

**ASSESSMENT OF LECTURERS' INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES: TOOLS FOR ENHANCING  
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS' LANGUAGE SKILLS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study was carried out to find out how far lecturers' instructional strategies in the Use of English classrooms helped to enhance students' acquisition of language skills. The study adopted a survey design. The population consisted of all the 1001 students of four universities in Enugu metropolis and they number four thousand hundred and ninety (4490) and a sample of 224 respondents was used. The research questions that guided the study were answered using mean statistics ( $\bar{X}$ ). It was found out that the strategies used by lectures of Use of English were not enough to enhance the students' acquisition of English Language, judging that this is our official language. Recommendations were made based on findings.

## Assessment of Lecturers' Instructional Strategies: Tools for Enhancing Undergraduate Students' Language Skills.

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study was carried out to find out how far lecturers' instructional strategies in the Use of English classrooms helped to enhance students' acquisition of language skills. The study adopted a survey design. The population consisted of all the 100L students of four universities in Enugu metropolis and they number four thousand hundred and ninety (4490) and a 5% sample of 224 respondents was used. The research questions that guided the study were answered using mean statistics ( $\bar{X}$ ). It was found out that the strategies used by lectures of Use of English were not enough to enhance the students' acquisition of English language, judging that this is our official language. Recommendations were made based on findings.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that education is the instrument par excellence for effecting development and improving the world. Language is a powerful medium for transmitting knowledge across generations. Nigeria is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-lingual. So the introduction of English language in Nigeria is seen as a major blessing as it became a mediator between all the multi-lingual groups in Nigeria. The status of the language could be seen from the national policy of education [1] which made English both a second and official language. At present, English is the official language of communication, commerce, administration, science, politics, religion, technology, civilization and social interaction in Nigeria [2], [3]. In addition, English is the language of education. It is used for instruction in schools from primary four and above. The implication is that every learner in school needs a high level of proficiency in English language to be able to cope in school because most school work is carried on in English language. Both the teacher and the learners must be proficient users of the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing if teaching and learning should proceed well. All teaching/learning situations must involve oral activities, reading texts, excerpts or passages, written work as notes are being taken or developed, class work being done or quiz and examinations. And of course, without the listening skill intact, nothing will be achieved. All will be lost. The learner must be able to read in English to be able to interact with all kinds of school work, social and political materials, news and daily business transactions, in addition to other language and communication situations too numerous to itemize here.

The National University Commission (NUC) has stipulated in the minimum benchmark, the minimum level of English language requirements for undergraduates [4]. In it, there are courses mapped out to cover the four language skills. They include listening, speaking, reading and writing. This is to ensure that the undergraduate is able to cope with the copious work in the different courses of study, all expected to be done in English. Apart from

school and class work, it is equally important that undergraduates should be able to carry on with his social and business life, within local and international domains all within interacting in the language of the time. According to [5], English is used to teach and develop young people's competence, confidence and contact, which will enable them to secure their places and influences in an increasingly global society. It all adds up to the statement thus: 'For the philosophy to be in harmony with the national goals, education has to be geared towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific, and technical goals.' In Nigeria, English language is needed for all these to be achieved. This is why the Use of English course is made compulsory for all undergraduates passing through tertiary institutions. In order to achieve the above, the education system organizes learning experiences that will eventually lead to the desired objectives. Many subjects are involved in this process. English is one of the key subjects in the education system. Every learner in Nigeria must study English language as a subject and study other subjects in the educational curriculum through the medium of English. As cited in [6] calls English language 'the primus inter peres' of all subjects studied in the school system. For that reason, English is a subject that must be handled with a lot of care so that poor linguistic knowledge does not continue to become a hindrance to learners' success in other subjects. This implies that care must be taken to ensure that effective teaching of these key subjects is enforced so that students can acquire the key skills referred to by the World Bank report. [7] specifically mentioned 'oral and written communications' in English. In other words, the language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are essential skills that must be acquired by the students. Research has shown that enough attention is not paid to the teaching of the language skills. Burns as cited in [8] lamented the absence of listening skills on the time table as well as the unavailability of books and audio resource materials necessary for imparting the language skills. Listening is actually part of the oral skill without which one cannot communicate well. It is therefore expected that lecturers should adopt expert strategies that can promote listening. Students can only fully access and process information from lectures, announcements, media houses, conversations etc if they learn the listening skill. In the same way, the speaking skill when developed is very important for fluency in speech and in reading. While it is important that teachers must be good role models, they must create and maintain interactive classrooms so that students can practice speaking/writing because practice makes perfect. Language involves habit formation and for one to cultivate the habit, one must be given the opportunity to practice. The same goes for reading and writing. It is because students are not properly introduced to reading and writing and are not made to practice consistently that the society is today pining under the weight of poor readership. Invariably, poor reading habit adversely affects their ability to read and study other subjects [3]. This means that the teacher must be skilled in the art of pedagogy in addition to the knowledge of the subject matter. Pedagogy involves a whole lot of things including methods, strategies and techniques that can have effect on teaching and learning. Strategies and techniques have complimentary effect on the teacher's method. [9] sees teaching strategy as ways employed by a tutor to improve the effectiveness of learning. It may involve the use of methods such as lecture, discussion, role play, questioning, dramatization are all part of it. When properly blended, bring learning to the optimum and reach out to different types of learners. That is why [10] described teaching strategy as complex set of behavior used by a teacher to implement a method. No method can succeed in isolation. It must be a combination of many complex behaviours such as questioning skills, voice modulation, use of visual cues and verbal signposts [11]. The use of these instructional strategies may be affected by other extraneous circumstances such as teaching space, class size and availability of instructional aids and other intervening variables. This more so as lecture method has been severely criticized as not being very effective in promoting active learning. [3] observed that education is about

ideas not facts which lecture method projects. He postulates that students in higher education are not receiving the educational experiences that they need to develop critical and self directed higher education skills that are required for lifelong learning. He therefore suggested the need for modified lecture method. This can be done through the use of different instructional strategies and techniques that will enhance the achievement of the educational goals. Therefore the purpose of this study is to assess lecturers instructional strategies during the Use of English lectures as a tool for enhancing the students' acquisition of language skills.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

[7] lamented that Nigerian graduates are poorly rated as job seekers because they perform poorly in English language and in the technical skill. The report went further to report that unfortunately the reports from stakeholders, industrialists and business executives show that university graduates fall short of expectations in the field of work. Even a World Bank report scores Nigerian graduates low. According to [7], a World Bank report says that "Nigerian graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job... Graduate skills have steadily deteriorated over the past decade. The poor performance is particularly evident in two areas: poor mastery of the English Language and lack of requisite technical skill. These deficiencies make them unfit for the labour market and also for the larger society." It further stated that the shortcomings were particularly observed in oral and written communication and applied technical skills. Guardian Newspaper report of 19<sup>th</sup> February 2001 'World Bank report scores Nigerian Graduates low WB Nigerian University Graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job... Graduate skills have steadily deteriorated over the past decade. This poor performance is particularly evident in two areas: poor mastery of the English Language and lack of requisite technical skill. These deficiencies make them unfit for the labour market and also for the larger society. Shortcomings were particularly observed in oral and written communication and applied technical skill.

### 1.2 Research Questions

1. To what extent do the lecturers' instructional strategies in the Use of English classroom enhance students' acquisition of listening skills?
2. To what extent do the lecturers' instructional strategies in the Use of English classroom enhance students' acquisition of speaking skills?
3. To what extent do the lecturers' instructional strategies in the Use of English classroom enhance students' acquisition of reading skills?
4. To what extent do the lecturers' instructional strategies in the Use of English classroom enhance students' acquisition of writing skills?

## II. METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. It sought to find out the extent to which lecturers' instructional strategies helped students to acquire the English language skills, in the Use of English programme of universities. The area of study covered 4 universities in Enugu Metropolis. Two are public and two are private. The population

comprised of 4490 first year students of the Use of English programme. Through random sampling technique, a total of 224 (two hundred and twenty four) students was selected. A (26) item questionnaire structured by the researcher and content validated by two lecturers in the Faculty of Education, Measurement and Evaluation, were used. The instrument was a four point Likert scale of Very often (VO- 4points), Often (O-3points), Seldom(S- 2points) and Never (N-1point). The data was analyzed using Means. A mean score of 2.5 was accepted (A) while below it was rejected (R).

### III. RESULTS

**Research Question 1:** To what extent do lecturers' instructional strategies affect student's acquisition of the listening skill?

**Table 1: Showing how Lecturers' Instructional Strategies affect Students' Acquisition of the Listening Skill.**

S/N	Item	Very Often	Often	Seldom	Never	Total	X	DECISION
1	Lecturers adopt small class size	56	52	98	18	224	0.26	A
2	Lecturers dictate lecture notes.	116	68	31	9	224	3.29	A
3	Lecturers give dictation exercises	14	23	155	32	224	2.08	R
4	Lecturers use audio prompts during lectures	50	60	48	66	224	2.41	R
5	Lecturers move about to reach every student in the lecture hall	11	35	153	24	223	2.13	R
6	Students may fail because they didn't hear well?.	113	46	39	25	223	3.06	A
	Grand Mean						2.21	

From TABLE 1, it can be seen that some strategies like adopting small class size (Item A) or dictating lecture notes (Item B) are good for developing the listening skills judging by their high means of 0.2 3.29. Items 3 and 4, with means 2.08 and 2.41 respectively did not enhance students' acquisition of listening skills.

**Research Question 2:** To what extent do the lecturers' instructional strategies affect/enhance students' acquisition of speaking skills?

**Table 2: Showing how Lecturers' Instructional Strategies Enhance/ Affect Students' Acquisition of Speaking Skills.**

S/N	Item	VO	O	S	N	T	X	SD	Decision
7	Lecturers make lessons interactive	21	28	132	43	224	2.24		R
8	Lecturers dominate the class with talking.	104	89	14	16	223	3.26		A

9	Lecturers organize class presentation for students	22	43	138	20	223	2.22		R
10	Use visual prompts to make students talk	8	52	128	26	222	2.09		R
11	Allow students to role play or dialogue in class.	8	50	116	49	223	2.04		R
12	Allow students to do speech presentation in class.	39	70	80	34	223	2.29		R
13	Lecturers encourage students to ask and answer questions	86	112	17	9	224	3.27		A
14	Students are encouraged to engage in debates	22	28	115	58	223	2.16		R
	Grand Mean						2.48		

Items 8 and 13 have the highest means of 3.26 and 3.27 respectively but item 8 is rejected while item 13 is accepted. Items 10, 11 and 14, have the lowest means of 2.09, 2.04, 2.16 respectively which shows that the strategies are not effective in enhancing students acquisition of speaking skills.

**Research Question 3:** To what extent do lecturers' instructional strategies enhance students' acquisition of reading skills?

**Table 3: Showing how Lecturers' Instructional Strategies affect Students' Acquisition of Reading Skills.**

S/N	Item	Very Often	Often	Seldom	Never	Total	X	Decision
15	Lecturers give students course outlines/contents to read up ahead of time	73	97	26	26	222	2.90	A
16	Lecturers give students reference texts to read up	81	106	24	13	223	3.15	A
17	Lecturers give many students opportunity to read in class	7	62	123	30	223	2.14	R
18	Lecturers give students opportunity to skim/scan materials in class	5	59	118	42	224	2.12	R
19	Students are made to read and summarize texts	22	49	99	53	224	2.16	R
20	Students are required to read & interpret graphs, charts & pictures	20	60	116	28	224	2.32	R
21	Students are given time to read for tests & exams	87	84	23	30	224	3.22	A
	Grand Mean						2.54	

From TABLE 3, only items 14, 15 and 21 have accepted means of 2.90, 3.15 and 3.22 respectively showing that the strategies can enhance the learning of reading skills. Other items 17, 18, and 19 have low means of 2.12, 2.16 and 2.14 respectively showing the strategies were not helpful in making students learn the reading skill.

**Research Question 4:** To what extent do lecturers' instructional strategies affect students' acquisition of writing skills?

**Table 4: Showing how Lecturers' Instructional Strategies affect Students' Acquisition of Writing Skills.**

S/N	Item	Very Often	Often	Seldom	Never	Total	X	SD	Decision
22	Lecturers teach students to take down notes accurately	44	53	99	27	223	2.50		R
23	Students are encouraged to take down notes from reference materials as assignment	48	45	99	32	224	2.48		R
24	Students are encouraged to write letters & essays	30	112	54	28	224	2.64		A
25	Students are exposed to memo/official writing	34	60	99	31	224	2.43		
26	Students are given opportunity to write answer exam/test questions	168	49	7	-	224	3.06		A
	Grand Mean						2.62		

From TABLE 4, it could be seen that lecturer's strategies influence students' acquisition of writing skill. With the grand mean as 2.62, lecturers strategies are capable of influencing students acquisition of writing skills.

#### IV. DISCUSSION

TABLE 1 shows that 4 out of 6 items were rejected showing that many strategies adopted by lecturers are not very effective in helping students acquire the listening skill. No one appears to pay particular attention to the development of the listening skill despite the fact that the listening skill is very key to the effective use of other language skills. The absence of the listening skill on the school timetable and the non-availability of adequate resources for the teaching of the listening skills. In the absence of enough audio prompts to enhance hearing lecturers should adopt small class size to bridge the gap between lecturers and students during lectures. But the scenario is that the use of English classes are full and overflowing, with many students hanging by the windows. Many students miss out on so many important aspects of the lesson just because they didn't hear well having not been taught the listening skill. A foreign or second language like English sometimes involves sound discrimination and only a proper listening skill will enable students to carry out such tasks. For the speaking skill, the strategies are equally deficient. According to the result in table 2, out of the eight possible strategies considered, only two were

accepted by the respondents as enhancing the speaking skill. Lecturers did not make the class interactive  $X=2.24$ , lecturers dominated the class  $X=3.26$ , students were given enough time to engage in class presentation  $X= 2.22$  or student given enough visual prompt to stimulate speaking 2.09. All these are not encouraging. Speaking is a productive skill and can only be improved by practice. Good speaking skill is the first sign of good scholarship by students or graduates. Lecturers of the Use of English must apply effective strategies to enhance the development of the speaking skill. The speaking skill is vital in making students build self confidence. In addition, the students must be made to develop the reading skill to be able to go through their academic work successfully. The reading skill is equally vital for life-long education. The same goes with writing skill. Enough is not done in terms of strategies to help students develop good writing skills. The result is that we now have a generation of youths who are good in colloquial English but very poor when it comes to writing.

## V. CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that students performance in English leaves a lot to be desired. The lecturers certainly need to step up their strategies to effectively enhance the acquisition of the four major language skills. This will go a long way in helping our students prepare for life out of school.

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