

Vocational/Technical Education in Nigeria: Challenge of Communicative Competence in the Written English of Technical College Students in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigates the importance of communicative competence in English language to a skillful and result-oriented vocational/technical education in Nigeria. One of the aims of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria is to arouse interest in technological and vocational education through actual fields of study in preparation for later educational and vocational choices. This study investigates the communicative competence of the subjects/respondents of study with a view to improving their communication skills in English language. The elicitation instruments are a 20-item filling-in multiple choice test and an essay writing exercise relevant to the academic needs of the respondents in each of the three subject areas in three technical colleges in Osun State, Nigeria. The findings reveal that technical college students did not have adequate competence in the use of technical registers relevant to their field. The paper concludes by offering useful suggestions on measures that could be taken to improve the communicative competence of the technical college students in order to make them useful to their immediate community and the country at large.

Key words: vocational education, communicative competence, technical register, communication skills, vocationalization

1. Introduction

The English language is an indisputable second and official language in the country. English as an official language serves three broad functions namely, accommodation, participation and social mobility. It occupies a unique position in the country because it is the language that facilitates communication between Nigerians regardless of the linguistic, cultural, ethnic and social barriers. The introduction of the English language has therefore served as a unifying instrument of social interaction among the various peoples and a medium for the business of government. It performs various functions such as that of lingua franca, language of instruction in schools from elementary school, government, commerce, mass media, judiciary, science and technology (Adegbite, 2020, 2005; Adegbija, 1998; Bamgbose, 1995; Banjo, 1996; Eka, 2000). Today, in Nigeria, English is an official language, which serves three broad functions, namely, accommodation, participation and social mobility (Akindele & Adegbite, 2004; Adegbite, 2020).

Indeed, the status of the English language in Nigeria is that of a “stable and important second language” (Ogu, 1992: 79). Seweje (1998: 174) confirms this when she asserts that “the Nigerian child’s access to the cultural and scientific knowledge of his world is largely through English”. The functional load placed on the English language in Nigeria has continued to accord it more and more esteemed status day

by day. This is why, today, the language has become indispensable in the Nigerian life.

The importance of English in most facets of life in Nigeria has made it imperative for anyone with pretensions to advancement in society to be proficient in it. It is the language of education in Nigeria. It is the language of instruction from upper primary education, through secondary and tertiary education used in formal situations, in services, in schools, for commerce at a higher level, in our law courts and in the majority of items in the mass media. The position of English as a Second Language in Nigeria coupled with the numerous roles it plays, compels every Nigerian citizen to learn and speak it (Malu and Obiakor, 2018). No doubt, English occupies a pride of place in Nigeria as a second language and indeed necessary language.

English is also the main language of education/literacy as it is the major medium of expression in the Nigerian educational system. The National Policy on Education (NPE 2013, Sections 3 e & f) emphasizes among other things that:

(e) The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject.

(f) From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects.

This means that English is the medium of instruction right from primary four to secondary and higher education levels. All other subjects (except Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo and perhaps other Nigerian languages) are taught and examined in English. The fact that any newspaper which aims at national coverage must necessarily publish in English is a better confirmation that English is the lingua franca in Nigeria. In the words of Banjo (1996: 69):

No African country is better served with English medium newspaper than Nigeria, and the scene has been further enriched in recent years by profusion in all manner of periodicals spanning the whole range from the basilectal to the acrolectal.

In spite of the above, and other numerous roles that English language plays in Nigeria and worldwide, it is unfortunate that many Nigerians are either completely illiterate in it, or have a grossly inadequate mastery of it. That many Nigerians are illiterate in English has been confirmed by many studies. For instance, Adetugbo (1979: 167) asserts that the English language remains today a second language “used with some degree of proficiency by 10 to 15% of Nigerians”. This might be connected to the poor performance of its users. The poor performance of English users, especially students, may be as a result of a lot of factors ranging from lack of adequate textbooks to paucity of professional competent teachers (Olawajun 2005 & Akande 2003).

Generally, it is observed that the standard of the English language is rapidly falling in Nigerian schools, especially in the post-primary schools, unlike in the past when a standard six pupil was able to speak and write good English. Many

studies have shown that despite the emphasis placed on teaching and learning of the English language, it is worrisome to observe that secondary school students are unable to communicate in the language. They make a lot of grammatical, phonological and semantic errors. They give direct translation of words and sentences and use slangy expressions. They find it difficult to use English language as a medium of expression in many social gatherings or in their academic purposes. The main logical justification for the situation is that English language is often learned as a second language in Nigeria, because most children learn Pidgin, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Igala, or any other native languages first (L1). Also, the fact that there is a shortage of professional/specialist teachers in the Nigeria educational system cannot be over-emphasised. *The National Policy on Education* (2013) stipulates that education in Nigeria is aimed at achieving among other things the following:

The training of mind in the understanding of the world around. The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively. The laying of a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking. The acquisition of an objective view of the local and external environments. The development of the intellectual capacities of individuals to understand and appreciate their environments.

These goals can mainly be meaningfully achieved through formal education. Therefore, English language being the language of formal education in the country has a lot to do to help in the transmission and expression of formal knowledge. The current inadequate knowledge of English by the Nigeria students in secondary schools present an impediment to attainment of the nation's educational goals (Malu and Obiakor, 2018).

The present study is, therefore, designed at investigating the lexico-grammatical problems in the English of Technical Colleges' students in Osun State. Consequently, the study will identify the level of their communicative competence and usage of technical registers, and discover from their written English the wrongly used words, spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. The ultimate goal of English language teaching is to develop the learners' communicative competence, which will enable them to communicate successfully in the real world – that is, passing on a comprehensible message to the listener. The problem of cultural differences, which second language speakers often bring along with their communication in ESL usually affects their acquisition of communicative competence in ESL. Cultural differences between EMT and ESL on the one hand, and differences in the learning and use of ESL and EMT on the other, as a matter of fact, may pose problems in 'efficient operation' of communicative competence in ESL (Adejare, 1995, Akere, 1979 and Alo, 2003). Akintola (1988:80-81) opines that:

The basic function of communicative competence (CC) is to generate communicative activity i.e., acts in different situational domains. A user of language is expected to acquire a level of competence that will enable his to participate in various communicative acts as a member of the sociolinguistic community.

Communicative competence, according to Yule (1996:191), is a broad concept, which subsumes the grammatical competence, the socio-linguistic competence and the strategic competence. This is why he opines that language acquisition is the gradual development of ability in a language by using it naturally in communicative situation. Also, following Alo (2003: 117), “linguistic competence entails the knowledge of linguistic forms (phonology, lexis, grammar and usage)”. The language users will be able to produce well-formed utterances and sentences on the basis of the knowledge of linguistic conventions of usage and acquisition of English communicative skills (Adejare 1995). Deviance or total departure from the linguistic conventions of usage will result in bad usage. This will affect communication and also attract unfavorable reactions from listeners and readers. Olorode (1999:35) asserts that linguistic knowledge such as the vocabulary or the lexicon are exemplified in the competence and performance of a language user in the three major components of Phonology, Syntax and Semantics. Ogunsiji (2023) opines that it is essential for Nigerian citizens to be able to create and communicate effectively in the English language if they desire to be fully integrated into the society in this age of science and technology.

Therefore, it is hoped that, this study will help to improve the communicative competence of technical students in English because lexical competence, being an important aspect of communicative competence helps a great deal in facilitating communicative skills.

2. Literature Review

Vocational and technical education means organised educational programmes, services and activities which are related to the preparation of individuals for paid or unpaid work or for additional preparation for career requiring technical competences or post-secondary or higher education advanced degree. According to Ikpe (2010), vocational-technical education is defined as acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge. Technical education in Nigeria is the kind of education targeted towards impacting technical skills and manpower (Oni 2004). The *NPE* (2013:24) explains technical and vocational education and training as:

A comprehensive term referring to those aspects of the educational process involving, in addition to general education, the study of technologies and related sciences and the acquisition of practical skills, attitudes, understanding and knowledge relating to occupations in various sectors of economic and social life.

For the goals and objectives of vocational education, see Section 42 of the *NPE* (ibid.). Section 44 of the *NPE* states the admission requirement into technical colleges thus:

Minimum entry requirement into the technical college shall be the Junior School Certificate (JSC). Entry could also be based on evidence of aptitude shown in the technical courses and a reasonably good performance in Mathematics and Science. Students who have proved exceptionally able in the artisan training centres shall also be considered for admission.

The relevance and importance of vocational/technical education to the socio-economic well-being of Nigeria can only be realised through effective teaching and learning of technical instructions in our technical colleges. The NPE places emphasis on the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competence both mental and physical as equipment for an individual to live and contribute to the development and progress of his/her community. Nneji (1996) asserts that it is in line with this policy that technical colleges were founded to meet the vocational needs of the people and train them to acquire physical (psychomotor/industrial/practical/manual) and mental skills which include educational-oriented ones.

Alao and Obilade (2000: 1) suggest that one of the aims of the 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria is to “arouse interest in technological and vocational education through actual fields of study in preparation for later educational and vocational choices”. They further assert that “total vocationalization” would entail giving the Nigerian educational system a well-integrated pre-eminently pronounced work orientation.” The main goals of the proposed vocationalization of the education system, therefore, would be the production of graduates with adequate vocational skills and competence to make them duly capable of taking up either self-employment or salaried work.

In view of the foregoing, it is evident that English language has vital roles to play in order for vocational education to be effective, meaningful and result-oriented. English language has a crucial role to play in effective vocational education because all the textbooks and technical manuals used for all their various training programmes are written in the English language. In addition, and most importantly, the students at vocational schools/colleges need competence in English because it is also the language of instruction for all the subjects being offered by the students. It then follows that for graduates of technical colleges to be skilled and competent and to function adequately in their chosen careers, they must have sufficient knowledge of English lexical items, especially those that are relevant to technical registers. Technical college students should also acquire communicative competence in English in order for them to function effectively in the community.

Babalola (2003: 137) defines English for Specific Purpose (ESP) as an “enterprise involving education, training and practice, and drawing upon three major realms of knowledge: language, pedagogy and the students/participants or specialists’ areas of interest”. He further opines that it requires the appropriate selection of language content, lexical and grammatical items as well as “rhetorical and communicative capabilities”. It was clearly stated in UNESCO (1983: 41), reported on Trends and Issues in Technical and Vocational Education, that “Nigeria is interested in solving problems of transition from technical and vocational schools to work” and that her primary innovative approach to realize this interest is through “the Industrial Training Fund” (*ibid*: p.42). Adequate teaching and learning of ESP relevant to academic and professional needs of the technical college students would go a long way in helping government to realize this aim. Technical college students/graduates should be able to express themselves correctly in English and, especially, possess a good mastery of the registers of their professions.

However, as important as communicative competence in English is in this age of science and technology, studies have shown that ESL learners are deficient in the acquisition and learning of English Language, since there are always many lexico-

grammatical errors in their English (Akande 2003a, Aremo 1987). This deficiency of ESL learners in Nigeria manifests through their poor performance in either written or spoken English (Adedeji 2005, Jowitt 1991). Jowitt (1991: 25), concerning the poor performance of Nigerians in English, noted that “the quality of the English spoken and written by Nigerians is perceived by Nigerians qualified to judge to have been deteriorating over a long period.”

Given its roles and importance, the need for learners to master every aspect of English language (i.e. lexis, morphology, syntax and semantics) in order to be able to communicate well in the language cannot be underrated. It is common knowledge that the level of educational achievement in the country's schools has been quite low, and no one seems to doubt that one of the most potent factors responsible for this is the language barrier created by the students' inadequate knowledge of English language. This is one reason this paper focuses on the communicative competence of the technical college students in three schools in Osun State.

Indeed, the present work has arisen out of the consideration for the urgent need to make the proficiency of technical college students in English match the English skills required for their vocations and in the long run, communicate comprehensibly well with the people in the society. This is because of the fact that to communicate adequately, especially through one's second language, a command of its lexis is as necessary as that of its grammar. A good mastery of English lexical items goes a long way in facilitating communicative competence in English. The subjects of our study must be well versed in English lexical items relevant to their academic needs because, as has been mentioned above, all the textbooks and manuals of instructions for their chosen vocational careers are written in English; and most importantly, to enable them relate functionally well in the society either as private or salaried vocational practitioners. The objectives of Vocational/ Technical Education as stated above (cf. NPE 1998: section 5: 31) imply the ability to be productive and the ability to communicate effectively in the society. Ogunsiyi (2003) also believes that it is essential for a Nigerian citizen to be fully integrated in the society in this 'age of science and technology'.

The need to acquire competence in English as a second language has become more urgent in these days of high technology. Equipment are becoming more and more computerized and practitioners have had to upgrade their skills by acquiring computer skills and by reading instruction manuals of different equipment so that they can be installed properly and used efficiently. Perhaps the most intricate situation that has confronted technicians in the last ten years or so is the advent of software which, in themselves, are tools for accomplishing designated tasks either on the computer or as accessories in instruments. The software comes with elaborate files of 'Help' written to assist users to understand how to use them efficiently.

A thorough understanding of the English language is a basic condition for being able to use the software. Many technicians are already falling out of business because they lack the language skills to upgrade their knowledge to cope with the influx of utility instruments embedded with chips. Therefore, it is hoped that, this paper will help to improve the communicative competence of technical college students in English. Moreover, the motivation to embark on this research stemmed from the urge to investigate how the English the subjects are being taught and

exposed to are in conformity with NPE's goals and objectives that graduates of technical colleges would be self-reliant, or gainfully employed; and would be able to relate with the society.

It is common knowledge that the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria has always been confronted with multifarious challenges. These challenges range from lack of specialist English teachers, through inadequate teaching materials, deficiencies in the syllabus, and poorly written English textbooks to lack motivation on the part of learners (Aremo, 1982; Olukpe, 1974). Aside from these, the environmental factors also affect the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria since learners have to cope with their mother tongue` and in addition, master English, which is the second language in the country. There are other factors that are of sociological, psycholinguistic and pedagogical nature, which affect the acquisition of English lexis by the L2 learners (Arua, 1985; Akindele and Adegbite, 1999).

Akande (2001) undertook a study titled "Learners' Competence versus Morphological Appropriateness in the Acquisition of English". The study examined morphological errors in the texts of the one hundred and fifty (150) pupils randomly selected from three secondary schools in Egbedore Local Government Area of Osun State, having analysed the written English responses of the pupils to the composition test administered on them, the study revealed that "there is a discrepancy in the subjects' acquisition and mastery of word formation processes. This is because while some processes, namely; acronym, blending, clipping, etcetera are not regularly used, suffixation is regularly used. It is also discovered that most of the errors arise from over-generalisation and misapplication of rules" (*Ibid.*: 44).

Babalola and Akande (2002:245) assert that only a few studies have examined English language with a view to discovering whether the language itself has compounded the problems of learners due to the notable differences between it and the major Nigerian languages, most especially, the Yoruba language. Hence, they endeavoured to explore the English language with a view to highlighting some of its unique features that may make its acquisition somehow difficult for Yoruba learners of English in Nigeria. Some of the problem areas they highlighted are: sound-spelling relationship; morphological inconsistencies; syntactic problems; and problems of tense. They asserted that these problems are usually caused by misapplication or over-generalisation of English rules. In conclusion, they suggested that scholars of English should not focus only on socio-linguistic factors but also, "they should carry out more contrastive studies on English and major African languages so as to identify areas of convergence and significant points of departure This is with a view to making the learning and acquisition of the language less difficult for the learners" (*ibid.*: 256).

Olorode (1999) also investigates issues in the development of vocabulary for learners of English as a second language and asserts that the knowledge of vocabulary is very crucial to all aspects of linguistic knowledge, especially the phonological, syntactic and semantic knowledge of language. She identified five aspects of the vocabulary teaching – vocabulary knowledge, levels of vocabulary knowledge. minimum vocabulary for productive and receptive uses of language, direct vocabulary teaching, and vocabulary selection and control. The study's conclusion is that resources material like newspapers, journals, novels, pictures, flash cards and charts can be used in the teaching of vocabulary.

Taiwo (2003) carried out a study which identified the collocational errors in the written English of the subjects of study – SSS1 pupils in six Yoruba-speaking states in Nigeria. His findings revealed that the subjects had both ‘remedial and developmental’ problems which reflected in their wrong use of English collocational form. Based on his findings, he suggested that “efforts should always be made to draw attention to collocations in the teaching of English registers”, and that learners should be taught and encouraged to read English texts and use English Dictionaries extensively (p.171). It is obvious that inclusion of adequate teaching of lexis in Nigerian schools for meeting the English language needs of learners cannot be taken for granted. All the relevant previous studies reviewed are thus one and same in showing the preoccupation of scholars over the years with the challenge of assisting Nigerian learners to learn and use English more effectively.

However, the present study differs from others in that the subjects are students of technical colleges unlike the previous studies which are either general in nature or have primary schools’ pupils, secondary schools’ pupils and students in higher institutions (Polytechnics and Universities) as their subjects. Thus, the present study seeks to identify the lexical problems subjects of the subjects, especially the ones that are relevant to their vocations, and the type of textbooks that would be adequate for teaching them such lexical items. It is concerned with the needs of the students for the purpose of their language competence vis-à-vis communication in their chosen careers.

3. Methodology

This study was carried out through a 20-item Multiple Choice Test and an essay writing exercise relevant to the academic needs of the subjects/respondents (students) in each of the three subject areas selected from the three technical colleges of study. The 20-item Multiple Choice Test asked subjects to choose the right option from options A-D to answer all the questions while the essay writing questions were based on the topics relevant to each subject area of the respondents. The subjects who participated in this case study were 225 final year technical college students drawn, 75 subjects/respondents were selected on equal basis, from the three Technical Colleges in Osun State (Ile-Ife, Ilesa and Osogbo). They are:

- Government Technical College, Ile-Ife, henceforth college A.
- Federal Technical College, Ilesa, henceforth college B.
- Government Technical College, henceforth college C.

The subject areas and the three departments from which the study’s subjects were selected are:

1. Typewriting, from the Department of Business Studies
2. Catering and Cookery, from the Department of Catering and Hotel Management
3. Basic Electricity and Electrical Installation, from the Department of Electrical Installation

The total sample is therefore made up of 25 respondents in each department. The questions were formed by the researcher from three textbooks relevant to the subject areas in the three departments of study. Each section of the questions illustrated the special English of trade or profession in writing form. They were intended to know the respondents' competence and knowledge of English lexical items within the range of a technical vocabulary that is of interest to them either academically or professionally, as well as identify their challenge areas and needs. The essay writing exercise was to test the respondents' active knowledge of English lexis while the fill-in-multiple choice test was believed to be suitable to test their passive or receptive knowledge.

The respondents were given one hour for the 20 fill-in multiple choice tests and to write on any of the following essay questions depending on their area of vocational specialization:

- Write an essay on the care and maintenance of a manual typewriter.
- Write an essay on the uses of boiling in cooking processes in your town.
- Describe how you would provide electricity to a newly completed building.

The questions were formed from the following books respectively:

- Aileen, M. Prince (1977). *Walmsley's Commercial Typewriting*. Eighth edition. Great Britain: Pitman Press.
- Johnson, R. O. (1960). *About Your Cookery*. London: Longman.
- Anyakoha, M.W. (2000). *New School Physics for Senior Secondary Schools*. Onitsha: Africana=Fep Publishers Ltd.

3.2. Theoretical Framework

This study is carried out using more of the systemic theory because it holds that the *parole* (performance) is to a large extent, a reflection of *langue* (competence), (de Saussure, 1916). The implication of this is that linguistic behaviour can be more adequately described from "actual" language used. This is why data for analysis of error occurrences were drawn from the "actual" speech situations (written texts). Also, the theory believes in the use of statistical methods in language studies (Berry, 1975:30; Sinclair *et al.* 1970). This is why some statistical methods have been used for the analysis of the study's data. The theory also has socio-cultural relevance for second language learning. Finally, the theory places emphasis on how language functions in the society. The systemic grammarians believe that language is developed as it has functions it serves and structures, which express those functions, in response to the demands made by the society and as a reflection of these demands (Kress, G.R. (ed.), 1976). The theory asserts that language is not only used "to mean" but also "to live" in the society.

Useful insights have also been drawn from different theories such as the traditional and structural theories since there is no model of analysis which discusses lexis exhaustively. Traditional theory is adopted by viewing lexis in terms of referents while structural approach is used by examining lexical items and their inter-lexical sense relations (that is, synonymy, antonymy, polysemy, etc.) and the systemic framework by accounting for the syntagmatic sense relation between lexical items

(that is relation of collocations). This eclectic approach adopted is in line with Aremo, 1997 and Akande, 2003b.

4. Analysis of Data and Discussion of Findings

In the pursuit of the study's objectives, the answers in the filling-in the gaps multiple choice test were analysed to determine the subjects' performance/level of competence in the use of technical registers while their written essays were analysed to determine their errors in continuous writing.

Analysis of the Performance/Level of Competence of Students across Colleges and Subject Areas in the Multiple-Choice Test

The overall performance of the subjects in the three subject areas in colleges A-C in the fill-in multiple choice test is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Overall Performance of Students across Colleges and Subject Areas in the Fill-in Multiple-Choice Test (FMCT)

College	Subject Areas						Overall Scores in Colleges	
	Typewriting		Catering		Electrical			
	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%	Score	%
College A	240	48.0	247	49.4	289	57.8	776	51.7
College B	242	48.2	222	44.4	233	46.6	697	46.5
College C	280	55.8	263	52.6	268	53.6	811	54.0
Overall Score in Subjects	762	50.9	732	48.7	780	52.8		

The results in the table reveal that college A has 240 out of 500 (48.0%) in Typewriting, 247(49.4%) in Catering and 289 (57.8%) in Electrical. The overall score of college A is 776 (51.7%), college B has 697 (46.5%) while college C has 811 (54.0%). The overall scores of colleges A-C across subject aera reveal that Typewriting has overall score of 762 (50.9%), Catering has 732 (48.7%) while that of Electrical is 780 (52.3%), the results suggest that there is no significant influence

of colleges on the performance of learners because college C that has the highest percentage has 54.0%, followed by college A with 51.7% while college B has 46.5%, that is, there is slight difference in their performance. On a general note, one could conclude that the students' performance in the multiple-choice test is below average. The low percentage scores of 51.7%, 46.5%, and 54.0% respectively in the three subject areas confirm this.

4.2. Analysis of Errors in the Respondents' Written Essays

The responses of the students to the essay questions were read through with the aim of identifying the types of lexical errors or deviations in them. In order that meaningful comments could be made on the data, the errors identified in their scripts were arbitrarily categorised into seven (7) types namely:

1. Collocational Error (CE)
2. Duplication Error (DE)
3. Generalisation Error (GE)
4. Similarity Error (SE)
5. Translation Error (TE)
6. Wrong Lexical Choice (WLC)
7. Wrong Word Formation (WWF)

Table 2: Frequency of Errors in the Written Essays

Type of Error	College A		College B		College C		Total		Rank Order
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	
CE	28	42.4	26	39.4	12	18.2	66	100	5
DE	23	39.0	14	23.7	22	37.3	59	100	6
GE	55	32.7	43	25.6	70	41.7	168	100	1
SE	24	23.8	39	38.6	38	37.6	101	100	3
TE	15	27.8	23	42.6	16	29.6	54	100	7
WLC	50	37.6	37	27.8	46	34.6	133	100	2
WWF	26	32.9	38	48.1	15	19.0	79	100	4
Total	221	33.3	220	33.3	219	33.2	660	100	

The results of the data analysis reveal that the students made seven types of errors consistently in their essays. The errors are collocation errors (CE) owing to lack of understanding of lexical sense relation; duplication errors (DE) owing to improper learning; generalization errors (GE) due to lack of good mastery of the register of their specialized areas; similarity errors (SE) resulting from lack of proper understanding or confusion in the use of certain homophones; wrong (or inappropriate) lexical choice (WLC) resulting from improper learning and partial synonymy; translation errors (TE) owing to low level of proficiency and natural problem of bilingual situation and error of wrong word formation (WWF) resulting from the misapplication of morphological processes. The results revealed the

occurrence of the errors in the following decreasing order: GE (168), WLC (133), SE (66), DE (59), and TE (54).

4.2. Discussion of the Major Lexical Problems of Subjects/Respondents of Study

The major lexical problem that can be identified clearly is that of Wrong Lexical Choice (WLC). This is because many of the students just chose options they thought were right by their own level of understanding of the lexical items from the provided options. The following are some of the examples of noticeable deviations or errors committed by the students in both the multiple choice tests and written essays with the erroneous words are put in italics for clarity and easy reference:

Discussion of Examples of Errors in Filling-in Multiple Choice Tests (FMCT)

(a) Wrong lexical choice (WLC) resulting from wrong analogy

E1. Hygiene in the kitchen begins with the *cooker* for many diseases can be caused by dirt carried by him/her.

Some of the respondents chose ‘*cooker*’ instead of ‘cook’ as a result of analogy with such items as ‘barber’ and ‘murderer’, - barb + -er, murder + -er.

Thus, the students thought ‘cooker’ should be the best option. This is an example of misapplication of suffix.

(b) Wrong lexical choice resulting from partial synonymy

E2. It is difficult for anyone to cook well without good and sufficient *kitchen vessels*.

The respondents took ‘vessels’ to be synonymous with ‘utensils’ in all contexts. This is wrong because ‘vessels’ and ‘utensil’ are only synonymous with ‘container’ in some contexts. However, ‘vessels’ and ‘utensils’ are themselves not synonymous, since ‘cooking vessels’ and ‘cooking utensils’ are not the same.

E3. Long cooking may *damage* some vitamins in the food.

Many of the respondents chose ‘damage’ instead of ‘destroy’. It is true that ‘damage’ and ‘destroy’ are synonymous because they both have the same meaning. However, ‘damage’ cannot be used in this context. This is a confirmation that the two words are not interchangeable in all contexts.

E4. It is better to not use oil to *clear* manual machine.

‘Clear’ and ‘clean’ are interchangeable in some other contexts like:

Please clear the table.

Please clean the table.

However, the choice of 'clear' is inappropriate, as it cannot be used in place of 'clean' in that context.

(c) Inappropriate lexical choice (ILC) resulting from improper understanding of antonyms:

- E5. It is economical not to buy more of *non-perishable food* that can be used quickly.
E6. A good house keeper plans ahead, makes a list of what she needs in the house and buys only *perishable foods* in bulk.

Inappropriate choice of 'non-perishable' and 'perishable' in examples 1 and 2, respectively, instead of "perishable" and "non-perishable" reveals the subjects' lack of understanding of the meaning of the lexical items.

(d) Inappropriate lexical choice owing to improper understanding of the lexical sense relations:

- E7. The maintenance of an electric type machine is better left to a *skillful mechanics*.
E8. All spelling, capitalization, and numbering, on a typed script should be *consistently*.

In example 7, the respondents wrongly chose 'skillful' instead of 'skilled'. Even though both lexical items are adjectives, the appropriate one in this context in terms of meaning is 'skilled'. Example 7 is an instance of wrong selection of adverb instead of adjective. The right option our subject could have chosen is 'consistent'. Generally, in the multiple choice tests exercise given to them; the respondents' performance was just average.

2. Discussion of Examples of Errors in the Written Essays of the Subjects of Study:

(i) Collocation Errors (CE):

Nouns and verbs in English usually collocate with some particular prepositions and the knowledge of such nouns and verbs is incomplete without knowing which prepositions usually accompany them. The violations of such collocations, even where intelligibility is not interfered with, mark the usage as a non-standard variety of English. Some examples with this kind of deviation are stated below:

- CE1: Boiling can be *consider by *putting water on the pot and put on the fire.
CE2: Typewriter must be clean by machine oil.

In CE1 and CE2, there are prepositional errors as 'on' is used instead of 'in' in CE1 while in CE2 'by' is used instead of 'with'. The examples here show improper mastery of prepositions that collocate with expressions of place and time in English.

(ii) Duplication Errors (DE):

The deviations identified here involve double itemization of lexical items where the second item is unnecessary. Some examples of this kind of error are itemized below:

DE1: We should keep a *type writer machine* in a good condition.

DE2: ... like primary school, secondary school or *higher institution school*

DE3: I will take the wire to *the another* pole that *have electricity.

In DE1, “machine” is unnecessary at all. Also in DE2, “school” should not have been written after “institution” again. In DE3, error is that of unnecessary repetition of definite article ‘the’.

(iii) Generalization Error (GE):

The deviations identified here involves non-specificity of key items in the respondents’ academic field. Owing to improper learning, some of our subjects were more comfortable using general terms than specific ones. This may be due to their limited knowledge of the specific forms required for explicitness. Examples of such errors are listed below:

GE1: type **machine* *need a good operator.

GE2: what you want *to do on manual machine you *do there because the machine is very *easily to *practice.

The word ‘machine’ which the respondents used in GE1-2 above is a general term used to cover any mechanical device with parts working together to apply power. Also, words like ‘to do’: instead of “to type”; “do” instead of “type” and “operator” for “typist” are words that subsume a wide variety of items and they should be avoided where specific items are more appropriate.

(iv) Similarity Errors (SE):

The errors in this category could be referred to as sound similarity errors and there are two kinds of these errors in the data. The first one shows that the writers lacked proper understanding or were confused in the use of certain homophonous words, for example:

SE1: Boiling * makes tough food become soft to it (instead of “eat”).

SE2: We must clean it at *list one’s in a week (instead of “at least once”).

The second kind is one in which the words used are not necessarily the homophones of the intended ones, but they still sounded similar to the writers perhaps owing to their inaccurate pronunciation or lack of familiarity with the words, e.g.

SE3: Manual machine is the machine *will *used when will go for training (instead of “we”).

(v) Translation Errors (TE):

The following sentences are examples that contain errors and deviations that are due to translation from a first language (Yoruba) to the target or second language (English):

TE 1: You need to service it month to month (instead of: once a month or monthly).

TE 2: Boiling *make food cook fast (kiakia) (instead of very fast).

The errors and deviations above perhaps arise because of two reasons. First, the transfer of Yoruba concepts into English at the incipient stage or primitive level of L2 acquisition, the data reveal the inability of students to effectively transfer some concepts in Yoruba into English based on their proficiency in English.

(vi) Wrong Lexical Choice (WLC):

The following examples are those of inappropriate or wrong lexical choice owing to improper learning and partial synonymy.

WLC 1: It is good to handle our machine with extra careful (adjective instead of noun: care)

WLC 2: Boiling is very useful in cooking many meals (instead of foods).

WLC 3: It is better to use oil to clear manual machine (instead of clean).

In WLC 1, the writer used “careful” (adjective) instead of “care” (noun). Examples WLC 2 is that which results from partial synonymy. In WLC 2, meals are taken to be synonymous with foods whereas meal and only synonymous only in some contexts like:

What time are you having your meal?

What time are you having your food?

However, they are not synonymous in all contexts because we can say:

Can I take you out for a meal?

But we cannot say:

*Can I take you out for a food?

WLC 5 is another example of partial synonymy. Our writer used “clear” instead of “clean” which is the most appropriate here. While both words connote removing something from a place or something; their exact full meanings are different. “Clean” means “to remove dirt from something by rubbing or washing”, while clear means “to make a surface or place emptier or tidier by removing things that cover it” according to the *Longman’s Dictionary of Contemporary English*.

(vii) Wrong Word Formation (WWF):

The errors in this category are the unacceptable lexical creations resulting from the misapplication of morphological processes. Some of the errors found in our data are listed below:

WWF 1: It is importance for *typer* to place fingers well on the machine.

WWF 2: Care of the machine when you are *typeing*.

WWF 3: A good electric *type machine* is good in *typewritten office*.

WWF 1 and 2 above are instances of misapplication of the suffixes –ance, -er and –ing which are all conversion suffixes. The origin of this problem is not only morphological but syntactic. This is what is referred to as the “system of polarity” (Muir 1972: 137). The wrong formations above are formed as a result of analogy with lexical items as acceptance, barber and dyeing, that is:

barb + -er

dye + -ing

In like manner, the students combined prefixes with the lexical items.

type + -er

type + -ing

WWF 3 is simply errors of unacceptable lexical creations which are due to the writer’s creative ability or improper learning as a result of their level of proficiency in English. The writer wrote “type machine” instead of “typewriter” while in WWF 6, the writer wrote “typewritten office” instead of “typing pool”. Our subjects might have thought that if a person who writes is a “writer” and one who reads is a “reader”; then, any person who types must be a “typer”.

5. Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, some lexical and grammatical problems that hinder adequate communicative competence of technical college students in Osun State have been examined. It has been established that the students made seven types of errors consistently in their scripts and did not perform up to expectation in the competence scores. Hence, their level of competence and the degree of difficulty of the errors identified have been established. One is therefore justified to conclude that the technical college students’ level of proficiency in English is low. They also lack proper understanding of most English lexical items relevant to their academic needs and their communicative competence is basically low.

The study opines that, as a matter of fact, the technical college students in Osun State, and indeed in Nigeria as a whole, need to be able to communicate effectively in social and everyday situation and most especially and specifically, in their areas of specialization or chosen career or profession. They require an understanding of lexical items usually found or used in the registers of their chosen areas of specialization or profession. They should also be able to use them in different contexts appropriately.

Some of the students who did well in the FMCT could be said to have a receptive knowledge of a wider range of technical registers in their specialized areas. However, their productive use of these registers could be regarded as limited on the

basis of the study's findings. This is one of the areas that need greater attention. Based on the results of the study, the following recommendations are offered:

There should be specific goals in the teaching of English at the technical college level. Among these, students should be able to write English texts that are grammatically correct, properly punctuated and effectively organised, to understand and communicate using a variety of notions and linguistic functions based on everyday situations. Accordingly, all the technical college graduates are expected to develop good proficiency level of English, which will enable them to communicate effectively in the society.

There should be qualified English teachers in all the technical college. It was observed during the course of this study that all the three technical colleges of study have guidance and counsellors teaching English, none of them has a professional English teacher. The lack of qualified English teachers in these colleges could have contributed to the students' lexico-grammatical problems.

Also, writers of English textbooks for teaching students should make sure the books they write make adequate provision for an up-to-date-knowledge of basic linguistic forms and technical registers relevant to the students' academic and professional needs. These English textbooks must be such that are written by ESP specialists and they must be well graded and above all, the content must cover as many vocations as possible. Teachers should not only be concerned with students understanding the meaning of words, but also being able to use them appropriately in all contexts.

Students should be encouraged and taught to be using the dictionaries, as this will also help them to develop vocabulary in English. This is important for the technical colleges students as indeed they are for other ESL learners. The dictionary is the repository for the lexicon of a language. Its effective use will definitely help in overcoming some of the challenges that have been revealed in this study. Better still, the inter-lexical relations which are important may be compiled for the students to suit their line of education and level.

Teachers should also encourage their students to read a lot of literature written in English on relevant technical issues or vocations that will be of interest to them since vocabulary are better acquired through reading. Having come across most of the words through previous reading, they will be able to combine words correctly.

Finally, the government, at the three levels (that is, Local, State and Federal) must assist in bringing the aforementioned suggestions into reality in the technical colleges if the goals of technical education as stated in *NPE* Section 5: 34-25 must be achieved. This is because English is the language of instruction and technology. Provisions of competent professional English teachers, relevant English textbooks, well equipped libraries, organization of workshops for teachers and students alike will go a long way to improve the students' English and communicative competence. Thereafter, on graduation from college, they will be useful to themselves and the society, and by so doing, Nigeria as a country will benefit from them technologically and economically.

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