

# **Investigating Factors Affecting the Use of Spoken and Written English in Schools**

Samuel Tamba

Faculty of Education and Community Development Studies

Eastern Polytechnic

Kenema, Sierra Leone, West Africa

tamba.samuel@yahoo.com

## **Abstract**

This paper is from a research work and it investigated factors affecting the effective use of oral and written English in senior secondary schools. The study revealed that some teachers who teach oral English are not committed teachers even though they have the requisite qualifications in English Language. The study further revealed that a large percentage of teachers of English Language teach the subject only few weeks before WASSCE using the wrong methodology. Also, the appropriate materials such as textbooks are not easily available or accessible: workshops and tutorials are not usually conducted for teachers; teachers are not motivated and thus pupils lack interest in the subject.

Keywords: Committed, Motivated, Accessible, Interest.

## **Introduction**

English Language is one of the subjects in the schools' curriculum, and it plays an important role in the learning processes in terms of learners' proficiency in the four English

Language skills that is listening, speaking, reading and writing English Language is listening, speaking, reading and writing the language of instruction in schools and colleges. It is learned in schools and colleges, and it is the official language that learners use to communicate effectively and efficiently. English Language is a compulsory subject as it has an important role as an official language in Sierra Leone. Apparently, reading and writing greatly depend on listening and speaking skills – it enables the learners to read and write what is understood and spoken. English is acquired after the first language. <http://www.google.com> claim that the process of learning a second language (L2) takes place in the classroom.

Speaking a language is the oral productive skill involving the pronunciation of words, <http://www.google.com> Speaking situations also involve interactive sessions such as discussions and dialogue; partially interactive sessions may include lectures while non-interactive sessions may be sermons and speeches. Interactive speaking is the face-to-face conversation and telephone call; partially in situations involving speeches.

The West African Senior Secondary School Examination (WASSCE) expects candidates to take oral English tests which form part of the English Language Paper for the English Language Examination. Generally, the performance of students in English Language is appalling. That is why this study was undertaken to investigate factors responsible for that poor performance. Hedge (1988) states that the use of available texts to teaching reading and writing is constrained, suggesting a need for research work, but Crystal, D (1996) states that a second language learner has the tendency to transfer wholesome work or sentences from his native language (L1) to English Language (L2). If this transfer of language takes place, it affects the spoken and written ability of learners. The two languages, L1 and L2 might vary in Phonology (sound) and morphology (word structure). This is why the L1 learner usually finds it difficult to effectively and efficiently speak and write the L2, English Language. Crystal, D (1996) mentions that there are problems in learning about spoken and written language when he states about curriculum. “The writer is a lonely figure cut from the stimulus and correct of

listener ... a predictor of reactions and acts on his predictions... writes with one hand tied behind his back, being robbed of gesture ... condemned to monologue". This implies that writers do not totally have the expressive ability at their disposal: stage fright, phobia and lack of confidence might militate against public speeches despite one's linguistic competence.

Potter (1975) highlights that students have trouble in writing because they are word bound. Students whose weak vocabulary causes them to be nervous might not write or speak effectively and efficiently as they easily get stuck and make mistakes. Such word – bound students should be given enough time to do more exercises in speaking and writing.

Corner and Caplan (1987) state that writers in second language (L2) are not familiar with new rhetorical structures and the organization of ideas. The teaching of consonants, vowels, diagraphs, diphthongs, monothongs and tenses through practice may enhance writing and speaking ability with a lot of practice.

<http://www.google.com> state that even though learners might have insufficient knowledge of correct usage; they often experience natural language interference as a result of fossilization that is when the learner's interference of language competence diverges from the target language grammar. But Oldin (1994:13) reveals that fossilized errors become ingrained, like bad habits in the learner's brain, and they reappear despite any corrections, for example, "hatredness" instead of "hatred".

<http://www.google.com> mention on the negative attitude of students in the learning of English Language, and that change is filled with resentment, reluctance, frustration and anger. There is need for more qualified and competent teachers to promote the teaching of English Language. Nonetheless

They also warn that basic skills in writing and speaking must be taught including spelling and pronunciation.

## **Statement of Problem**

The goal of many learners is the ability to speak and write fluent English. Successful communication in speaking and writing require constant practice. Many pupils perceive speaking and writing in English as a difficult matter and that is why the speaking and writing ability of students in English Language is poor due to lack of commitment to the reading books.

## **Research Questions**

How would you agree or disagree that the inadequacies in teaching and learning of English Language affect the performance of students including:

1. What aspects of English Language do you like most?
2. What problems do you encounter in the teaching/learning of English Language in school?
3. Does your teacher give additional lessons on English Language?
4. Do you have relevant texts, prescribed by Government?
5. Is there a school library in your school?

## **The Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The main aim of the study was to investigate factors affecting the use of spoken and written English. The objectives included to:

- Identify the factors affecting the effective and efficient use of spoken and written English
- Investigate the causes of ineffective use of spoken and written English

## **Significance of the Study**

The study was relevant as it provided relevant information on factors affecting the spoken and the written English.

## Methodology

### Population:

The population of the study included all the pupils from Government Secondary School, Holy Trinity Secondary School, Islamic Secondary School and Ahmadiyya Secondary School, all in Kenema City.

### Sample Size:

The sample size forty (40) pupils and twenty (20) teachers was randomly selected from the targeted population.

### Instrumentation:

Well – structured questionnaires were prepared and distributed among forty (40) pupils and twenty (20) teachers. The questions considered profile, background of school, teachers interest, background information, pupils’ interest in spoken and written English and difficulties faced by pupils in learning English Language. Interviews and informal discussions were done to collect information on the activities of pupils and teachers in the schools.

### Method of Data Collection

The data were collected through a formal questionnaire method and informal interview. The results were selected, tabulated and expressed in simple percentages.

TABLE 1: Methods/Approaches in Teaching Oral and Written English

NO.	METHODOLOGY	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS AND PERCENTAGES (%)							
		TEACHERS (40)				PUPILS (20)			
		YES	%	NO	%	YES	%	NO	%
1.	Pupils do Oral English without being taught.	0	0	20	100	15	87	5	25

2.	Pupils speak and write sentences and do corrections	0	0	20	100	5	25	15	75
3.	Pupils are given notes to copy without any assignments, discussions or explanations	0	0	20	100	0	0	0	0
4.	Only some guides are given to pupils without any exercises	0	0	20	100	40	100	0	0
	TOTAL	0	0	20	100	40	100	20	100

## Discussion

Forty pupils and twenty teachers responded to questions on method used in the teaching and learning of Oral and written English. 100% teachers teach reported that they space and write sentences without being corrected. Although teachers explain and give notes, teachers themselves choose what method to use to teach pupils. However, the report shows that over eighty percent (80%) of pupils do oral English without being taught well.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Table II: Background of Schools

No.	Name of School	Level	Sex	Status
1.	Government Secondary School, Kenema	Senior Secondary School	Single sex boys	Government School
2.	Holy Trinity Secondary School, Kenema	Senior Secondary School	Single sex Boys	Catholic Mission School

3.	Islamic Secondary School, Kenema	Senior Secondary School	Mixed School (Boys and Girls)	Islamic Mission
4.	Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Kenema	Senior Secondary School	Mixed School (Boys and Girls)	Ahmadiyya Mission

## DISCUSSION

There are two single sex boys schools, namely the Government Secondary School and the Holy Trinity Secondary School, where as the Islamic Secondary School and the Ahmadiyya Secondary School are mixed schools consisting of boys and girls.

Table III: Qualification of English Language Teachers

N O.	SCHOOL	MALE	FEMALE	M. A.	M.A . Ed.	B.Ed .	B.A . Ed.	B.A .	HTC
1.	Government Secondary School , Kenema	5	0	0	0	3	1	1	0
2.	Holy Trinity Secondary School, Kenema	5	0	0	0	3	1	1	0
3.	Islamic Secondary School, Kenema	5	0	0	0	4	1	0	0
4.	Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Kenema	5	0	0	1	4	0	0	0
	Total	20	0	0	1	14	3	2	0
	Percentage (%)	100	0	0	5	70	15	10	0

## Discussion

There are five (5) English Language teachers in each school, giving a total of twenty (20). The qualification of teachers varies from school to school, but in general, 70% have Bachelor of Education, 15% Bachelor of Arts in Education, and 10% Bachelor of Arts.

Only one teacher has a higher qualification, Master of Arts in Education at the Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Kenema.

Table 4: The aspect of English Language Teachers like most

No.	Aspect of English Language	Number of Respondents	Responses			
			Yes	%	No	%
1.	Grammar	20	15	75	5	25
2.	Comprehension	20	10	50	10	50
3.	Continuous Writing	20	5	25	15	75
4.	Oral English	20	0	0	0	0
5.	All	20	5	25	15	75

## Discussion

Twenty teachers responded to the question about which aspect of English Language they like teaching most. 75% like teaching grammar, while 50% the same percentage like/does not like reading and comprehension in consonance with summary and only 25% like continuous writing in letter writing and essay writing.

Table 5: Pupils Interest in Oral English and written English

No.	School	Number of Respondents	Responses			
			Yes	%	No	%
1.	Government Secondary School Kenema	10	5	50	5	50
2.	Holy Trinity Secondary School, Kenema	10	7	70	3	30



3.	Islamic Secondary School, Kenema	10	2	20	8	80
4.	Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Kenema	10	5	50	5	50
	Total	40	19	47.5	21	52.5

## Discussion

Forty (40) pupils were interviewed on their interest in Oral English and Written English. Generally, 47.5% were interested in Oral and Written aspect of English Language, where as 52.5% were not interested in Oral and written English. There was an overwhelming response at Holy Trinity Secondary School, Kenema compared to the other schools.

**Table 6:** Inadequate time to teach English Language

No.	School	Number of Respondents	Responses			
			Yes	%	No	%
1.	Government Secondary School Kenema	5	5	100	0	0
2.	Holy Trinity Secondary School, Kenema	5	0	0	5	100
3.	Islamic Secondary School, Kenema	5	3	60	2	40
4.	Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Kenema	5	0	0	5	100
	Total	20	8	40	12	60

## Discussion

From the target of 20 teachers, 100% at the Government Secondary School Kenema reported about the inadequate time to teach English Language, followed by 60% at the Islamic Secondary School, Kenema.

Table 7: Availability of relevant texts on English Language for Teachers

No.	School	Number of Respondents	Responses			
			Yes	%	No	%
1.	Government Secondary School Kenema	5	1	20	4	80
2.	Holy Trinity Secondary School, Kenema	5	2	40	3	60
3.	Islamic Secondary School, Kenema	5	0	0	5	100
4.	Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Kenema	5	4	80	1	20
	Total	20	7	35	13	65

## Discussion

Twenty teachers responded to questionnaires on the availability of relevant texts for teaching English Language. Only 35% teachers altogether agreed, but the highest number 4 (80%) at the Ahmadiyya Secondary School, said that learning materials are not quite available in school for teaching English Language.

Table 8: Availability of a School Library

No.	School	Number of Respondents	Responses			
			Yes	%	No	%
1.	Government Secondary School, Kenema	10	7	70	3	30
2.	Holy Trinity Secondary School, Kenema	10	0	0	10	100
3.	Islamic Secondary School, Kenema	10	6	60	4	40
4.	Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Kenema	10	4	40	6	60
	Total	40	17	42	23	58

## Discussion

Out of 40 teachers, 7 (70%) responded that there is a Library facility at the Government Secondary School, Kenema; 6 (60%) at the Islamic Secondary School, 4 (40%) at Ahmadiyya Secondary School, but 10 (100%) teachers responded that they do not have a Library facility at the Holy Trinity Secondary School.

Table 9: Provision of practice exercises on Oral English

No.	School	Number of Respondents	Responses			
			Yes	%	No	%
1.	Government Secondary School, Kenema	5	2	40	3	60
2.	Holy Trinity Secondary School, Kenema	5	1	20	4	80
3.	Islamic Secondary School, Kenema	5	0	0	5	100
4.	Ahmadiyya Secondary School, Kenema	5	3	60	2	40
	Total	5	6	60	40	100

## Discussion

Whereas no practice in Oral English takes place at the Islamic Secondary School, the responses of teachers at the other schools were fairly in support of Oral English Practices: 3 (60%) at Ahmadiyya, 2 (40%) at Government Secondary School with 1 only (20%) at the Holy Trinity Secondary School, Kenema.

## Conclusion

Being the most outstanding schools in the City, there are qualified teachers in all the schools. Although the schools adhere to the government's present day policy of quality education, the study revealed that there are challenges in the schools in the teaching and learning of Oral and Written English in the following ways:

This is because the time allocated to teach English Language is inadequate, the teachers find it difficult to apportion time differently to teach various aspects of English Language including Comprehension and Summary, Oral English, Essay and Letter Writing. In addition, the teachers are interested in teaching other aspects of English Language than Oral English. At the same time, there are inadequate teaching and learning materials for teachers coupled with an absence of appropriate methodologies. Thus these problems of unavailability and accessibility of prescribed textbooks by pupils and teachers including other relevant instructional materials continue to hinder performance in English Language.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were suggested to resolve the problems affecting the effective use of spoken and written English Language in school.

- The schools' time table should include the teaching of Oral English to improve on the pupils' spoken English.
- Secondly, schools should be assisted by the government in collaboration with Non – Governmental Organizations in constructing functional school libraries well – stocked with prescribed textbooks.
- Pupils' should be given the opportunity to do additional activities on Oral English
- Pupils should also be highly encouraged to be interested in speaking and writing in class.
- Appropriate methods of teaching English Language should be emphasized in schools
- The habit of listening to the British Broadcasting Co-operation (BBC), the Voice of America (VOA), reading newspapers, reading magazines, and the use of dictionary for understanding the meaning of words should be emphasized.

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