

Behind closed doors: Perceptions of English Language Teaching (ELT) and the development of English at the Department of English, Université Félix Houphouët Boigny, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa

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Abstract: English language teaching has been gathering some momentum in formal and informal education worldwide, for some time now. In higher education, particularly, it offers a forum for the dialogue of cultures and civilizations which is, nowadays, a necessity to reckon with in this world gone global. However, the 'predicament' of English at the English Department, the sanctuary of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), commands attention in a particular way. In a sense, one is empirically justified to say that regardless public pronouncements of actors, the outcome of English education hardly lives up to expectations, because of the prevailing ambiguous and mixed attitudes of major parties. Through the study of major actors' perceptions in the process of English education, attempts were made to shed light on the issue by way of allowing for a better grasp of this phenomenon. The data showed that the use of English as a language was seriously constrained. It turned out that, in order to improve the outcome of EFL, in a significant way, especially language use wise in social discourse, a new didactic contract toward prompting and consolidating a paradigm shift was in order.

Keywords: *perceptions, attitudes, instruction, learning, inadequation, didactics, and paradigm*

Introduction

*"Give me the bag" said a sophomore to his teacher. "Come on guy, we've just seen the lesson
"Expressing polite request," replied a member of the team of teachers that has just facilitated the
grammar class. "Sir, we are not in class, now," said the student to his defense, after giving a wry
grin*

This incident is telling in more than one way. In the first place, accuracy should be cared for only in the classroom environment. In the second place, this may also mean that errors should be overlooked outside the classroom. Away from any wrangling over what to make of this statement, one thing seems clear: there is a disconnection of the classroom from the outside world, at least perceptually speaking, when it comes to the use of the foreign language.

Years of life experience as an instructor at the English Department have helped construe flairs and hunches, which have been nurtured and consolidated by a number of indiscretions, moves or pronouncements that had been shapeless, then. The student's statement brought everything back full circle. Memories of saying, deeds, behaviors that seem to be in line with this statement got ignited. In a sense, this statement sent bright signals - preconceived ideas or views - about what English is, on one hand, and also what the whole business of English education connotes. In sense, this incident may be likened with the tip of an iceberg. This, therefore, prompted me to wanting to take a further step toward exploring the

submerged part. In other words, what are perceptions people hold on both English and English education at the Department of English?

Defining perception seems hard to achieve as it has come to mean a number of things to a number of scholars: assumptions (e.g., Victori & Lockhart, 1995), mini-theories (e.g., Hosenfeld, 2003), self-representational systems, conceptions of learning (e.g., Rust, 1994), or again hunches and self-concepts (e.g., Bernat & Gvozdenko, 2005). This raises the issue that MacIntyre, Mackinnon and Clement (2009) refers to as "the naming problem," or proliferation of concepts. In a number of fields of study, including education, all the preceding have often been terms as personal philosophies. That's why concepts of this type are often regarded as the "Building block of epistemology," (Goldman, 1986, p.2). It is undeniable that 'perception' has been assigned some variations and multifarious substance over time, however, in this study, as a working definition, it was understood as views or assumptions that the major stakeholders, teachers and students often brought to English education.

Literature often points to an egg-chicken like argument when it comes to perceptions and beliefs. Beliefs are often pictured as spillover effect of perceptions and vice versa. In any case, a number of scholars have used them interchangeably (Altan, 2006; Gahin, 2000; Saur & Saur, 2000). Owing to this, there was an undertone of beliefs, even though the major concept put forward was perception.

New understandings on how foreign languages are best acquired have stressed the use of language , which is why approaches, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Competence –based Language teaching (CBLT) that emphasize the development of communicative competence, as a buttress and a catalyst for mental competence, have been gaining prominence. Yet, English, as a spoken language, lacks in visibility at the English Department, because it is seldom, if not, never used for and/or in social discourses. Further, it is hard to establish a link between academic records and the quality of language used by most learners, because it is often the case that a student holding excellent grades in English is hard put to make two good sentences on end in a social discourse inside the classroom, let alone to achieve that outside the classroom.

Studies on perceptions in Cote d'Ivoire are still in their infancy. To the best of my knowledge, formal research on perceptions regarding the Why and Wherefores of the use or non-use of English as a foreign language is nascent. As I set out to broach this issue, a number of questions that begged for answers, read as follows:

- 1) What is the scope of perceptions of major actors regarding English and its education?
- 2) What has 'speaking' come up with in the panorama of English Education, as a result of those views, at the Department of English?
- 3) What foci to operate in order to rehabilitate English as a language of communication at the Department of English?

Beside collateral considerations, my aim, thus, was to look into the views that major parties held when it comes to English education, in general, and the "Speaking" skill, that is the actual use of English, in particular. It was expected that answers to these questions would shed light on this exacting issue prevalent at the Department of English, in particular.

In the discussion that follows, I reviewed the literature germane to central issues that were brought to bear in the space of this study, namely the weight of language production, on one hand, and perceptions, on the other, in the process of English education in particular.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section of the study I reviewed aspects of language production, particularly oral use, and its role in language learning, implying conscious efforts in the process (Krashen, 1987). I also concerned myself with perceptions from various standpoints, including their nature, origin and impact on learning outcome. It was hoped that these discussions would help illuminate the contours of the study and provide means to have a better grasp of the essence of the research project.

1.1. Oral use of language or language interactions

From a Vygotskian perspective, language interactions is both a sociocultural event which is the platform from which concepts are first presented at the inter-personal level, then processed at the intrapsychological level where things are usually personalized/appropriated, after being validated. Therefore, social discourse largely contributes to human development, including language development (Vygotsky, 1978). Further, it is a widely shared idea among socioculturalists that using language empowers the user in terms of sociocultural and sociolinguistic awareness of language use and usage (Ohta, 2000, Lantolf, 2002)

Takashima & Ellis (1999) have it that conversational interactions much more than drill of grammatical structures largely contribute to developing the syntax of a foreign language (For more on the issue also see Larsen-Freeman, 2003; Gass, 2007). On another note, Speech production interacts with speech perception during conversational interactions, as learners engage in a psychologically authentic practice of the language – meaningful use of the language to serve own realistic purposes in a symbiosis of conditions of use and practice (Segalowitz, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2003), which may result in a number of benefits to the learner, intakes wise. Similarly, conversational interactions allow for noticing forms of language, including various subsystems (Izumi, 2002; Swain, 2005). In a sense, van Lier (2001) forwarded the same idea through the concept of “affordance.” His contention is that that language use makes it possible for the user to become aware of the linguistic environment of utterances and linguistic forms that manifest them. In the same line of thinking, Rivers (1994) says,

Comprehending a message is not merely attending to a stream of sounds and imposing on it some idiosyncratic structure of meaning: a highly complex structured system is involved that has existence apart from the particular listener or speaker and which is known to varying degrees to both (p. 81)

Language use in real life conversations for language learners appear to be an indispensable tool to reckon with, as it allows for rehearsing already known forms or becoming aware of new ones that one got exposed to, including, according emergentists, new patterns that are co-shaped by co-speakers in the process of co-creating meaningful patterns (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008; Carer, 2004; Hopper, 1998).

Scholars also contend that the social participation of individuals to linguistic transactions (e.g., conversations) allows for accessing language systems, functions, modalities, communicative strategies (Ellis & Larsen-Freeman 2006b; Long, 1996). In sum, language production is highly instrumental in forwarding accuracy and fluency, including performance competence. Additionally, language production reinforces the learner’s interlanguage micro and macro systems gotten fine-tuned thus, thanks to the on-going readjustments triggered by numerous elaborations, input modifications, topic nominations or re-nominations, linguistic confrontations due to discrepancies and mismatches in inputs that are brought to bear in conversations (Picas, Lincoln-porter, Paninos, & Linnell, 1996; Ohta, 2000; Gass, 2012).

It is also assumed that, output in particular, allows for meaning (van Patten, 1998) and also use and pragmatics (Larsen-Freeman, 2006) mapping onto form. Therefore, output makes it possible for the learner to moves from semantic concerns to syntactic processing (Swain, 1985, 2005). Further, because the actual use of the language compels the learner to performance beyond the interlanguage level, it also has a metalinguistic function to it (Iwashita, 2001; Shehadeh, 2003; Swain, 2005). Furthermore, real life conversations are said to benefit levels of performance functions, i.e., communicative, expressive, and integrative, because not only do they contextualize language use, but also overlap between inputs, redundancies and frequencies of forms that occur are key factors in language appropriation (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008; Hatch, Perle & Wagner-Gouth, 1996)

A number of scholars (e.g., Long, 1996; Cohen, 2005; Gass, 2012; Knox, 1992) have stressed the benefits that accrue to interlocutors during negotiations. Despite some light shades in their take on the issue, there seems a convergence on the fact that feedback, information check, or just the sheer reaction to incomprehensible input or the mere recognition of the inadequation of own system during conversations triggers attention, which offers ample opportunities for re-accessing the system’s elements and communicative canons and properties. Learning an additional language is, therefore, a dynamic process,

during which pragmatic competence is shaped through the use of language with others (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008).

The benefit of oral communication in real life discourse has also been underscored at the affective level. For instance, McNamara (1996; 2013) has it that frequency of activation of affective schemata in social discourse reinforces the adaptive flexibility of speakers to variations in newer situations.

Verbal interactions is multifarious and multidimensional in essence, because, beyond vocalizing or sounding out words, they involve processing at various levels –editing thinking and ideas, editing the language system before language output, beside pragmatic, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic considerations that come into play. Further, speaking both feeds on and manifests various components or modalities of language, simultaneously, while online. The vital and dynamic cognitive processing that ensues stimulates memory and raise attention in a particular way. In other words, the actual use of language complex rests on inter-psychological transactions, which result in the enhancement and consolidation of language at various levels, i.e., formal competence and communicative competence, broadly speaking.

1.2. Perceptions

Literature on perceptions suggests varied sources from which they may originate, including life or learning experience, contextual or personal factors, ontological and epistemological considerations (Bernat et al, 2005). Contextual factors fall into several categories. Some of these are teachers' classroom actions and attitudes toward language instruction, including approaches, materials and activities, among other considerations. These are often said to influence the views of learners in EFL, in a significant way. Rifkin's (2000) longitudinal BALLI study has largely evidenced the fact through data elicited from learners. Likewise, clashes between teacher's and learner's conceptions about learning and the failure of the teacher to attend to learners' affective needs and attitudinal dimensions may also seriously shape learners' perceptions of the course (Kern, 1995; Mantle-Bromley, 1995)

Wesley (2012) contends that “. . . Contextual factors in the learning environment interacted with the students' views of their progress and performance” (p. S 109). Therefore, not only may contextual factors seriously curb learners' perceptions and attitudes on a given academic subject, but also they often make it harder to assess true attainment of learners at a given point in time. For instance, due to would-be constraints dictated by various myths, the grade may fail to actually reflect the real level of proficiency or achievement of the learner.

Research across disciplines has clearly indicated that personality traits, such as individual differences of learners are also serious candidates. Dorneyi (2009a) has it that self-concept, identity, self-efficacy, low or high, among others personality characteristics influence the way we see things or behave, in a given learning environment.

In the space of this study, suffice it to say that perceptions could be prompted and forwarded by anything when conditions are ripe. On a safer ground, as would contend some researchers, perceptions, much like beliefs are concomitant with life itself, which is why no matter what the field of knowledge, the social walk of life, people carry around myths or perceptions or beliefs (Bernaus & Gardner, 2008).

Following Wenden (1999), perceptions fit in the body of metacognitive knowledge described as “A system of related ideas, some accepted without question and others validated by their experience” (p. 436). In the domain of formal education, perceptions are thus likened with saint halo (attendant and implacable) which learners and instructors bring into classrooms (Altan, 2006). By virtue of the preceding, this type of metacognitive knowledge is often deemed more important in terms of learning gain than IQ or aptitude or any other type of psychometric measures that are often granted sizeable value in matters relating to learning because perceptions are pre-existential to any learning situation (Wenden, 1999, 2001). That is why they are often regarded as powerful incubators that constitute powerful impetus in intellectual performance and ultimate success in the process of learning (e.g., Flave, 1987; Wenden, 2001; Benson, 2001). Further, in a series of studies that looked into learners' views and learning outcome in an EFL

situation, Kalaja & Barcelos (2003) show that success was largely dependent on how both the language and its learning were perceived by learners.

There may also be various ways in which major actors position themselves regarding language modalities (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, phonology). Altan (2006) has evidenced the fact that success depends on the quality of the posture. For instance, a student that thinks that the formal aspect is the most important in learning a language will develop a strong grammar and vocabulary.

Metacognitive knowledge, including perceptions, is regarded as a major momentum behind regulatory processes that lead to self-directedness / autonomy in leaning (Barcelos, 2003). The perceptual standing of the learner or teacher may increase motivation, which results in the amount of time devoted to studying a course or positive attitudes toward learning (Kern, 1995; Mantle-Bromley, 1995), which is also the opinion of Altan (2006). On the other hand, a number of scholars (e.g., Altan, 2006; Horwitz 2010) underscored the fact that assumptions held on a course work both ways. For instance, negative assumptions will result in debilitating anxiety, inhibiting thus proper learning.

The above discussion, centered on language use on one hand, and the weight of perceptions in foreign language use, in general, and English, in particular, on the other, has univocally underscored the following: In the first place, there is more to language learning than just comprehensible input, important though it may be. Output, the actual use of language for meaningful social purposes does looms large in the ultimate outcome of the process of learning an additional language. In fact it works both ways: it strengthens the formal aspects, on one hand, then molds and consolidates language, in its function as a tool of communication, through improving fluency and enhancing the pragmatic, sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic dimension of the medium being learned. Then, perceptions, essentially multifarious, can take on various shapes or forms. They may also stem from various and varied sources. Because they belong to the category of metacognitive knowledge, they appear all encompassing, pervasive, evasive, fleeting and contagious. As such, they seem overriding in men's moves and actions, irrespective of the field of activities, and particularly in language education. Therefore, investigating major stakeholders' perceptions in an educational institution like ours seems worthwhile.

2. METHODOLOGY

A number of approaches have been used in studies on perceptions/beliefs. One is the normative approach which rests on well-defined batteries such as the BALLI developed by Horwitz (1988; 1999). Others are the standard liker-scale type questionnaires and the contextual approach where the context is not only the layer but also and mainly the major factor for data elicitations (Kramsch, 2003). There is also the metacognitive approach which makes a wide use of semi-structured interviews and self-reports protocols (Wenden, 2001; White, 1999).

This study heavily relied on tools used in the metacognitive approach, that is to say self-reports mechanisms such as questionnaires and semi-structured protocols in interviews and focus group. It also included a bit of ethnographic dimension through the exploration of the emic views of bona fide people. Thus, the design is essentially heuristic and holistic.

Participants: The sample for the study included 150 learners and 15 faculty members, from the Department of English. Thus the opportunity sample of the study was 165 participants.

Data collection: Two phases: In phase one, the major tool of data elicitation was the Questionnaire survey protocol. Out of the initial sample of 165, 138 students and 13 faculty members returned their survey questionnaire forms filled out.

For the questionnaire, the major profiles encompassing the main rubrics for eliciting data for the study read as follows: **a) The English Department as an English environment; b) the extent of the use of English by major actors (faculty and students) outside the classroom; c) initiating agents of real life conversations outside the classroom; d) impediments/constraints to the use of English in social intercourses at the English department; e) the take on error correction and extent of negative evidence in**

social discourses; and f) ways to remedy the situation, to cite only these. For each of the foregoing profiles, there often were a number of prompts or thematic units.

In the second phase, thirty students, representing all grade levels, took part in the focus group discussion, while 7 instructors were individually interviewed. In both of the cases, a semi-structured protocol was used. A few outstanding rubrics from the questionnaire were brought back again onto the table in order to further probe participants take on some key profiles. They allowed me for reaching out to further articulations of the views of participants.

Data analysis: two modes of analysis, the qualitative and quantitative, that ran concurrently, made it possible to carry out the analysis of content. The quantitative analysis consisted in tallying responses to various profiles according to which the survey questionnaire was run. In this mode, descriptive statistics was used, namely means and modes. Then, the qualitative one concerned itself with the bearing of data. Regarding this mode, the focus group and the interview data made it possible to undertake a microanalysis which allows for observing minutes to minutes development participants' opinion on some key issues. This led to a better grasp of the situation.

3. RESULTS

The analysis of the data yielded a variety of results which, as in a scatter plot comprised of outliers, the type that came just once or twice at most. One such instance is "Faculty members seem insecure speaking English." Such single occurrences were not dealt with then. The results presented here are those likely to help broach and eventually help fathom the problem we have set out to scrutinize.

To the exception of the point regarding "ways out toward the rehabilitation of speaking," the profiling questions which constituted the backbone of my central query were collapsed into five headings under which results were laid out. a) Is the English Department an English environment? b) What is the status of English: a subject or a language? c) Inciting factors to the use of English: How do faculty and students weigh in? d) What is the size of the population that actually uses English for social interactions at the English Department? and e) What are the constraints on the use of English at the department?

3.1. Is the English Department an English environment?

As revealed in the survey questionnaire, there were 40 'yes' for 80 'no', which represents about 62% of participants over 130 respondents, among students. On the other hand, the entire faculty thought that the English department was not an English environment, meaning that English was seldom spoken there. When the respondents were asked to elaborate on the reason why the English department was not an English environment, things got largely altered. The "no" percentage was upgraded to over 99%, when all students participants but 1 and all faculty acknowledged that it was not at all, during the focus group discussion and the interviews, respectively. In fact, people had made a serious amalgam between English as a medium of instruction and as a language of communication in real life. Some powerful imageries and metaphors that caught my attention are laid out as a vignette below:

- . *At the English Department, even flies fly in French,*
- . *English is like a coast you leave inside the classroom,*
- . *Speaking English here make you look like an alien, and*
- . *An English phrase or sentence at the department is like a bolt from the blue*

As is made evident here, the above statements brought essential amendments to the answers provided in the questionnaire. The department seems far from being an English environment.

3.2. What is the status of English: a subject or a language?

Only 54 people out 130 students said that it was a subject, which meant that the majority believed it was a language that was treated as such at the department. It is noteworthy that 3 teachers over 13 thought likewise. In fact, the confusion pointed out above regarding the responses to the first question also held here. Likewise, as was noted above, things changed dramatically during the second phase, as all students and faculty acknowledged that English was just a subject rather than a medium of social interactions.

- . Grades are assigned for English like for biology or economics,
- . The successful completion of the course leads to a degree being awarded,
- . You don't interact socially with algebraic formulas; English is just like that
- . One does not have to speak English to be successful at the English Department

Beyond other considerations, the above statements clearly suggest that English is not, in any way, used for social discourse.

3.3. Inciting factors to the use of English: How much do faculty or students weigh in?

This question was twofold: I was interested in the extent to which faculty or students encouraged the use of English outside the classroom, in one way or another. Then, in the second place I attempted to look into the reasons why teachers were thought to be or not inciting factors. Below, Table 1 and 2 lay out the data illustrating the take of respondents on the issue.

Table 1: Faculty as inciting factors to students

Options	Agree	Disagree	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Participants					
Students	13	38	15	55	09
Faculty	11		2		

It is noteworthy that the overwhelming majority of students thought that teachers were not inciting factors, while eleven (11) out of thirteen (13) teachers thought they were.

Table 2: Students as inciting factors to students

Options	Agree	Disagree	Strongly agree	Strongly disagree	No opinion
Participants					
Students	08	41	03	68	10
Faculty		09		3	1

As in table 1, even though the figure is slightly higher (109 vs. 93), most of students disagree that their colleagues are inciting factors when it comes to the use of English for real life purposes. So did most faculty (12 disagree with the statement). In addition to the above, some enlightening propositions were also revealed during the second phase, when respondents were asked to substantiate aspects of their responses.

3.4. Teachers are not inciting factors, why?

To this question put during the second phase, various statements were made to sustain the fact that teachers were far from being any kind of sustaining factors in the whole process. The most representative are laid out below:

- . Outside the classroom, they can't afford to spare time for conversations,
- . Most teachers often look annoyed, when you try to engage conversations with them,
- . Teachers only care about facilitating their lessons,
- . They seem to care only about correct English, which we do not have
- . They always put things off till another time, because they have other things to do.

The above statements seem to speak for themselves, if anything else.

3.5. Why do you think teachers are inciting factors (put to faculty)?

In the questionnaire, teachers overwhelmingly claimed that they were inciting factors. This prompted me to wanting to get a better feel by asking them to elaborate on that. Below are some of the pronouncements they came up with.

- . We often tried, but by dint of being unsuccessful, we just gave up trying.
- . Students do not try ever so little, beyond “Good morning,” and “How are you?”
- . Students do not care about learning,
- . They want to go to heaven, but they do not want to die, and
- . They do not want speaking; what they want is a degree by all means

The arguments adamantly put forward by teachers look like the nail that seals the coffin. As it were, that was their side of the story.

3.5. What is the size of the population that actually uses English for social interactions at the English Department?

I was concerned with percentages of people who actually used the language over a range of durations, from 2 to more than 30 minutes, for any social purposes. Thus, I looked into the proportion of faculty who willfully engaged in conversations with students, or that of students with other students (Cf. Table 3, 4 & 5 below).

Table 3: Percentages¹ of faculty who are likely to get into a social talk with students from 2 to over 30 minutes

Duration	Central tendency measures	Mean	Mode
Less than 2 minutes		50%	35%
More than 5 minutes		21%	15%
More than 10 minutes		07%	05%
More than 30 minutes		02%	01%

Table 4: Percentages of students who are likely to get into a social talk with students from 2 to over 30 minutes

Duration	Central tendency. measures	Mean	Mode
Less than 2 minutes		30%	20-35%
More than 5 minutes		10%	15%
More than 10 minutes		2%	1%
More than 30 minutes		1%	0.5%

Table 5: Percentages of faculty who are likely to get into a social talk with faculty from 2 to over 30 minutes

Duration	Central tendency measures	Mean	Mode
Less than 2 minutes		70%	45%
More than 5 minutes		50%	30%
More than 10 minutes		30%	15%
More than 30 minutes		02.5%	2%

Looking across the above tables, as far as real life conversations were concerned, the highest percentage is 70% for faculty-faculty verbal exchanges lasting less than 2 minutes, against 50% for faculty-students and 30% for students-students ones. Then, for conversations lasting about 10 minutes, everything dropped to 10%, 7%, and 2% for faculty to faculty, faculty to students and students to students, respectively, against 2.5%, 2%, and 1%, in the same order of citing for conversations that last about 30 minutes.

Further, we also presented the general trend regarding the percentage of students much likely to initiate conversations in English, by grade levels.

¹ For the means, the percentages have been rounded up to the nearest whole number, in tables 3-7)

Table 6: The extent of students' commitment to social discourse by grade levels

Grade levels	Central tendency measures	
	Mean	Mode
Licence 1 (Freshmen)	08%	05%
Licence 2 (Sophomores)	10%	07%
Licence 3 (Juniors)	12%	06%
Master I	07%	03%
Master II and doctoral students	05%	03%

The figures are higher for juniors and sophomores and surprisingly lower for master 2 and doctoral students. Still 12% is very low for speaking to impact the department in a significant way.

Thus far, the emphasis has been put on the overall appraisal of the whole situation prevailing at the English department, in terms of various lunettes from which a number of considerations linked to English education could be observed. Among other things, results bearing on the department as an entity, major acting stakeholders – instructors and learners and their weight in the actual use of the language were laid out. Finally results regarding both the place and role of the “speaking” skill in the panorama of English education were also looked at.

This study was mainly concerned with major factors constraining the actual use of English in social talks or discourses which the overwhelming majority of prompts both aimed at and allowed for examining, from different loopholes.

The fairly large amount of data generated often overlapped and intersected. Therefore, the essence of the data was summarized under two thematic units. It was hope that this move would render handling and management of the profusion of substantive body of information much easier and forward thus a better apprehension of the topic under study. The first, **Feeling of insecurity**, was broken down into ‘**Lack of readiness**’ and ‘**Threat to the user**’, and the second, **Contextual factors** fell into three types – ‘**Physical environment**’, ‘**Human factors**’, and ‘**Academic factors**’(See Table 8 & 9, below).

Table 7: data portraying the feeling of insecurity

Rubrics	Thematic units
Lack of readiness for language use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Anxiety (debilitating) . Lack of BICS (basic interpersonal communication skills) . insufficient grammatical and lexical preparation . erroneous views on language education in general
Potential threat to the user	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> . Fearful of ridicule . Reckless disruptive correction . fear of being ostracized . Poor command may influence teacher's class assignment assessment

An attempt was made to synthesize a lot of information into a few rubrics. For instance, the readiness of concern alludes to psychological and spiritual preparedness, on one hand, and also the mental competence – the sum of knowledge at the disposal of students when it comes to the language use. Because accuracy is what seemed to matter, students often underestimated their capacity to use the language. So any attempt at interactions in English is tantamount to sticking out one's neck.

It also seems essential to stress the fact that each item included in the rubrics encloses a number of ideas that go under the same heading. For instance, “anxiety (debilitating),” subsumes the idea that actors often became numb because they dreaded the use of English. So this led to a downright neglect or disregard of the speaking skill.

Table 9: data portraying contextual factors

Rubrics	Thematic units
Physical dimension	. Institution . French environment . No real drive for the use of English
Human factors	. Poor leadership from teachers . teacher training . lack of commitment of learners . Teacher instruction
Academic factors	. English as a subject . English as a medium of instruction . Implicit standard linked with English education . Lack of instructional support . oral skill lags behind others

Table 9, much like Table 8, suggests that each item in the rubrics coats several ideas. For instance, “institution,” subsumes the idea of foreign territory (e.g., EFL situation), therefore an antagonistic environment which would imply that there is no purpose for the language outside the classroom. The foregoing, thus, constrains the actual use English in one way or another.

In a tandem, the qualitative and quantitative types of data have allowed us to reach out to some insights regarding the task at end. It is made evident that the department was far from being an English department, essentially due to the fact that English was invisible. This was instantiated by means strong statements. The whole thing may be explained by various constraints due to ways in which English was perceived.

4. DISCUSSION

In the present section, my intention was to help further the understanding of some of the statements or pronouncements made by participants by attempting to flesh out their bearing. Some figures of speech, namely metaphors and similes were worth lingering on, as they seemed to be loaded phrases or statements in the real sense of the meaning; they actually helped substantiate important aspects of the data. Proceeding from the thematic elements enclosed in the synthesizing rubrics, I attempted to bring similar or converging ideas into focus to shed light on particular points that work toward providing answer to the questions that served as a backbone to the study.

4.1. The lack of readiness

The spiritual preparedness and disposition that could impulse the impetus toward the use of English in real life verbal interactions were not available. This was justified by a number of deterring elements, such as anxiety as pointed out. It outstandingly came out from the data that there was a low tolerance for errors, as accuracy was earnestly aimed at. Over time, a phobia that gradually developed turned into a debilitating anxiety that bogged most actors down. Following Ehrmana, Leaverb & Oxford (2003) the numbness due to emotional blockage that ensues renders the ego-boundaries compact and impermeable (Also see Selinker, 1995; Aguirra, 1992; Anold, 1999)

In language use in general, there hardly is room for spontaneous generations, as everything seems to build on social intercourses amidst which verbal interactions stand out. Rituals and norms in turn taking, elaborations and evaluations while expressing foundational functions of language, are often gained through rehearsal while being online, that is as one is engaged in meaningful social discourse. Because actors at the English department more often than not stayed away from the use, they were unable to develop skills and strategies for conversations.

Though grammar and other formal aspects of the language were emphasized in the educational system (e.g., "**you want to speak, master syntax and morphology first**" or "**It is shameful to make errors in English when you are an English major**"), the lack of practice of the language that would wash up and consolidate formal structures lead to learners having poor command of the syntax. The irony of fate was that the overly stress on grammar to the exclusion of actual use made things worse for that modality. Thus, grammar because it was regarded as an end in itself, failed to play its role as a passkey to learning, simply because it was not actually used.

Views on English education observed across the numerous factors under scrutiny were varied and impressive. The way it was perceived succeeded in molding and strengthening a number of beliefs, i.e., the thought according to which one needed to know a language before they spoke it ("**If you can't speak do not ever try. You will get other people confused**"; or "**No obligation on you to speak, when you are not ready**", which is contrary to most theories on language acquisition or learning. The views that "**You don't need to speak English to be a success**", "**You may complete a degree program with distinction, and yet be unable to say your name in English**," even though you majored in English, did make sense, because success translated in terms of degree acquisition which rested on skills other than speaking.

It is made evident in the above discussion that the use of English was fated because of numerous assumptions that did a disservice to it. Further, surprisingly, it appeared that the use of English may also be endangering to some users.

Potential threat to user: this speaks to the extent to which the actual use of English may become harmful to the user's integrity. For instance, wrong command of the language, even the slightest error was likely to turn the speaker into a laughing stock. This is made evident in "*If you don't know, just shut up,*" or "*No obligation on you to speak, if you are not ready.*" Also, continual interruption as one tries to use the language was both belittling and frustrating. The assumption seemed to be that speaking would become full blown spontaneously. Understandably, the integrative and expressive functions of language have preeminence over the communicative one. This view of English education, which overly attached importance to form, seemed to have thrust learners in a survival mode of operation as far as conversing in English was concerned; most of them were discouraged from even trying ever so little. Further, chances were that that anyone that was very keen on using the language would run the risk of being shaken off as can attest, "*Mr. English, time is over,*" "*Mr. X is over there in his office, go meet him,*" or again, "*Please let our ears rest a bit.*" The feeling of being rebuked or punished for simply using English was outstanding here. Finally, poor performance in real life exchanges in the presence of an instructor could result in a halo syndrome. This could influence the teacher's judgment when it came to assessing class assignments.

It is made evident in the above discussion how a number of things built up over time became deterrent to the use of English. Longstanding misconceptions weighed down on the development of speech in English education. Another dimension that was scrutinized was "contextual factors."

4.2. Contextual factors

To what extent were environmental factors (physical, human and academic) detrimental to the use of English in social discourse? It was suggested that the English Department was not an "*English Institute.*" Understandably, the language serves an academic purpose. From this, it is "academic English" that was prevalently used for a degree purpose. Therefore, that the language was not actually use for social discourse did not seem to bother anyone. The metaphor "*Even flies fly in English,*" epitomizes the fact. In other words, the English department was an all French environment much like the department of Geography, or Economics, or Math. This may also reinforce or justify why "*You look like an alien when you speak English,*" meaning that the speaker may be likened with an ethereal being from another planet. It was also suggested that "*English outside the classroom looks like a bolt from the blue,*" both sudden and unwanted. All of the above are very strong signals that underscore the 'unexpectedness', when it came to the use of English for real life purpose.

Human factors also stand out. As instructors refrained from using English, they also brought in a breach in their mission which now seemed devoid of vision, clear purpose and direction. In a sense, just like a poor salesperson, they failed to value what they intended to sell to potential customers. Yet, it is a well-known truism in business that the first product is the salesperson himself, because his overall attitude toward the product reflects the value he assigns to the items he sells.

It is also said that "*Teachers look down on learners,*" regarding their capacity to use the language which led to the learners developing a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. By way of consequences, most learners ended up believing that they were unable to use the language. Thus, overall, faculty members failed to induce that contagious enthusiasm that could incite learners to get on board, language use wise, engendering thus a vicious circle hard to break through. Yet, it behooves the teacher to create propitious learning conditions that helps shape the collective and individual development of learners in any given situation.

Instructors at the English department came from various backgrounds and specialized in at least one of the subject matters on the curriculum – literature and civilization in American, British and African studies, general and applied linguistic. However, the overwhelming majority are not language instructors even though they teach in English.

Teacher instruction was regarded as a barrier to speaking in many ways. Teachers were regarded as mere information providers because they were only concerned with the technicality of their subject. Because classes seldom dealt with social discourses, instructors failed to offer models that learners could build on, and, by the same token, stifled the soul of foreign language education, to borrow from Kessler (2000).

The teacher has numerous essential functions that constitute essential cogs in the educational system, in his quality as a facilitator, a mentor, a manager and a leader. That is why his moves should be careful, judicious and contingent. Academic factors were also pointed out in a particular way.

English was regarded as a classroom thing, "*A coat one leaves inside the classroom,*" much like math, history, geography, as it was essentially concerned with bookish knowledge validated by grades and degrees subsequently awarded. That is why "*Outside the classroom, you sound abnormal.*" Since it is the degree that mattered, exclusive use of English in linguistic transactions during class was enough to serve the purpose. Further, the status of English, largely strengthened by the perceptions of major actors, also speaks to the issue of envisioned standard.

It was largely implied in the data that degree completion for bread-earning is what really matters. From this looping, reading and writing skills stood out, at the expense of speaking, as manifestation of the benchmark that informs the implicit standard. Therefore, efforts were invested in building mental competence in these skills. Some underpinning assumptions concomitantly held were that mastering those skills would have a spillover effect on speaking, on one hand, and speaking will come full blown spontaneously once you are online, on the other. Yet, some scapegoats were pointed at, i.e., instructional supports.

Both students and teachers blamed the lack of instructional supports that could boost the speaking skill – materials and audio-visual facilities among other pedagogical or extra-curricular arrangements. It is the case that a student generally enrolled and graduated from the department without having the single opportunity to use a language lab. Though this may be a serious shortcoming, it does not justify the predicament of the speaking skill, as pointed out earlier. Instructors and learners had other means to expound this skill. In didactics the conditions justify the means – the "tail does not wag the dog, but rather it is the dog that wags the tail." Likewise, the tree should not hide the forest. An ample instance, illustrating the way speaking is jeopardized is the perception of Oral Practice (OP), a course on the curriculum.

The OP course was often likened with a break from hardship encountered in courses like grammar, reading or listening. Even though there often were themes and topics, there was no objective pattern according to which the overwhelming majority of classes were organized in order for learners to gain substantial wash-back in terms of linguistic, grammatical awareness, speech performance and modes of

conversational operations. Therefore, this rare and wonderful curricular arrangement particularly oriented to developing the speaking skill was often wasted in subsidiary and unessential moves.

The speaking skill, as it appeared, was less valued than other skills at the English department, which reflects its status in the educational system at large. It is worthwhile noting that from the 6th form, when English is introduced in the system, to entrance to higher education, there are only two oral exams state-wide, in the 9th and 12th grade. This has been carried over into higher education even as students major in English. For instance, while there are wide scale final exams for freshmen and sophomores in reading, writing and listening, there is none for speaking.

Over time, a series of factors, both endogenous and exogenous, molded a culture that thrived on exacting and relentless perceptions relative English education as an inclusive phenomenon, and which ended up blurring the whole framework. Like any culture, it is nurtured by patterns, namely "does" and "don'ts" solidly carved in pseudo stones and which underpin the moves of actors. In this panorama, language use lagged behind everything, particularly other macro skills and language modalities, because it is regarded as undeserving and trivial.

5. CONCLUSION

This study supports the view that personal philosophies or perceptions are often influenced by variables that are societal and experiential in essence, on one hand, and also that major actors, teachers and learners' thought patterns greatly influence their actions, on the other, as can show glimpses of their cognition that were suggested in the present study. That being said, I will concern myself with suggestions by way of offering answers to the research questions that transpired in or were suscited by the data, and which shed some light on the major issue of the study, the impact of perceptions on English education.

5.1. What is the scope of perceptions that were brought to bear regarding English education at the Department of English?

The data showed that varied, numerous and multifaceted perceptions, built over time, and that were brought to bear at the Department of English, gave rise to a number of things, including beliefs systems that got shaped and consolidated and which induced attitudes and practices now prevalent in English education. Further, these views seriously constrained the education of English as a foreign language.

Perceptions covered the gambit of essential factors, conditions and circumstances comprising those delineating contextual components, namely physical, psychological and mental environments, on one hand, and a set of value judgments that major actors held on one another regarding the role of each party, and the extent to which these views constrained or facilitated the whole process of English education. Perceptions also bore on issues relating to pedagogical bents or instructional preferences, modalities and skills that supposedly mattered in EFL.

The range of perceptions, actually voiced or implied during the data elicitation, translated into a spectrum of attitudinal dispositions, both prescriptive and mythical in essence, as can attest the "dos and don'ts" that actors carried around in their head at the department, i.e., "English is a classroom thing," "Proper conditions are not met for the use of English," to cite a few instances.

Assumptions or views held by major actors at the department often were tainted with accusations and intents on looking for scape-goats, which often blurred the notion of accountability. And this, in its turn, bred feelings of insecurity, mistrust or distrust and precariousness in one way or another, something that seemed to work against the grain. As a result of the foregoing, a serious destruction of the learning environment ensued.

5.2. What has speaking come up with in the panorama of English education at the English Department?

It is widely acknowledged, today, that functionally communicative uses of language in sustained efforts to achieve social goals in likewise discourses prove to forward much better learning, which is why there have been persistent calls for more transformative methods emphasizing the realistic use of language, in formal education. However, this study overwhelming suggests that true communicative uses have not yet found their way into most classrooms, let alone to be effective outside.

Based on the data, a few reasons were suggested. One of these is that teachers failed to be the indispensable “push” and “pull” factors in the promotion of language use, because they would not lead the way at the department. Understandably, the lack of frequent and enough exposure to real life use of language during instructions, and especially outside lecture rooms, deprived learners from appropriate opportunities to develop effective and efficient communicative strategies. Thus, teachers became the very barrier to oral skill development because of the mixed messages carelessly and inadvertently sent to students. Another reason is that speaking was invisible, because it was willy-nilly suppressed through attitudes induced by both students and instructors’ perceptions of what English education connotes, and specifically what the implicit benchmarks and standards aimed at were

Further, students were comforted in their feelings that speaking was tabooed or untouchable outside the classroom, which is why they developed a certain phobia, nay trauma with respect to oral production; things that fed on a debilitating anxiety concomitant with negative attitudes. Ganschow and Sparks (1996) contend that such a situation necessarily results in a decreased performance of learners, because there is a low tolerance of ambiguity due to ego impermeability.

The use of English language, particularly in social discourse, was also looked at as something to treasure for individual benefit, a linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) for the privileged few (e.g., teachers) who have the capacity to wield this tool, or again a power following Fairclough (1990) that these only can exercise by virtue of their qualification through their training or special circumstances. Thus, English as a language was something in which the overwhelming majority of learners had no fair share.

Overall, there was a serious loss of trust in the benefits of oral skill in the process of English learning, because of the attitudes and behaviors induced by the perceptions of major parties at the English department. It is thus understandable why “flies fly in French.”

5.3. What foci to operate to rehabilitate English as a language at the English Department?

“How do we recognize the shackles that tradition has placed upon us? For if we can recognize them, we are able to break them” (Franz Boas).

Building on the above, we may say that the solution to “speaking” would seem to be better approached by acting on perceptions of both instructors and learners. Perceptions are not immutable. Therefore, changes in perceptions may certainly lead to changes in educational outcome. In sense, major actors must become aware of their own views that stand in the way or those that are facilitating factors. However, in order for perceptions to change, propositions with which they mesh must be altered according to Alexander & Dochy (1994). This seems the crux of the issue, given that the nature of perceptions, in terms of their tangible materiality, is often hard to pin down (Mantle-Bromley, 1995; Peacock, 2001)

However, it would seem a fair bet that major actors’ capacity to operate a significant and major spin on how “speaking” is viewed may make a huge difference. For instance, one should refrain from looking at it as an individual benefit that accrues to the speaker but rather the core ingredient in EFL education in addition to being a communal patrimony to treasure for the benefit of the whole community outreach. This is all the more sensible as there are rarely purposes for language use outside the classroom in an EFL context. It thus stands to reason that continuous access to the language through a contingent and

judicious use to achieve meaningful social purposes builds fair chances to reach quality learning. From this, speaking seems the nucleus of learning, when English is looked as a language.

Further, there sure is a spiritual dimension to the puzzle of turning the English department into an English environment. To a large extent, this entails a dynamic move that prompts a synergy of all major stakeholders, who, in a collective responsibility, will to step up and mutualize efforts, instill and concoct an ambient and positive energy, toward the creation, consolidation and maintenance of a learning community that thrives on widespread use of the language in social discourse. One may picture a wholesome, blossoming, blooming, rich and harmonious environment from which each and every one draws essential resources for learning and also for the perpetuation of the learning community. Therefore, encouraging and firmly establishing social discourse as a tacit norm is a *sin qua non* for enhancing language learning.

To this effect, a gentleman agreement to initiate and launch such a learning environment must be suscited, encouraged and realized for the benefit of everyone. Another essential cog in the machinery and that should be carefully watched in this panorama is the teacher, by virtue of his numerous and various roles.

First, thanks to his ontogenetic role as a trainer, a coach and an educator, the teacher is a major change agent. Then, in the socio-genetic role he also takes on, the teacher has a vested power that makes it possible for him to extend his actions and influence beyond the sanctuary, the lecture room, by means of various stratagems, in his quality as a catalyst. Furthermore, as a 'cheer leader' or 'head of the band wagon' or again the very individual that runs the show, in short a leader, he must be the centerpiece in any move or shift that may run any chance of securing sustainable good and worthwhile ends on a larger scope and a longer term. There seems some urgency incumbent upon the teacher to inspire and instill in the community of learners some leadership capacity.

Change may be achieved by means of a new deal based on a new culture that feeds on a new spirit, on one hand, and sensitization about new standards of English education and promotion of learning based on much more positive views as to what learning means to each and every one, in general, and the education of English as a foreign language, in particular. All the while, major actors should become aware and make home methods, techniques and strategies that pay off.

That being said, operating a shift that really makes a difference entails the capacity to set clear goals or objectives with organizational, managerial and systemic schemes – such things that everyone understands and abide by, as far as EFL is concerned. On the other, this requires breathing some willpower and exceptional mental dispositions into major actors, in order for them to take new and prospering aims: nothing short of a kuhnian shift. In this, teachers must earnestly take charge.

The above discussion attempted to bring tangible and worthwhile responses to the questionings that constituted the backbone of this research endeavor. The issue at hand was huge, and could not possibly be covered exhaustively in the space of this project. Still a number of things transpired, in terms of central illuminations brought about this study. One of these was that, even though perceptions were not attended, they weighed in the quality and extent of learning outcome, because they influenced ways linguistic realities were construed and constructed by major actors in the process of learning. Owing to this, they, undoubtedly, inadvertently sapped the scheme of organization of instructional designs, on one hand, and the way English education was approached, on the other.

Perceptions are aspects of what some scholars (e.g., Munby, 1978; Richards, 2013, 1984) termed the hidden syllabus. Much like the submerged base of the iceberg, they should be properly watched and taken care of. In a sense, they should be factored in one way or another in reflection on curriculum development and syllabus design.

Language production, i.e., speaking is an instance of proximity pedagogy (Morin, 1989). Following (Habermas, 1987; Meunier, 2003) the actual use of language is transformative in that additional multifaceted support at the level of the language as a system, communicative strategies and empathy, among others, that are embedded in conversational interactions are foundational in language acquisition, a

view widely spread in the camp of language learning and acquisition. Therefore, rather than being regarded as an end in itself, "speaking" is fundamentally a means to an end, particularly in language education.

It was stressed in this study that speaking is classroom thing, which portrayed teachers as one-time 'transactioners'. Instead, the teacher must become a life-long partner persistently sustaining endeavors in this area, wherever it seems fit. Teachers must become the first incubators of enthusiasm toward language use. Finally, knowing a language means speaking it fluently. Therefore, it is high time that students majoring in English knew English.

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