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OVERCOMING ENGLISH LANGUAGE BARRIERS AMONG FOOD VENDORS SERVING IN SELECTED RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN LAGOS STATE

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ABSTRACT
English language barriers is a common phenomenon in rural areas. That informed the motive for this study that focused on the overcoming English language barriers among food vendors of rural secondary schools in Lagos State. The study was carried out in three (3) Local Government Areas of Lagos State which are Epe, Ikorodu and Badagry. A total of 60 respondents were sampled and retrieved for analysis through a multistage sampling procedure. Questionnaire was used to collect information on personal characteristics of the food vendors, causes of English language barriers among food vendors and ways of overcoming language barriers among food vendors of rural secondary schools. Data collected were analyzed using frequency count and simple percentage. The study revealed that lack of mastery of English language (with mean score of 1.46) is the most important cause of English language barrier. One hypothesis was formulated to determine the relationship between selected personal characteristics of food vendors of rural secondary schools and their ways of overcoming English Language barriers. The analysed result shows that age, religion and sex with exception to marital status are all significantly related to the ways of overcoming English language barriers with p-value 0.002, 0.004 and 0.000 respectively. It was therefore concluded that there should be constant practice of English language speaking among food vendors, while adoption of native or mother tongue language to ease the communication flow should be prioritized.

Keywords: English language Barriers, Food Vendors, Secondary Schools, Rural Areas

Introduction

Communication is a very powerful tool for effectiveness in mundane activities. Every living organism relate with one another by communicating. Communication becomes effective if the message or information being communicated is comprehended and can generate appropriate response. The lack of understanding of language of communication can bring about barriers to effective communication. The use of language that is understood by a sufficiently large number of people is necessary for profound communication to be possible. This is in line with Bayford (2023) who stated that language matters more than many may think when it comes to global trade. When trading partners use similar languages, trade is likely to be seventy-two (72) percent higher on an average than when trading partners are linguistically distant. Language similarities between countries can boil down to a mutual official language, commonly spoken language, or a shared native language. Language differences between vendors, students and teachers can boil down to a non-mutual use of language, which can lead to poor communication or ineffective communication created due to Language barriers.

Language barriers deals with aspects of language use that make it difficult to understand speeches and utterances. This could be because of a variety of factors like differences in educational background, level of literacy and locality of the language users. Language or communication barrier generally occurs between sellers, buyers, vendors and personnel when a difference in the native language is present, or the seller has language disabilities. This causes misinterpretation, and is a growing problem in African societies particularly in places where English is not the native language of users and participants.

Ashley (2023) pointed out that language barriers are more common than many people realize because they exist in several different forms. These barriers can even occur between people who speak the same tongue, due to their different levels of knowledge and proficiency.

English language barrier has been seen to pose challenges to individuals when communicating or when been communicated to in English, often as a non-native language, hindering effective expression and understanding (Crystal, 2003). In Nigeria, where English is the official language, barriers can arise from limited proficiency, cultural differences, or inadequate language skills (Ogundele & Olatoye, 2017).

Food vendors play a vital role in secondary schools, providing students and staff with accessible and affordable meals. In Nigeria, many students rely on school vendors for their daily nutrition, making them a crucial part of the education system.

Food Vendors can serve as source of food security, economic empowerment, conveniences in food availability and provision of needed nutrients. As means of Food Security, vendors help ensure students have regular meals, reducing hunger and improving concentration in class. As Economic Empowerment, Food vending provides income opportunities for vendors thereby contributing to local economic growth. Furthermore, food vendors offer quick and easy meal options that fits busy student schedules while making food conveniently available to access. Ultimately, when managed properly, vendors can provide balanced and nutritious meals, supporting students' health and well-being.

In rural Lagos State, food vendors are crucial in providing meals to secondary school students, often serving as a primary source of nutrition. However, many vendors face significant challenges communicating effectively with students, teachers, and staff due to limited English proficiency in the primary language of instruction in Nigerian schools. This language barrier can lead to misunderstandings, meal errors, and compromised student satisfaction (Ogundele & Olatoye, 2017). For instance, vendors may struggle to understand dietary needs, leading to meals that don't meet students' requirements, potentially affecting their health and academic performance. The multilingual context of Nigeria, with multiple languages spoken across regions, exacerbates these challenges. In Lagos State, vendors

navigate English, Yoruba, and other local languages, highlighting the need for strategies to overcome English language barriers.

Food vendors in rural Lagos State secondary schools face significant English language barriers, compromising their ability to provide quality services, meet students' dietary needs, and maintain a positive reputation, ultimately affecting students' health and academic performance. It is against this background that this research intended to proffer solutions to the following research questions.

Research Questions

i. What are the personal characteristics of the food vendors in selected rural secondary schools?
ii. What are the causes of English language barriers among food vendors in selected rural secondary schools?
iii. What are the ways of overcoming English language barriers among food vendors in selected rural secondary schools?

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study is to evaluate the possibilities of overcoming English language barriers among food vendors serving in selected rural secondary schools in Lagos state, while the specific objectives are:

1. To identify the personal characteristics of the food vendors in selected rural secondary schools
2. To identify the causes of English language barriers among food vendors in selected rural secondary schools
3. To determine the ways of overcoming English language barriers among food vendors in selected rural secondary schools

Research Hypothesis.

Only one hypothesis is postulated for the study.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of food vendors in rural secondary school and their ways of overcoming English language barriers

Methodology

The study was carried out in rural areas of Lagos state. There are four (4) rural Local Government Areas in Lagos State, out of which 75% were randomly selected for this study These include Epe, Badagry and Ikorodu The population of the study includes all food vendors in all secondary schools in rural areas of Lagos State for which the study was conducted. This amounted to one hundred and forty-nine (149), out of which forty percent (40%) was purposively sampled from Model Colleges and upgrade Secondary Schools situated in rural areas, (due to the fact that staff and students in these schools usually communicate in English), to get an approximate of sixty (60) respondents sampled from the population. Reliability and validity tests were carried out on the instrument. A test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument, which gave reliability and validity coefficient of 0.74 and 0.76 respectively. Questionnaires were used to collect information. Data collected were analyzed using frequency count and simple percentage. The formulated hypothesis was analyzed with the use chi square analysis to establish relationship between the personal characteristics of food vendors and their ways of overcoming English language barriers

Results and Discussion of Findings

Personal Characteristics of Respondents

The personal characteristics of respondents were presented in the section, Table1 represent a tabular presentation of the personal characteristics of respondents. The table below shows that the males were percentage of 15% while their females counterpart were 85% of the total respondents. This implies that most of the respondents were women which means that they (females) experience more of language barriers. Jean-Marc (2018) in support of this

finding established that a very large majority of food vendors are women with harder sales conditions and obstacles being faced than men.

Also, the table shows that 11 respondents (18.3%) are below the age of 30 years, 29 (48.3%) of them are between the age of 31- 45years, 16 (26.7%) of them are between the age of 46-60years while 4 (6.7%) are above the age of 60 years respectively. The result of age analysis shows that majority of the respondents are still within the active age range. On marital status of the respondents, it is revealed that 17 (28.3%) of the respondents are single, 31 (51.7) were married, 5 (8.3%) are divorced, while 7 (11.7%) of the respondents are widows, respectively. This implies that majority of the food vendors are responsible as they were married men and women. The result on religion of the respondents shows that 28 (46.7%) of the respondents are Muslims, 24 (40%) of the respondents are Christians, while 8 (13.3%) of them are traditional worshippers. On the level of education of the respondents it was revealed that 29 (48.3%) of the respondents had no formal education, 17 (28.3%) of the respondents went to primary school, while 14 (23.3%) of them were to secondary school certificate holders. This implies that most of the respondents had no formal education.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents' Personal Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	09	15
	Female	51	85
Age	< 30	11	18.3
	31-45	29	48.3
	46-60	16	26.7
	Above 60	4	6.7
Marital status	Single	17	28.3
	Married	31	51.7
	Divorced	05	8.3
	Widow	07	11.7
Religion	Islam	28	46.7
	Christian	24	40
	Traditional	08	13.3
Formal Education Attended	No formal Education	29	48.3
	Primary .school	17	28.3
	Secondary. School	14	23.3
Total		60	100

Source field work 2025

Causes of English language barriers among food vendors

The causes of English language barrier among food vendors were presented in Table 2. It was revealed that “lack of mastery of English language’, “Limited access to English Language training and education”; as well as “Educational level as a barrier in communication” were the most important causes of English language barriers among food vendors in the study area. These causes were ranked 1st, 2nd and 3rd with weighted mean score of 1.46, 1.43 and 1.35 respectively in the distribution. It must be noted that Manner of the communication and Cultural Difference was the least ranked cause in the distribution with 0.85 mean score.

Table 2: Distribution of Respondents on causes of English language barriers among food vendors in rural secondary schools

S/N	Statements	High Level Cause		Low level cause		Not a cause		WMS	Rank
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1	Educational level as a barrier in communication	31	51.7	19	31.7	10	16.7	1.35	3rd
2	Physical language disabilities as a cause of barriers	18	30	24	40	18	30	1.00	7th
3	Technical expressions as a cause of barriers	23	38.3	14	23.3	23	38.3	1.00	7th
4	Lack of mastery of English language	34	56.7	20	33.3	06	10.0	1.46	1st
5	Manner of the communication and Cultural Difference	16	26.7	19	31.7	25	41.7	0.85	11th
6	Economic and institutional status	15	25	33	55	12	20	1.05	5th
7	Psychological barriers/low confidence/shyness	14	23.3	30	50	16	26.7	0.97	9th
8	Mother tongue influence	21	35	17	28.3	22	36.7	1.27	4th
9	Grammatical errors as a barrier in communication	15	25	31	51.7	14	23.3	1.02	6th
10	Use of Complex terms as a barrier between vendors and buyers	13	21.7	31	51.7	16	26.7	0.95	10th
11	Limited access to English Language training and education	32	53.3	22	36.7	06	10.0	1.43	2nd

Source field work 2025

Ways of overcoming English language barriers among food vendors

The result of respondents' ways of overcoming English language barriers is presented in Table 3. It was observed that the statement, "An ideal problem solving mentality was ranked 1st with a weighted mean score of 3.04. This is in line with Ashley (2023) who suggests that all language barriers in the workplace or everyday life are challenging, but overcoming them is entirely possible if one can select the right approach and adopt a problem-solving mentality. Adoption of constant practice was ranked 2nd means in the distribution on ways of overcoming English language barriers with a weighted mean score of 3.03. It should be noted that constant practice enables language learners to assimilate their acquired knowledge, integrating a variety of cognitive skills at once to produce oral communication. In line with this, Nishanthi (2018) opines that to learn English language requires constant practice and patience. "Using simple forms of communication" was ranked 3rd with an average weighted mean score of 3.02. Tackling fear as a way of overcoming barriers is ranked 4th with an average weighted mean

score of 2.87. This assertion is true because "most language barriers are overcome-able simply by making attempts and avoiding the fear of mistakes" (Ashley 2023). Meanwhile, at the 5th position is improving proficiency as a way of breaking out of the barriers therein. Introducing cultural content, as well as using native language in eliminating barriers such as mother tongue was ranked 6th and 7th respectively in the distribution with weighted mean scores of 2.73 and 2.63. The implication of this is that when the usage of English language becomes a problem to vendors and buyers, using mother tongue automatically becomes the way out in overcoming such barriers.

At the lowest rung of the distribution is the use of "visual and symbolic aid in overcoming barriers" which are ranked 8th with an average weighted mean score of 2.63.

Table 3: Distribution of Ways of overcoming English language barriers among food vendors in rural secondary schools

S/N	Statements	Never		Seldom		Sometimes		Often		Always		WMS	Rank
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1	Improving proficiency as a way of overcoming problems	4	6.7	4	6.7	14	23.3	17	28.3	21	35	2.78	5th
2	Using simple forms of communication	0	0	6	10	13	21.7	15	25	26	43.3	3.02	3rd
3	Using native language in eliminatory barriers	4	6.7	8	13.3	12	20	17	28.3	19	31.7	2.65	7th
4	Introducing cultural content in overcoming barriers	10	16.7	1	1.7	11	18.3	11	18.3	27	45	2.73	6th
5	Tackling fear as a way of overcoming barriers	3	5	6	10	14	23.3	10	16.7	27	45	2.87	4th
6	Visual & symbolic aid in overcoming barriers	5	8.3	9	15	13	21.7	9	15	24	40	2.63	8th
7	Constant practice	0	0	8	13.3	10	16.7	14	23.3	28	46.7	3.03	2nd
8	An ideal problem solving mentality	8	13.3	0	0	7	11.7	13	21.7	32	53.3	3.04	1st

Source Field work 2025

Test of Hypothesis

Ho: Ho: There is no significant relationship between the personal characteristics of food vendors in rural secondary school and their ways of overcoming English language barriers

In Table 4 below, the test of hypothesis on the relationship between the personal characteristics of food vendors of rural secondary schools and their ways of overcoming English language barriers show that age, religion and sex of the respondents are significantly related to the ways of overcoming English language barriers. It implies that individuals of a particular age range among food vendors could not show required dexterity in overcoming English language barriers. This result is against the finding of Johnson, *et al* 2011, Mendez *et al,* 2002, Verhaeghen, 2003) who postulate that older adults tend to have larger vocabularies and greater lexical knowledge compared to younger adults. Similarly, individuals of a particular religion had more challenges in ways of overcoming English language barriers in the study area. Furthermore, the female folks are more in food vendor business than their male counterpart. The result shows an implication that the challenges of overcoming English language barriers among food vendors of rural secondary school are more of the female folks. This finding is supported by Jean-Marc (2018) who opined that a very large majority of vendors are women with harder sales conditions and obstacles being faced than men.

Table 4 Test of relationship between the personal characteristics of food vendors of rural secondary schools and their ways of overcoming English language barriers

Variable	x^2	Df	p-value	Decision
Age	11.034	3	0.002	Significant
Religion	12.301	2	0.004	Significant
Sex	10.171	1	0.000	Significant
Marital status	12.125	3	0.6713	Not Significant

Conclusion

Language of communication is a very important means of reaching out to others for most of our livelihood activities. On this premise, this study investigated the issue of overcoming English Language barriers among food vendors in rural areas of Lagos State. The study established that English language barriers exist among food vendors in rural secondary schools in Lagos State as it found out that lack of mastery of English language is the most important cause of English language barrier. It is a known fact that language is a tool and vehicle for communication, and as such, efforts must be made to totally eradicate barriers that serve as roadblocks to a clear, smooth, efficient, effective and interactive communication. This study also established that an ideal problem solving mentality as well as constant practice are very much necessary towards overcoming English language barriers among food vendors of rural secondary schools in Lagos State.

Recommendations

In line with the findings, the following were recommended:

1. Constant language practice should be a norm, tradition and habit in people in order to ensure language mastery and proficiency.
2. There should be public enlightenment and awareness on how to achieve effective communication through language programs, seminars and workshops.
3. There should be an adoption of native or mother tongue language to ease the communication flow.

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