



Industrial action by teachers: Impact on secondary school students' performances in English language

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Abstract

Teaching is a noble job. This is because the product of teaching is human growth and development. All classes of professionals pass through the tutelage of teachers. It is often said that a literate society is made possible by the teacher. Thus the absence of a teacher in the society will cause havoc much more than the havoc caused the ravage of the highly revered Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS). When teachers embark on an industrial action, juvenile crimes increase because parents engage their children in hawking to augment their sources of livelihood. During that period pupils/students abandon their academic pursuit. Many, especially in the rural areas, do not see academic pursuit as a worthwhile engagement as virtually all communicative interactions take place in either Pidgin English or vernacular. This paper explores the impact of industrial actions by teachers on the academic performance of students in English Language, and recommends measures to avert such actions so as to enable learners cope with such situations.

Keywords: teachers, industrial action, impact, academic performance

Introduction

The school is a formal institution recognized by the society for the purpose of teaching and learning. The learning process in the school is conducted in a very formal manner. As society gets more complex, the home which has the parents as teachers, can no longer cope with the learning demands of the children. The arduous task is passed on to the school; the school thus receives the children and brings them up in their attitude, norms and values acceptable by the society.

Well-educated societies have lower rates of violence and crime, and societies that emphasize accessible and effective system of education see their economies improve as well. As the world moves towards automation and demands more high-knowledge by workers, education will be at the forefront of ensuring that the workforce is ready and able to tackle challenges that arise. The knowledge learned in school plays a major role in peoples' daily lives. Knowledge about history improves cultural understanding, and basic mathematics skills help people keep their finances in order. English Language courses expose learners to how to read, comprehend and analyse written materials. This is crucial for nearly all modern jobs.

The school is also important for developing social skills. Communication skills are important for succeeding in a wide range of fields, and spending time with others improves students' social skills. Humans are social animals, and schools provide a means of ensuring that young people have a stimulating environment that will lead to more empathy, understanding and social growth.

It is worthy to note that a healthy relationship among the stakeholders in education (e.g. government, teachers and students) facilitates the learning process. Asaolu (2010) ^[2] opines that students perform better in school when the stakeholders adequately perform their roles. This means that students' performance in English Language can be hindered when there is a conflict among the stakeholders especially when one fails to perform its required responsibilities and

disrespects others' rights. Good human relation is important for teachers' and students' wellbeing as well as their performance generally. However, conflict in the school setting disrupts academic programme and adversely affects overall performance.

Industrial actions in recent time have become frequent occurrences in our educational sector. Inyang and Akpan (2006) ^[9] give the reason to be the inability of an employer (government) to reach a compromise with the employees. In educational sector the government is the employer of the teachers in public schools. It owes teachers the responsibility of making them comfortable to discharge their duties effectively. Unfortunately, government in some cases renege on its promises hence, the industrial actions in schools.

The industrial action embarked upon by the teachers for whatever reason affects the school members (teachers and students) differently. On the whole students are adversely affected in English Language because of their wide syllabus which they do not cover even when the school re-opens. The teachers hurriedly teach the remaining topics in the scheme of work before examination.

English Language as a course holds the key to further academic progress in Nigeria. To have the opportunity to study any course in the University, Polytechnic or College of Education, a candidate must have obtained a credit pass in English Language in the West African School Certificate Examination or its equivalents. There is therefore an urgent need to improve the level of performance in our schools by students. This fact is further made obvious because all candidates must present themselves for an examination in the language.

It is also important to consider the significance of English Language in Nigeria. English is the medium of instruction at all levels of education. But there is lack of seriousness on the part of most students with regard to the learning of English. This situation, coupled with poor methods of teaching by some English Language teachers, result in poor performance

by learners. Furthermore, the government fails most of the time to provide enough funds for teaching and learning facilities in schools, thereby forcing the teachers to embark on industrial actions. All these seriously affect the teaching and learning of English Language and contribute in no small measure to the poor performance of students in English Language.

Industrial action also creates poor teachers'-students' relationship. Iheanacho (2002) ^[8] opines that students learn effectively when their attention is not distracted. But industrial actions create distraction and disrupt the normal learning process. It is therefore not surprising during industrial actions that most students engage in activities outside school work such as watching movies, visiting friends, gambling, attending night parties etc. Olukunle (2011) ^[16] stresses that disruption in academic work does give students undeserved extension in their study years.

Students' performance in English Language is enhanced when there is stability in the school calendar. Kazeem and Ige (2010) ^[12] believe that students at most times are denied opportunity to make up for lost time even after the industrial actions. This denial causes problem to the students hence their achievement is negatively affected. This may result in students using short-cuts (examination malpractices) to pass examination. On the whole, industrial actions in educational sector do not create conducive environments in secondary schools to enhance performance in English Language.

The education sub-sector, especially secondary schools in Nigeria, has witnessed incessant closures due to teachers' industrial actions by Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT). The effect of these repeated closures of schools on students' performance in English Language can better be imagined in the constant failure of students in English Language during internal as well as external examinations. Secondary school education in Nigeria has thus suffered tremendous setback in school work as a consequence of teachers' industrial action. Consequently, educational standards in secondary schools are now questionable. This is because students' performance in English Language has comparatively become low. It is against this backdrop that a paper of this nature becomes imperative with a view to arresting the effect of teachers' industrial actions which affect students' performance in English Language.

Disruption in academic programme and students' performance in English Language

Disruption occurs when academic activities are substantially interrupted or impeded as a result of industrial action. According to Kazeem and Ige (2010) ^[12], disruption in academic programme resulting from teachers' industrial action leads to closure of schools for a definite or indefinite period of time. The authors explain that at such a period, no academic activity takes place in schools and on resumption, students in most times are denied opportunity to make up for lost time. This results in low level of students' performance in English Language because during this period many students make use of the mother tongue or Pidgin English in their daily conversations.

Olukunle (2011) ^[16] in his assessment asserts that disruption in academic programme as caused by teachers' industrial action gives students undeserved extension of year of study. Isangedighi (2011) ^[10] and Iheanacho (2002) ^[8] agree that students' performances in all subjects is enhanced when they are emotionally and psychologically stable. But when

disruption in learning occurs due to teachers' industrial action, students become emotionally and psychologically unstable especially on the perception that it will cause them to stay at school beyond the expected time.

Disruption in academic programme serves as a non-motivational factor to the students. It is not surprising that during teachers' industrial action most students get involved in diverse activities such as sexual immorality, cyber crime, pool betting, unnecessary gossips, watching of films and reading comic materials for entertainment purposes rather than learning. Motivation is essential in the teaching-learning process. It is regarded as a super highway to learning. But this is usually suppressed by disruption in academic programme as a result teachers' industrial action.

The quality and quantity of students' learning is determined by individual study habit. Disruption in academic programme from teachers' industrial action results in faulty study habit among the students. When there is strike, students are not organized in their study, do not interact effectively with their fellow students, do not consult regularly with teachers, and do not read, thus, their performance is not enhanced.

Every individual learns through sense excitement and responses (Isangedighi, 2011) ^[10]. The author believes that the way a stimulus excites or impacts on his senses will trigger his response. Linking the stimulus to the disruption from teachers' industrial action and the students' ability to learn English Language as the response, the learning ability of the students is bound to be negative as the result of interruption in learning. This is because students lose their preparedness and readiness to learn during teachers' industrial action, hence their poor performance in English Language.

Odubela (2012) ^[14] concludes that students perform better in a subject when the subject syllabus is covered timely before the examination. This is rarely achieved when teachers' industrial actions are experienced in schools. English Language teachers are the major implementers of the English Language curriculum. When they are on industrial action, students who are at the receiving end would not certainly achieve their learning purpose in English Language. Disruption in academic programme as caused by teachers' industrial action breeds disappointment, frustration, emotional and psychological trauma on learners, thus poor performance.

Students' attitude to learning and performance in English Language

One of the determinants of students' performance in English Language is their attitude towards learning the subject. Some students, particularly in secondary school, show negative attitude toward learning the subject because they consider it foreign. Mohammed (2002) ^[13] states that many students put up negative attitude to learning and use of English Language thus making the teachers' task a difficult one. It is obvious that for any student to be proficient in English Language, mastering the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are necessary. According to Anoma (2005) ^[1] secondary school students have problems in the learning of English Language as revealed in their performance in the subject in public examinations. Fakeye and Ogunsiji (2009) ^[4] state that the poor performance of students in English Language at public examinations in recent times has been explained as a major cause of decline in academic achievement and standard of education.

According to Fakeye (2010) ^[3] students' attitude to the language is a personal variable that affects their performance in English Language. Therefore, developing favourable attitude as a means of enhancing performance in English Language is of utmost importance. The attitude of the learner towards learning the language matters a lot, if the learner is to gain mastery of the subject for a better performance. Attitudes are positive or negative feelings an individual holds about objects or ideas. The achievement of any learner will, to a great extent, depend on the learner's attitude towards the learning materials. Fakeye (2010) ^[3] states that, a positive attitude more often leads to successful learning. Similarly, Gardener and Lambert (1972) ^[6] observe that success in mastering a second language depends not so much on intellectual capacity or language aptitude but on learners' attitude towards the particular language. According to them, attitude could help in the language learning process by changing students' orientation towards it. It is therefore imperative that a positive attitude towards English Language accounts for success in learning it.

Gardner (1985) ^[7] proposes three different experiences associated with second language acquisition that can have an influence on students' attitudes and motivation. The first experience is bicultural excursion programme. This refers to relatively short term interactions with members of the other language community in their own social environment with the purpose of developing positive attitudes towards that group. Generally, there is little, if any, instruction in the second language. Unfortunately in Nigerian schools, most learners and teachers of English Language go through their entire life without coming in contact with native speakers. The other two experiences proposed are regular language courses and intensive language training.

According to Gardner (1985) ^[7], if teachers are skilled in the language and attuned to the feelings of their students, and the methodology is interesting and informative, can do a lot towards awakening positive attitudes, regardless of whether students' initial attitudes are positive or negative. Conversely, if teachers are not knowledgeable or sensitive to students' reactions and encumbered with a dull and unimaginative methodology, it is unlikely that positive attitudes would be developed.

Fisher (2004) ^[5] submits that students who associate learning with certain problems would develop negative attitude towards learning. From this, it is clear that teachers' industrial action is an ugly incidence because during this period, students refuse to actively engage in academic activities. For instance, no student wants to refer difficult words from the dictionary except for social purpose. Students from poor homes consider the period as an opportunity to fend for themselves having no time and interest in the study of English Language.

Okon (2011) ^[15] assert that a learner's attitude towards the learning of a particular task or material determines the depth of his involvement in the particular learning process. The student's positive attitude towards the learning of English Language may lead him or her to attain an appreciable degree and aid him or her to see the link between the previous learned tasks and new learning. This implies that positive attitude towards the learning of English Language among the students will ensure good performance in the subject. On the contrary, the occurrences of teachers' industrial actions in schools disrupt the learning process which may erode the positive attitude cultivated by students before such action.

This is because students in time of teachers' industrial action are kept away from normal school activities causing them to lose interest in learning.

Incessant teachers' industrial actions in secondary schools may cause students to develop negative attitude towards their normal studies in school. This attitude may cause them to lose interest in reading and practising skills already learnt in English Language before the teachers' industrial action. Therefore, attitude of students towards learning due to teachers' industrial action impinges on performance of students in English Language.

Teachers'-students' relationship and students' performance in English Language

The personal interactions of the teacher with his or her students make a significant impact on learning in school, particularly, English Language. A positive relationship between the student and the teacher can be established. The qualities for a positive relationship can vary to set a learning experience approachable and inviting for the students to learn.

Teacher who has the qualities of good communication, respect for students in the classroom, and shows interest in teaching will establish a positive relationship in the classroom. Students have different strategies for learning and achieving their goals. A few students in a classroom will grasp and learn quickly. But there are those who have to be taught repeatedly using different techniques before they are able to understand the lesson. Teaching then becomes difficult, especially if there is no worthwhile commitment. Yet, teachers creating a positive relationship with their students will not necessarily control all the disruptive students. Teachers should build strong interpersonal relationships with them, focusing on the strengths of the students while maintaining high and realistic expectation for success. During industrial action, this may be lacking.

The interactive relationship should be based on respect, trust, care and cohesiveness. A sense of belonging is another important by-product of a strong teacher-student relationship that is critical to students' success in school. Teachers need to continuously monitor the students in order for them to be aware of any difficulties the students are facing. Understanding the students' problem, fear, or confusion will give the teacher a better understanding of the students' learning difficulties. Once the teacher becomes aware of the problems, he or she will have more patience with the students, thus making them feel secure or less confused when learning is taking place in the classroom. The communication between the students and the teacher serves as a connection between the two, which provides a better atmosphere for a classroom environment. Of course, a teacher is not going to understand every problem from every student in his or her classroom, but will acquire enough information for those students who are struggling with specific tasks. Academic achievement and students' behaviour are influenced by the quality of the teacher and students' relationship. The more the teacher connects or communicates with his or her students, the more likely they will be able to help the students learn at a high level and accomplish quickly.

Thompson (2008) ^[18] avers that the most powerful weapon available to secondary schools teachers who want to foster a favourable learning climate is a positive relationship with the students. They can recall when they did not do well in class because they did not like their teachers. This reminds teachers

about the importance of having a strong, positive relationship with students. Learners are more likely to be respectful when important adults in their lives respect them. They are more likely to care about others if they know they are cared about. Students resist rules and procedures as well as disciplinary actions consequent upon absence of a good relationship. Relationships are perhaps more important at the elementary and junior high levels than at the high school level and students will never trust teachers or open themselves up to hear what teachers have to say unless they sense that the teachers value and respect them. Poor relationship between students and teachers work against the effective study of English Language in the secondary schools.

The teacher needs to understand that the students come from different cultures and backgrounds. A teacher also needs to understand the value of the students' senses of belonging, which can be of greater value and build self-worth for minority students. If the teacher demonstrates an understanding of the students' culture, it will provide a better understanding between the teacher and the students. There are students who have difficult time in school especially when they are yelled at. They feel rejected and frightened because a teacher shouts at them. The reasons for the student to be yelled at vary from teacher to teacher, but shouting should not be the solution for students who find learning a difficult process or simply learning experiences, but sometimes teachers find yelling at the students as the only quick solution.

Therefore, those teachers who demonstrate respect towards their students automatically win favour by having active learners in their classroom. The arrogant or offensive teachers would lack these positive qualities due to their lack of control over the students. Teachers should ensure that students are treated with respect and kindness. According to Jones (2000)^[11] teachers are encouraged to blend warmth and firmness towards the students in their classroom, but with realistic limits. Strikes deprive students of this.

Inyang and Akpan (2006)^[9] in their contribution state that teachers' industrial action creates negative relationship between teachers and students which serve as an impediment to normal learning in any educational institution. The authors add that an industrial action affects the economic status of the workers including the teachers. They explain that during the period of strike, teachers may not be remunerated. Thus, they may not find it easy, not to talk of imparting knowledge to the students. The aggression arising from non-payment due to teachers' industrial action passed on to students, thus creating a relationship that does not encourage learning.

According to Asuquo (2010) children like teachers who are kind, friendly, cheerful, patient, helpful, fair, have sense of humour, show an understanding of children problem, allow plenty of students' activities and at the same time maintain order. Industrial action embarked upon by teachers makes understanding the teacher difficult. He may no longer be helpful to students, pay less attention to the students' needs and problems and most especially become less interested in students activities. Furthermore, teachers' industrial action creates a wider gap between teachers and students hence learning is discouraged which affects students' performance. Some teachers may not want to attend lessons even before commencement of the action. This means that relationship between teachers and students becomes strained immediately an intention is made to embark on an industrial action. At such instance, teachers remain in the staff room not minding

what is supposed to be done in the classrooms. Uwatt (2001)^[19] opines that purposeful learning can be achieved with an effective communication. It is certain that the members of the classroom are the teacher and students. The communication between these members cannot be effective when their relationship is not cordial. This simply means that an industrial action embarked upon by teachers breaches mutual relationship between them and students thus, causing ineffective communication and negatively impacts on learning at school.

The author adds that teachers' industrial action discourages mutual relationship between the teachers and the students which is one of the prerequisites of learning any subject matter in school. It creates an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, uncertainty, pain, frustration and confusion which do not aid good and effective interaction between the school members (students and teachers). It therefore serves as an impediment to an effective learning among secondary school students. Sa'ad (2007)^[17] concludes that successful achievement of any stated objective in teaching and learning process is always associated with using the right method. Teachers' industrial action causes pain to the teachers thus frustrating the good intention they have for the teaching profession. This invariably affects their method of teaching. Teachers'-students' good relationship helps in effective teaching and learning whereas poor relationship is detrimental.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers' industrial action affects students' performance in English Language. Students' attitude to learning as a result of teachers' industrial action relates to their performance in English Language and teachers'-students' relationship relates to their performance in English Language. The multiplier effect of this would be teachers' dedication to duty leading to students' improved performances.

From the discourse and conclusion, the following recommendations are made.

1. The government should meet teachers' demands of payment of allowances, salaries and other entitlements as and when due to avert their industrial action.
2. Parents should assist their children/ wards at home to inculcate the right attitude to learning English Language. Also, the government should employ counselors in all the schools to help in checking students' attitude to learning.
3. Teachers should ensure that cordial relationship exists between them and their students. Since it is certain that no matter what happens, the strike would certainly be called off, it is recommended that teachers, before embarking on the strike, should give their students take-home assignments to keep them busy.

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