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Research Article

Correlate of Factors Affecting Effective Learning of English Language among Undergraduate Students in Northwest Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated whether difference exists between factors hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students in the northwest Nigeria, and determined the relationship between lecturers' role and undergraduate students' effective learning of English language. It also examined relationship between lecturers' English language teaching method and undergraduate students' effective use of English language. These were with a view to improving the quality of teaching and learning of English language among undergraduate students. The study adopted a survey design. The population comprised of all male and female undergraduate students in public universities in northwest states of Nigeria. The sample consisted of an intact class of 5880 Part 3 undergraduate students which made up of 2940 male and 2940 female students respectively. This was done to balance gender difference and to ensure gender equity. A highly structured self-developed instrument tagged, "Student's English Failure and Weakness Questionnaire (SEFWQ)", was used to elicit information about factors hindering effective learning of English language amongst undergraduate students in the university. One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical methods were used to test postulated hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results revealed that a non-significant difference existed between the factors that hinder effective learning of English language among undergraduate students. Further, there existed a significant relationship between lecturers' role and undergraduate students' effective learning of English language. Also, there was a significant relationship between lecturers' English language teaching method and undergraduate students' effective use of English language. It was concluded that an awareness campaign of the importance of English language and the role of English lecturers on the part of undergraduate students should be vigorously embarked upon in all Nigerian university campuses as well as the society at large.

Keywords: English language, Effective learning, Teaching method, Lecturer's role, Undergraduate students.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural country. As Nigeria is a large country with peoples of diverse cultures, languages and myriads of dialects, the British bequeathed the country English as its official language (lingua franca). Thus in all spheres of Nigerian life, English is adopted and spoken. English has a crucial role in Nigerian education, politics, commerce and various human endeavours. It is used in many contexts like diplomatic

affairs, television and radio news, banking, exports, imports and oil industry. In fact, it is not an exaggeration or out of place to say that Nigeria is English and English is Nigeria. Thus, English is necessarily needed for communication among the people with different languages in the country. Not only this, but also English is the language of instruction in schools (i.e., primary, secondary and tertiary). Indeed without English there would at present be little or nothing to achieve in receiving Western Education.

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However, the persistent poor academic performance in English is a basic problem which has been a concern to the university authorities in Nigeria. The expressed concern on the perennial poor performance of the undergraduate students despite the huge investment made in the mounting of various technologically-based instructional materials, the situation still remains the same. Suffice to say that the poor performance could be attributed to a myriad of factors such as poor entry qualification of undergraduate students, lecturers, curriculum, teaching methods, examination factors, to mention only a few. For instance, the communicative competency of most undergraduate students is quite poor. They cannot communicate with others even by using simple sentences, orally or in writing, though the English curriculum is principally based on the communicative approach and these students are given a total of six years of English language instruction at the secondary school level. This problem is obviously noticed in school leavers who join the English department of the university, and are supposed to be more competent in this course compared to their peers, who join other disciplines.^{8,9} This phenomenon has been an issue that most concerns researchers in the Nigerian universities, hence this study.

Historically, English language came into Nigeria as a result of the arrival of colonial masters in the 19th century. 13 There are many languages in Nigeria. Some have written forms while some do not have. Language is known as it is acquired from childhood, as a set of habit depending on environment of area that an individual comes from. Therefore, it is naturally going to be a different problem for somebody to learn a language other than his mother language (mother tongue) or to adjust to the second language (L₂). This is because generally languages are and they vary in their forms. Such variations include: phonetics (sound and systems), semantics, syntax and the most sensible aspect of grammar. Consequently, most learners of English as a second language (L₂) stand at a natural linguistic position between their first language (L₁) and the target language (L₂). Although the British colonization ended in Nigeria in 1960, but the struggle for learning their language still continues.6

It is in this context that the status of the English language in Nigeria is the official language of the country. It is used in the area of administration, commerce, law, education, and a host of others. For instance, all textbooks used in Nigeria, from nursery/kindergarten, primary to secondary schools and tertiary institutions, which include universities, colleges of education, polytechnics, monotechnics including those institutions offering correspondence courses, are written and taught in English.^{8,9,12} In fact, no tertiary institution in the country will grant admission to any prospective student seeking admission into its fold without a good grade in English language. Hence, students are expected to have a

considerable proficiency in English language in order to be able to continue higher studies and communicate when required. Therefore, English language is very important to undergraduate students on which this research is conducted because it is a tool for the student's academic activities and scholastic achievement.

Against this backdrop, Al-Sohbani⁵ observed that several factors can affect students' performance in English language as English language learning is a complex process that can be influenced by many factors such as pedagogy, language learning strategies, students' aptitude, personalities, attitudes and motivation.

Ibrahim et al.9 investigated undergraduate students' attitudinal disposition towards English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language in the course of their studying in a Nigerian university. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The sample consisted of an intact class of 332 Part 3 undergraduate students who registered for EDU 309 (English Teaching Methods). A researcher-developed instrument was used to collect data. Data collected were analyzed using independent t-test statistical method. The results showed that factors affecting students' attitudinal disposition towards learning English language significantly influences their scholastic disposition to English language. Further, the findings indicated that there existed a significant difference in students' interest in learning English language and perception of English language learning owing to their scholastic disposition to English language. It concluded that undergraduate students listed ten factors affecting their disposition towards learning English language as: students always forget vocabulary and verbs tenses, absence of encouragement from the teacher, English is not introduced at an earlier age, the textbook is not available, the time of the lesson is not enough, they do not speak English at home, students think that English is the language of English people, English is not taught by specialist teachers, English is not used in day-to-day life, and students believe that English is difficult. Therefore, all these factors are responsible for students' negative attitude and poor motivation regarding learning English language and thus not working hard towards learning English language in the university.

Al-Sohbani⁵ explored the reasons behind the weakness in English among public secondary school leavers in Yemen. Twenty three female English teachers and 47 female school students participated in the study by writing the reasons which, according to them, affect learning and acquiring English negatively. An open-ended questionnaire was used. Both teachers and students listed about 59 reasons. Teaching English by non-specialist teachers was considered by teachers and students the first reason, followed by the absence of family and societal encouragement, lack of instructional aids and materials, students not caring

about English and concentrating during the class, and their negative attitudes towards English which stems from western colonization of the Arab World. Further, other factors include students, teachers, school, curriculum, family and society. Teaching English by non-specialist teachers was considered by both the teachers and students as the first reason which leads to learners' weakness in English, followed by the absence of family and society encouragement, lack of instructional aids and materials, and students' negative attitude towards English. He concluded that although the school English textbooks are based on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Yemeni students study English for six years in the public schools, the language competency of most secondary school leavers is considerably low. They cannot communicate with others even by using simple sentences, orally or in writing. Such weaknesses are obviously noticed when such students sit for entrance exams as prerequisite for English studies, engineering and medicine.

In the same vein, Lei and Qin¹¹ reported that failure in English learning was attributed to a lack of confidence, effort, test-oriented learning, practical use and external help. Likewise, Walqui and Ed¹⁷ claimed that factors that need to be considered are learning process, learners' needs and goals, teaching and learning styles, classroom interaction, social context of learning, the status of the target language, the processes of language learning itself, learners' attitudes and motivation. According to Al-Sohbani,⁵ the ability to work independently, make intelligent guesses, use contextual clues, create opportunities to practice and ability to use contextual clues and use appropriate language learning strategies have been described as good language learner qualities which help learners to succeed in language learning. Abdolmalek1 cited in Al-Sohbani5 believed that students' failure and weakness in most school subjects in general are attributed to the family with its big number of members and its problems, also the need for child labor. He also reported that the teachers and their way of dealing with students, the text books which reach the schools very late, the crowded classrooms and the difficulty of the exams are reasons which lead to a lot of weakness in students' performance in their studies in general.

Adebayo² examined the effect of using electronic media in ELT classes in southwestern Nigeria. The data for the study were gathered among 180 randomly sampled students. The data were analyzed through the inferential statistical tool. The finding of the study revealed that there is a significant relationship between electronic and digital gadgets, which facilitates the pedagogy in ELT large classes in southwestern Nigeria.

Oxford and Shearin¹⁴ stated that attitudes and motivation represent the factors that prominently affect students' performance in English language learning since they play a

prominent role in the success of English language learning. However, the undergraduate student's competency in English language is poor over time. This problem is obviously noticed in school leavers who join the English departments of universities and are supposed to be more competent in this course compared to their peers. Therefore, the broad objective of the present study is to obtain insight into the recurring dynamic relationship among factors hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students in northwest Nigeria. Towards this end, the specific objectives of this study are to:

- Identify the factors that hinder effective learning of English language among undergraduate students.
- Examine if the role of English lecturer in motivating undergraduate students affect their effective learning of English language.
- Investigate whether lecturers' English language teaching method affect undergraduate students' effective use of English language.

Research Hypotheses

From the objectives above, the following null hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance:

- There is no significant difference between the factors that hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students.
- There is no significant relationship between lecturers' role and undergraduate students' effective learning of English language.
- There is no significant relationship between lecturers' English language teaching method and undergraduate students' effective use of English language.

Methodology

Research Design

The study is exploratory in nature adopting a descriptive survey research design. It is descriptive survey in that data gathered from the participants with the use of questionnaire only described factors affecting effective learning of English language amongst undergraduate students in the university. There was no conscious manipulation of the variables since the interactions among variables have been completed. According to Singh and Upadhya, ¹⁶ the descriptive survey design should normally be employed in exploratory studies as such studies are normally aimed at collecting data, describing in a systematic manner, the characteristics, features or facts about a given population.

Participants

The population of the study comprised all male and female undergraduate students in public universities in northwest

states, Nigeria. There are seven (7) states that make up northwest Nigeria and these states are Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. Based on data provided by the Ministry of Education in each of the states in northwest Nigeria, there are a total of 16 governmentowned universities (7 federal government-owned and 9 state government-owned universities) in northwest Nigeria as at the time of this study. Multi-stage sampling technique was used in selecting the Part 3 undergraduate students in the study. The undergraduate students were selected using the seven states in the northwest as the first stratum. From each of the states, one federalgovernment-owned and one state government-owned universities were selected using simple random technique. From each of the selected federal government-owned and state government-owned universities, stratified random sampling method was employed to select a total of 420 Part 3 undergraduate students totaling 5880 across the northwest states, using sex and level of educational attainment as strata. The undergraduate students were selected from seven federal government-owned and state government-owned universities in each of the states making a total of 14 public universities. 210 male and 210 female undergraduate students were selected from each of the randomly selected one federal-government-owned and one state government-owned university making a total of 420 Part 3 undergraduate students per university. This was done to balance gender difference and to ensure gender equity. Thus, a total of 5880 consisting of 2940 male and 2940 Part 3 undergraduate students were included in the study. Their average age was 26.75 years. Only 5586 consisting of 2793 male and 2793 female Part 3 undergraduate students returned the instrument administered to them. Thus, the return rate was 95%.

Noteworthy, Part 3 undergraduate students were selected because they were considered as middle-level students as they had completed a minimum of two years on campus out of 4 or 5 years program in the university, considered more matured and capable of making decisive judgement on what affects them in the course of their studies than their counterparts at both Parts 1 and 2 levels in the university. Also, Parts 4 and 5 undergraduate students were not considered because since they were in the final year of their studies in the universities respectively, they may not take the study with all seriousness and attention it deserves.

Research Instrument

A highly structured self-developed instrument tagged, "Student's English Failure and Weakness Questionnaire (SEFWQ)", was used to elicit information about factors hindering effective learning of English language amongst undergraduate students in the university. The instrument contained 30 items divided into three sections, and rated on a five-point Likert-scale graduated from "Most of the time"

to "None of the time" agreement about the statement.

The questionnaire was of three parts: part one elicited students' bio-data such as name of the institution, sex, degree in view, family types, number of siblings in the family, position among the siblings, academic career aspirations, type of institution, to mention only a few. The second part comprised 30 items with each item designed to collectively measure each of the factors hindering effective learning of English language amongst undergraduate students in the university. The third part consisted of two sections A and B. Section A measured lecturers' role in affecting undergraduate students' effective learning of English language. This comprised 10 items. Also, section B measured lecturers' English language teaching method in facilitating undergraduate students' effective use of English language. This consisted of 10 items.

Validity and Reliability of the Instrument

The face and construct validity of the instrument were established through subjecting items to expert judgment of five experts. Two of these experts were tests and measurement, while the remaining three were educational psychology, sociology of education and guidance and counseling experts respectively. Afolabi³ maintained that face validity of instrument was based upon a superficial examination of the nature of the instrument. Hence, the experts appraised the items on the basis of ambiguity, relevance and sentence structure respectively. The experts' judgments revealed that the instrument had adequate face and construct validity. Thereafter, a pilot study was conducted to establish the reliability of the instrument. This involves the double administration of the instrument on 30 undergraduate students from a state government-owned University with a two-week interval. The 30 undergraduate students randomly selected were not the same with the 5880 students used for the study as sample. A Pearson product moment correlation coefficient formula was used for data analysis. The result shows a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.75 (n=30; p<0.05) and internal consistency reliability estimate of 0.86 (n=30; p<0.05). Thus, the instrument was accepted as highly reliable, consistent and valid over time.

Procedure for Data Collection

The research instrument was personally administered to the respondents by the researcher with the aid of Research Assistants recruited for the purpose of this study. These Research Assistants, who were Graduate Assistants in their respective universities, were trained to assist in distributing the hard copies of the questionnaire and collecting the questionnaire as well as in arranging the venues for the administration of the questionnaire. They were properly trained for two hours twice a week for a period of two weeks before the commencement of the study. The training

included explanations on the nature and purpose of the research as well as the need to maintain confidentiality of information provided by the participants and to avoid undue interference with the participants' decisions during the course of administering the questionnaire. The training ended three days before the administration of the instrument so that the Research Assistants could maximally make use of what they had been trained for. They actively assisted in the conduct of the study and were well remunerated at the end of the field work which lasted for three (3) weeks.

Further, the hard copies of the instrument (SEFWQ) were administered to all undergraduate students who were converged in a particular classroom where the questionnaires were administered to them. Subjects requiring extra attention were attended to as the instructions were continually read to them. The confidentiality of their responses was also assured, and enough time was given for the completion of the questionnaire. This was done to guide against ambiguity in subjects' responses. This method helped to reduce the invalid responses and wearing down often experienced in data collection. By this method, a total of 5880 instruments were administered on the selected sample. Out of these, only 5586 questionnaires were returned correctly filled consisting of 2793 male and 2793 female Part 3 undergraduate students. Thus, a return rate of 95% was achieved. This percentage represents those who return the SEFWQ given to them for completion during data collection.

Thereafter, a key was developed to code every information received from the questionnaire. Hence, the instruments were scored variable-by-variable as guided by the research hypotheses. For part one of the questionnaire, items 1–8 enabled the classification of the respondents into male and female undergraduates; high, moderate and

low socio-economic statuses; and high, moderate and low perception of effects of economic recession on their academic performance. Part two, section A, B, C, and D of the questionnaire consisted of 30 items which were broken down to variables in the study. Each of the items was scored in an increasing (ascending) order of magnitude for those items that were positively worded, while those items that were negatively worded were scored in a decreasing (descending) order of magnitude. The combination of these scores formed the basis on which the data were analyzed.

Data Analysis

Using updated SPSS version 21.0., the data collected were subjected to analysis computing first, the mean (\bar{x}) scores and standard deviations (SD). Afterwards, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistical methods were used to test the three hypotheses. Hence, all hypotheses postulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Hypothesis One

There is no significant difference between the factors that hinder effective learning of English language among undergraduate students. To test this hypothesis, the mean and standard deviation of the points assigned to each factor were first computed. The respondents were asked to rate on a 4-point scale, the extent they consider each factor hinders effective learning of English language among undergraduate students. Afterwards, independent t-test was used to determine whether a significant difference exists between the mean ratings of each factor by students in relation to effective learning of English language among undergraduate students. The results of the analyses are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1.The Mean (x) Ratings and Standard Deviations of Factors Hindering Effective Learning of English Language among Undergraduate Students

Factors	Mean $(x\overline{)}$	SD	
Wrong use of tense (s)	4.64	3.19	
Poor motivation	4.20	2.55	
Students do not like English language	4.83	2.73	
The late acquisition of the English language	5.76	2.34	
Students do not participate inside the classroom	5.60	2.67	
Large number of students in one classroom	6.22	2.41	
Lack of English lecturers for some English courses	5.38	2.92	
Students' belief that English is difficult	5.51	2.88	
English is not introduced at earlier age	5.57	2.99	
Students do not focus on learning English during class	5.97	3.36	

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Table 1 presents the ranking of ten factors hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students. As shown in the table, the undergraduate students ranked large number of students in one classroom as number one factor (\bar{x} =6. 22; sd=2.41). Also, the undergraduate students ranked factors such as students do not focus on learning English during class (\bar{x} =5.97; sd=3.36); the late acquisition of the English language (\bar{x} =5.76; sd=2.34); students do not participate inside the classroom (\bar{x} =5.60; sd=2.67); and English is not introduced at earlier age (\bar{x} =5.22; sd=2.99) as number two, three, four and five factors hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students respectively. Further, the undergraduate students ranked students' belief that English is difficult as number six factor (\bar{x} =5.51; sd=2.88); followed by lack of English lecturers for some English courses (\bar{x} =5.38; sd=2.41); then followed by students do not like English language (\bar{x} =4.83; sd=2.26) as number seven and eight factors hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students. Also, the undergraduate students ranked large wrong us e of tenses (\bar{x} =4.64; sd=3.19); and poor motivation (\bar{x} =4.20; sd=2.55) as number nine and ten factors hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students respectively.

Further analysis of the data to determine whether significant difference exists between the factors that hinder effective learning of English language among undergraduate students using One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) shows that the calculated F-value of 1.54 is not significant since it is less than the critical F-value of 1.88 given 9 and 5576 degrees of freedom at 0. 05 level of significance. Consequently, the null hypothesis was confirmed. This implies that there is no significant difference between the factors that hinder effective learning of English language among undergraduate students. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.Factors Affecting Effective Learning of English Language among Undergraduate Students

Sources of Variance	Sum of Squares Degrees of Freedom		Means of Squares	F-ratio
Between groups (factors)	205.08	9	22.79	1.54 (n.s.)
Within groups (error)	82614.73	5576	14.82	
Total	82819.81	5585		

ns=not significant, p>0.05; df=9/5576; F-Critical=1.88

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant relationship between lecturers' role and undergraduate students' effective learning of English language. To test this hypothesis, the mean and standard deviation of the points assigned to each item were first computed. Afterwards, Pearson product moment correlation statistic was used to determine whether a significant relationship exists between lecturers' role and undergraduate students' effective learning of English language. The result of the analysis is presented in Tables 3.

Table 3.Relationship between Lecturers' Role and Undergraduate Students' Effective Learning of English Language

Variables	N	Mean Scores (x)	SD	MD	Df	r-cal	r-critical
Lecturers' role	5586	22.80	4.42	0.28	103	0.72*	0.195
Students' learning of English	5586	22.52	4.63				

^{*}Significant, p<0.05

Table 3 shows that the calculated r-value of 0.72 is significant since it is greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 given 103 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Thereafter, the null hypothesis was disconfirmed. This means that there is a significant relationship between lecturers' role and undergraduate students' effective learning of English language.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant relationship between English language lecturers' teaching method and undergraduate students' effective use of English language. To test this hypothesis, the mean and standard deviation of the points assigned to each item were first computed. Afterwards, Pearson product moment correlation statistic was used to determine whether a significant relationship exists between English language lecturers' teaching method and undergraduate students' effective use of English language. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 4.

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Table 4.Relationship between English Language Lecturers' Teaching Method and Undergraduate Students' Effective Use of English Language

Variables	N	Mean Scores (x)	SD	MD	Df	r-cal	r-critical
Lecturers' teaching method	5586	25.01	3.52	0.03	103	0.64*	0.195
Students' use of English	5586	24.98	4.72				

^{*}Significant, p< 0.05

Table 4 shows that the calculated r-value of 0.64 is significant since it is greater than the critical r-value of 0.195 given 103 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. Thereafter, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. This means that there is a significant relationship between English language lecturers' teaching method and undergraduate students' effective use of English language.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to obtain insight into the recurring dynamic relationship among factors hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students in northwest Nigeria. The findings revealed a non-significant difference between the factors that hinder effective learning of English language among undergraduate students. Further findings indicated that there was a significant relationship between lecturers' role and undergraduate students' effective learning of English language. Also, there existed a significant relationship between English language lecturers' teaching method and undergraduate students' effective use of English language. These findings are consistent with the earlier studies by Adebayo,² Al-Shobani,⁴ Lightbown and Spada,¹⁰ and Qashoa, 15 who in their separate studies discovered that attitudes and motivation represent the factors that prominently affect students' performance of English language learning since they play a prominent role in the success of English language learning. Specifically, Al-Shobani4 reported that students' negative attitudes and no motivation regarding learning the English language can be influenced mainly by wrong beliefs due to surrounding environment such as teachers, studying English just to pass exam, and therefore not working hard. Another reason is the inappropriate pedagogy which focuses merely on memorizing vocabulary and grammar rules, influenced by the traditional exams, without using English and causes students to face difficulties in retaining, for example, vocabulary and verb tenses. This can lead to frustration and demotivation as learners feel no need for English and only want to pass exams, which can be achieved easily either by cheating or by having a personal relationship with some teachers.

Likewise, Adebayo² who examined the effect of using electronic media in ELT classes in southwestern Nigeria reported a significant relationship electronic and digital gadget facilitates the pedagogy in ELT large classes in

southwestern Nigeria. Also, Brown⁷ pointed out style conflicts between teachers and students and the nature of the classroom activities as a source of demotivation. Further, crowded classroom makes teaching ineffective and students passive. The role of the teacher is of particular importance in motivating or demotivating students. This is observed when, for example, a teacher is criticized for not following appropriate and effective language teaching methods or techniques. However, when his learners are asked about that teacher, they tend to praise him for being useful and encouraging, and it also happens that such learners tend to be very successful at the subject taught by such a teacher. If an English teacher, for example, is not friendly, sociable, and encouraging, his/her learners may not have the initiative to participate in learning tasks or activities, which is a crucial factor in language learning in general and in Nigerian situation in particular as English in the country is both official language of instruction and lingual franca.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that there existed a non-significant difference between the factors that hinder effective learning of English language among undergraduate students. However, further findings indicated that there was a significant relationship between lecturers' role and undergraduate students' effective learning of English language. Also, there existed a significant relationship between English language lecturers' teaching methods and undergraduate students' effective use of English language. Conclusively, all undergraduate students listed ten factors hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students, such as, large number of students in one classroom; students do not focus on learning English during class; the late acquisition of the English language; students do not participate inside the classroom; and English is not introduced at an earlier age. Other factors include the students' belief that English is difficult; lack of English lecturers for some English courses; students do not like English language; wrong use of tenses; and poor motivation as factors hindering effective learning of English language among undergraduate students.

Recommendations

From the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

Teachers should motivate their students to learn better

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- English by highlighting its importance as they need English for their academic achievement.
- English teachers should develop a friendly relationship with their students in order to develop a positive attitude towards learning English Language.
- Parents and stakeholders in education should live up to their roles in encouraging positive attitude towards learning English language among undergraduate students.
- An awareness campaign of the importance of English language and the role of English teachers on the part of undergraduate students should be vigorously embarked upon in all Nigerian university campuses as well as the larger society.

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