools. The study established that language laboratories facilities were lacking in both private and public secondary schools. It was also found that English language teachers had low competent knowledge of language laboratories. The findings also revealed that English teachers barely uses language laboratory in their teaching.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and the conclusion arising from the study, the following recommendations are hereby made.

1. Government and school administrators should ensure compulsory building of language laboratories at all levels of education.
2. Government and school administrators should ensure adequate provision of language laboratory facilities needed for language teaching in secondary schools.
3. Government and school administrators should ensure that competent and adequate teachers are employed to teach English language in secondary schools.
4. Government and school administrators should ensure training and retraining of teachers to enhance effective utilization of language laboratory in teaching English language.

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