

# Investigating Problems Associated With The Pronunciation Of English Sounds in Selected Secondary Schools In Sierra Leone. Case study: Makeni City.

**Gabriel Maxwell Turay**

Lecturers At The Ernest Bai Koroma University Of Science And Technology Port Loko Campus  
Curriculum And Teaching Department

## ABSTRACT

This study looks on the issue of students of various linguistic origins having difficulty pronouncing English sounds in secondary school. In other words, to identify the troublesome sounds and the underlying causes of these issues. Then, develop methods that will benefit the fifty students who will be chosen from the Primary and Secondary levels. Thirty Junior High School students and twenty Senior High School students (ten from each school) were randomly selected from the five schools included in the research. Additionally, third-year English instructors were chosen to receive the printed surveys.

Observation, audio recordings, and a preplanned questionnaire were used to compile the data. According to the results, most students struggled with the consonant sound contrasts, as well as the pronunciation of English vowels with several possible pronunciations (such as /z/ and /O/, /s/ and /O/, and /s/ and /i/).

The study's findings suggest that many variables work against students' mastery of English pronunciation, including exposure to the language at home, linguistic differences between English and the students' native tongue, and spelling and pronunciation variations within the language.

## INTRODUCTION

Many individuals all around the globe have a burning desire to improve their command of the English language and to be able to do so in a more formal context. English is not only the medium of instruction in schools in Sierra Leone, but also the official language of the country. Once again, it is considered to be the most widely spoken and influential language in the world. Therefore, it is the responsibility of every student to take all necessary measures to reduce the frequency with which mistakes are made. Making use of Talking to one another in English ought to be treated as routine as using any of our native tongues. A speaker must be unafraid to voice their mind and must exude confidence. Studies have shown that non-native speakers of English make more systematic than random mistakes while using the language. It has been shown that Arab pupils have difficulty pronouncing sounds like /v/, /p/, and /n/ (Moosa 1972; Homeidan 1984). To a similar extent, speakers of languages other than Krio, Mende, Themne, Hulimba, etc. have difficulty pronouncing specific sounds such as /o/, /ch/, /dz/, and the like in Sierra

Leone. Researchers have shown that there is a pattern to the pronunciation mistakes made by students of English from a variety of cultural backgrounds. According to their findings, non-native speakers of English have the most trouble with sound substitution, or replacing sounds that aren't present in their original language with sounds that are close to them in the location of articulation, while speaking English. Some people, for instance, substitute /b/ for /p/ and /O/ for a. The information in this study comes from surveys administered to students at the five largest secondary institutions in the Makeni City Municipality. Some of these institutions have been around for almost half a century, while others have been open for thirty years or more. The goal of these classroom environments is to help students become fluent in the target language, English. As a result, students' enrollment in these institutions allowed them to get instruction in the four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening). Despite these efforts, many students still struggle with English pronunciation since it often conflicts with their original language. The aforementioned educational institutions are listed below:

Benevolent Islamic Secondary 1979

Saint Francis Secondary School – 1958

Saint Joseph Secondary School – 1964

Birch memorial Secondary School – 1968

S.L.M.B Secondary School – 1980

### Statement of the Problem

Through a close observation of secondary school pupils speaking, the research noted that many pupils confuse the pronunciation of some set of words e.g. most of the pupils pronounced English sounds which are not accounted for in the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), instead they pronounce the sounds /o/ in 'this: It was also observed that pupils could not differentiate between some vowel sounds which have more than one pronunciation e.g. the vowel in 'mat' and 'mate'. The research thus spent many days going around the selected schools and closely observed the pupils, as they on daily basis, invitation of some English sounds, as some were unable to distinguish between consonant sounds and vowel sounds, misplacement of articles, substitution of one word for another, overgeneralization and the like.

### AIM (S) AND OBJECTIVE (S) OF THE STUDY

To find out the problems associated with the pronunciation of English of English sounds among secondary school pupils

To find out suitable techniques and strategies that would help the pupils to speak English with better pronunciation.

To outline how to minimize mispronunciation errors that might hinder effective communication.

To determine the proficiency level of pupils in speaking English at a given class

## RESEARCH QUESTION

The study is limited to the five Secondary School mentioned in the above introduction as a case study. It seeks to examine the problems associated with the pronunciation of English sounds among secondary school pupils who have English as their target language. In undertaking this research, the researcher faced numerous problems and difficulties ranging from the unavailability of relevant materials to the irregularity of earning funds. The limited their lessons. The researcher was also challenged to explain what the research is all about. The risk involved in using vehicles and motorcycles from one point to another was inevitable.

Lastly, the researcher was obsessed with a psychological effort of losing a very key personality mentor, caregiver, sponsor, and mother, at the time of researching.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, the background of the data is been collected from five selected secondary schools in Makeni City, northern Sierra Leone. The data was collected through interviews, written and oral tests, observation and with the help of a structured questionnaire to be answered specially by teachers of English Language in those selected schools.

### Population and Sample of the Study

The original population of this study was all the pupils learning English language in the selected secondary schools. The study sample contained two parts, i.e. the Junior Secondary School's (JSS) and the Senior Secondary School's (SSS). From the background of the study, it is evident that the five school selected were of JSS and SSS status. Thus the researchers targeted both sectors by selecting 30 pupils from JSS and 20 pupils at SSS. For the staff, 15 teachers were selected from each sector. The teachers selected to the questionnaires on the exact sounds which the pupils mispronounced and the exact reasons for the pupils to the facing such mispronunciation problems. In doing this, the research employed the descriptive and the statistical methods as well as the analytical method. As we know too well, the, the descriptive researches attempt to descriptive researches attempt to describe the problem as it is i.e. they describe the phenomenon and explain it. Then offer the recommendation for solving the problem. Again, the analytical method was used in this study, to test the hypotheses of the study by using appropriate statistical procedures.

## Tools of Data Collection

As it is known that the tool of any research work is any instrument the researcher uses for collecting the required data for the study. There are many types of tools used in the field of Observation

The primary method used in this study was observation. The researcher conducted in-class interviews with the students to collect information regarding the frequency and causes of mistakes. The class spoke about some of the students' favorite mathematical subjects. Examples include students' first days of school, how to play a favorite game, a personal narrative, an interesting anecdote, and so on. The researcher took notes during this time about any sounds the students had trouble pronouncing, any sounds they substituted for something closer to their own in terms of place of articulation, and any other interesting findings that emerged from the students' efforts.

It was hypothesized that students at these institutions would say "tank" for "thank," "tink" for "thought," "wit" for "with," "tin" for "thing," etc. The majority of the students showed genuine enthusiasm and interest in using English, and as they did so, the researcher took thorough notes on any mistakes they made. The majority of the students, and particularly the Krio speakers, were found to pronounce the letter "t" rather than the letter "e," suggesting that the "e" sound is unfamiliar to their articulators. As a result, the Krio words tank, tink, tin, and wit were spoken. Students' difficulties pronouncing some English vowels were also noted. For example, some students pronounced /ai/ instead of /i/ in terms like "infinite" and "service," while others said /ei/ instead of /:/ in words like "also" and "fall." Pronunciation errors in the same sounds were examined by listening to recorded versions of a certain number of phrases. It's worth noting that tape recording makes it possible to play back sounds as many times as necessary. Teachers were given questionnaires to fill out on their students' pronunciation in order to confirm whether or not the target sounds were being spoken correctly.

## REFERENCES

Akande, A.T. (2005). The pronunciation problems in the English of some Yoruba

Learners Retrieved from *3U1 T* <http://www.hkjtefl.org/2005-Akande-yoruba.pdf> *3U1 T*

Alkhuli, M.A (1083). English as a foreign Language. Ph.p Dissertation, king abdulAzaz public Library.

Brown, H.D (200) principles of Language learning and Teaching (4<sup>th</sup> ed.) longman:

*P P*

Homidan, A.H. (1984)/ Utilizing the theory of Articulatory setting in the Teaching of Pronunciation to Saudi Students learning English as a second language. Doctoral Dissertation, king fahad public Library.

Jones, D., Roach, P.J., & Hartman, J. (1997) Daniel Jones English Pronunciation Dictionary /915<sup>th</sup> ed.)