

## **General Problems of Sudanese Learners of English in The International University of Africa Compared to Nigerian Learners ( Emphasis on Communicative Ability )**

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Africa International University is the most gifted university in the Sudan. There are students from different African countries as well as Asians and few Europeans. English is taught as required and specialized courses.

The target of this paper is the study of the failure of Sudanese learners in communication compared to learners from Nigeria. This is because of the differences in communication ability, poor reading and writing standard. This lays a great burden on the teacher to accommodate the needs of these learners who start the course with different entry behaviors.

Sudanese learners of English unlike Nigerians learn English in their native country where the native language is Arabic. The only way to learn English is through formal instruction, i.e inside the classroom where the language teachers at school are native speakers of Arabic. There is little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction in the target language. There is only little or no possibility when students encounter native speakers of English. This I can say rarely or never happens.

In Nigeria, English is used in almost all the teaching in high school. This has two important results. In the first place, the quantity of classroom experience that each student receives is much greater outside the English lessons than within it. I can say that if the English lessons were removed entirely from the school in Nigeria, little or no effect would be noticed on the ability of the students in English.

Nigerian students get a lot of exposure even outside the classroom. English is considered a unifying factor not only in

Nigeria but in all West Africa. It is true that this English – Nigerian English – does not conform to Standard English. However, the students in Nigeria have more chances to communicate in English compared to Sudanese students.

To correct this problem – the Sudanese poor performance in communication – can easily be solved. I am, of the opinion that all university courses except Arabic language course should be taught in English which would certainly improve the university students' linguistic ability which would in turn improve their communicative ability.

The Sudanese learners transition from the school level to a more advanced level in the university is difficult. It can be safely generalized that the linguistic competence of the incoming students does not enable them to make sense of a literary piece, let alone appreciate it.

English is not used in daily situations. Arabic is the language used in everywhere. The situation is different in Nigeria. In Nigeria because of the multilingual nature of the people, English is used at large. It is thus more difficult for the Sudanese learners of English to communicate in the target language in real life situations.

In the Sudan there are general outcries of deterioration of the standard of English proficiency among teachers and even university instructors. They all commit serious lexical errors while communicating in English.

The goals set by the Ministry of Education in the Sudan are very ambitious. The English courses are supposed to gear students to be able to communicate effectively about a broad range of topics. The communication should be free of lexical, syntactical and phonological errors.

Unfortunately, these ambitions were not achieved.

The problem of the Sudanese learners of English in the International University of Africa is that students are accepted in the English department without taking into consideration their proficiency level and whether or not they will be able to manage.

The prepared placement tests are poorly designed with a lot of emphasis on grammar. Such tests are not valid and reliable.

I can surely say that they can not predict whether students will be able to communicate in English or not.

In Nigeria students start English from a very early age, grade 1 in the Sudan students start English from grade 5. For the success of the students according to Halliday (1984) the amount of time spent on learning a foreign language is very important. This means that Nigerian students spend more time learning English in comparison to Sudanese learners of English.

Harrison (1975) emphasizes the importance of the syllabus. The English syllabus has undergone a lot of changes. Syllabus writers should be well paid.

In Nigeria, English is given a lot of prominence. Is it a phase of acculturation?

The methods of language teaching and the learning environment is unsuitable for learning a foreign language in the Sudan. From my own experience in Nigeria (1975) conditions are better. Universal Primary Education (UPE) led to the creation of the modern schools to meet the needs of learners.

### **Sudan English department problem:**

English language graduates in Sudan where Arabic is the native language find it difficult in using English for communication. When engaged in authentic communication situations, they often lack some of the vocabulary or language items they need to get their meaning across. As a result they can not keep the interaction going for an extended period of time.

These graduates when they join the Ministry of Education as teachers of English will definitely have very little to offer. This is really a very serious problem. This is not an impressionistic point of view.

The weakness of English learners in general and English language graduates can be attributed to a number of factors.

- 1- Lack of knowledge on the part of school graduate when they join the university.
- 2- School and English language curricula.
- 3- Teaching methodology.
- 4- Lack of the target language environment.
- 5- The learner's motivation.

Because of this university students continue to make basic and frustrating errors in pronunciation, spelling, morphology and syntax. These learners can not express themselves comfortably and efficiently when dealing with academic topics or common every day topics.

My very short experience as a teacher of English in the Faculty of Medicine, International University of Africa showed a very big difference between the Nigerian learners and the Sudanese learners. In a communicative drill Sudanese learners find it very difficult to communicate whenever a presentation for a topic mainly- academic – is required. I can never forget a comment made by a Sudanese learner when he stated “These Nigerians have complicated us” He used the equivalent Arabic word for the English word complicated - عملونا عقدة - That student was astonished by the flexibility and proficiency on a topic whether academic or every day English by a Nigerian student .

I don't think that the failure and inability of the Sudanese learners are attributed to inhibition which is always present when one is learning a foreign language.

This means that the difficulty is related to the students deficiencies in communicative competence and self-expression. The study plans and methods of teaching can not be ignored.

The Dean of the Faculty of Health Sciences in the International University of Africa Dr. Tikaina has shown dissatisfaction with the performance of the students in English courses. This suggests a lack of fundamental standards in curriculum design, testing and oral communication skills and productive skills.

The Sudanese learners of English are an outcome of a curriculum which is mainly dominated by grammar. Other skills are given every little prominence. This shows a lack of balance in the curriculum. In fact, the curriculum assumes that the incoming students are proficient in the language and that they do not need any further language training. This indeed is an unrealistic assumption.

Furthermore, most of the bachelor degree courses are taught in Arabic in the Faculty of Arts and the Faculty of Education.

The remainder of the courses may not be enough to help these graduates communicate effectively and freely in the target language. They are thus likely to face some difficulties in their performance.

I don't support the idea that all courses except Arabic should be taught in English. The amount of time for English courses should be increased. This will help improve the student's linguistic ability which will, in turn improve, their communicate competence.

Other solutions can be offered so that the Sudanese learners can compete with the Nigerian learners. Inadequate mastery of the four skills – namely listening, speaking, reading and writing should be cured. English departments should offer solid language training. Sudanese students who attend university find it difficult to communicate in the target language. Mother tongue interference is not the only factor responsible but also more may be attributed to the teaching and learning process as a whole.

Sudanese learners of English need to use the language more successfully. That is why they should be involved in real-life situations. Unfortunately, English in the Sudan is used as an academic subject. Without practice English or any other language course cannot be acquired. English language graduates do not have enough practice in English; they only use Arabic most of the time even after becoming English language teachers. They only use English when they are obliged to use English as a

medium of communication. And to tell the truth this rarely happens. We may therefore come to the conclusion that most of those graduates' speaking time is in Arabic. According to Harrison (1983) practice is very important for mastering any language.

My teaching experience has shown me that most teachers resort to Arabic in explaining difficult vocabulary items . Vocabulary items are taught in isolation though the communicative language teaching approach stresses the importance of teaching vocabulary items in context. Listening materials are not used at a large scale in the classroom. The large number of the group makes the use of listening materials impossible. Real dialogues do not provide the learners with the necessary native speaker accent.

**Lack of the target language exposure:**

It is another reason behind the English major weakness in communication. Most of the student's speaking time is Arabic. In addition, all of the instructors are native speakers of Arabic. In the International University of Africa there is only one native speaker, Donald Pacific. I'm sure he can offer no help as he is-like all English language instructors - overburdened with a lot of teaching tasks.

Harrison (1975) in one of his articles states that exposure to the target language can familiarize and acquaint the learners with pronunciation, stress and intonation.

Motivation according to Seed house (1996) plays an important part in improving and developing the learner's communicative ability.

The Sudanese learners of English are instrumentally motivated to learn English. This means that the main stimulus for learning English is instrumental, i.e. to achieve a goal. Unfortunately, this has faded and even diminished among the Sudanese learners. The future –as they all tell- is dark and uncertain. The possibility of getting a job is very rare. I don't think that any of the Sudanese learners in the International

University of Africa is studying English because of integrative reasons. None of them is aspiring to become a member of the English speaking community. The case is completely different with the Nigerian learners of English. Many of them aspire to go abroad and even get married to an English lady.

This may not be true for the ( Hausa ) in Northern Nigeria . For (Uropa) and the ( Iboo) the case is different . I can surely defend this point of view as I have been in Nigeria for two years.

### **Conclusion:**

To conclude, Sudanese learners of English face many problems in all the language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The great number of erroneous errors they produce in oral performance and their recourse to communication strategies is an indication of how serious the problem is. It is also an indication that the objectives of the university have not been achieved. This situation requires a solution.

### **Recommendation :**

Hopefully, the recommendations will help in solving the problems of the Sudanese learners of English in the International University of Africa.

- 1- Before enrolling the students in the university courses, they should be given the chance for a whole month intensive English course.
- 2- The amount of time for the English courses should be increased.
- 3- Using technology and computer labs for more exposure.
- 4- Refresher courses for teachers outside the Sudan.
- 5- High school graduates are never to be accepted in the English courses without taking into consideration their proficiency level and whether or not they will be able to manage.
- 6- English language curricula should be reviewed and the help of native speakers should be sought.

**References:**

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