

Pedagogical Challenges in the Teaching and Learning of Oral Skills in English in Secondary Schools in Kenya

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Abstract: Oral skills in English are taught and examined in Kenyan secondary schools with the purpose of developing fluency and accuracy in speech communication. However, majority of students do not attain intelligibility at the close of their study. Oral skills are examined in paper one of the English language exam though in written form. In 2016 the students scored a mean of 29.15 in the paper. In 2017, the students scored 25.89 indicating a decline of 3.26 points. This shows that not many secondary school students in Kenya are competent in oral skills in the English language. English is a second language to Kenyan students after their mother tongue. They develop its competence through learning it in the classroom context. The objective of the study was to determine the pedagogical challenges involved in the teaching and learning of content of oral skills. The study attempted to explain the challenges involved in teaching and learning of oral skills in English language which could be of help to curriculum developers, teachers of English, students and future researchers. The study was confined to the pedagogical challenges that are involved in the teaching and learning of oral skills in English in relation to teaching content, teaching construct and teaching context. The theoretical framework on which the study was based was the socio-cultural-constructivism theory. This theory is relevant to the acquisition of oral skills in the classroom where both the teacher and the learner actively participate in the learning process. The study was done in Kisumu East Sub-county with a population of 4021 students and 47 teachers of English. Data was collected from 295 students and 35 teachers a total of 330 participants through the use of Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table of determining sample. The study employed concurrent triangulation design with mixed methods approach. Questionnaires, unstructured interview schedules and observation schedules were used to collect and analyze data concurrently. The quantitative data was summarized using descriptive statistics and presented using tables, pie charts and bar graphs while qualitative data was put under themes and presented in verbatim and narratives. Analyzed data were then merged for presentation and discussions. The study established that there were pedagogical challenges in the teaching and learning of oral skills in English in relation to teaching content, teaching construct and teaching context. The study therefore recommended that the curriculum developers need to come up with comprehensive teaching and learning materials that would help both the teachers and the students to succeed in teaching and learning content of oral skills in English. Textbooks should be more comprehensive in oral drills exercises. English aural exams should be introduced in the curriculum as done in other foreign languages like French and Germany. All the stakeholders should be committed and work together for the success of oral skills acquisition in school.

Keywords: Pedagogical Challenges; Oral Skills in English.

1. INTRODUCTION

Background to the Study

English language learning includes four skills namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing (KIE 2005). Speaking and listening skills also referred to as oral skills play a major role in English language acquisition. According to Onchera

(2013) competence in speech leads to competence in writing as one can write competently what one can speak competently. Oral skills in English are taught and examined in Kenyan secondary schools with the purpose of developing fluency and accuracy in speech communication. However, most students do not attain intelligibility at the close of their study. The results over the years, especially Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) of 2013, indicate dismal performance and worse still when the oral skills are tested in written form.

The table below shows the performance of the students' performance in KCSE. The table reveals that English is one of the least performed subjects. In comparison to other languages like Kiswahili, the performance keeps deteriorating yet English language is a language of communication in Kenya. It is expected that the students would perform exemplarily well in the subject because they use English language in learning other subjects. The dismal performance indicates that not many students in Kenya are competent in English language. Onchera (2013) further quotes Ministry of Education (MoE, 2012) "that it appears that spoken English by many secondary school students and subsequent graduates in Kenya is wanting".

Table 1 Performance in KCSE from 2010- 2013

Year/ subject	2010 Mean %	2011 Mean %	2012 Mean%	2013 Mean %
English	38.9	36.42	37.88	27.49
Kiswahili	39.7	40.1	35.8	41.60
Mathematics	21.8	22.0	28.8	27.58
Biology	28.0	28.3	26.2	31.63
Physics	32.3	32.6	37.9	40.10
Chemistry	19.7	19.9	27.9	24.83
History & Govt.	47.2	47.7	40.9	44.72
Geography	40.1	40.5	46.6	42.41
CRE	44.1	44.5	44.0	47.96
Homescience	53.4	54.0	56.9	57.98
Agriculture	40.0	40.4	35.0	31.07
Business Studies	36.5	36.8	44.3	-

Source KNEC 2014 Report.

Several studies in various parts of the world, where English is studied as a second language, reveal that there are challenges in teaching and learning of oral skills in English. Either the teaching and learning of oral skills is neglected or very little attention is given to it. A study carried out in the USA among students studying English as a second language indicate that the needs of English learners are not addressed in a systematic and programmatic manner in the core curriculum requirements. While very highly qualified teachers are expected to teach other subjects other than the English language, it does not require teachers to be highly qualified to teach English language learners (Rieger & McGrail, 2006). This means that the standard of English language would be very low and the students would be incompetent in speaking the language. However, in Kenya the teachers are well trained and it is expected that they would guide the students to towards attainment of intelligibility in English language.

The difficulties experienced by various learners of English are also witnessed in Africa. The findings of the studies done in Ghana by Kwarteng & Ahia (2013) indicate that no pedagogical attention is given to the development of oral skills in English and blame it on the teachers for failure to provide students formal instruction and opportunities in the classroom to develop the skills. In looking at the performance of English language in Nigeria a study was carried out by Olanipekun, Atteh, Zaku & Sarki (2014). The findings of the study indicated that students perform dismally in English language despite the fact that emphasis is placed in passing English language for entrance in Nigerian higher institutions of learning. Further studies in Nigeria by (Usman & Mustafa, 2014; Akinbode, 2008) attributed the difficulties of learning English as a second language to phonological level brought about by first language interference in speech and writing.

In Kenya Mwaniki (2013) also found out that the learning of pronunciation skills is a neglected area that needs to be addressed in order to achieve higher levels of intelligibility and communicative effectiveness. While Mwaniki studied the students, that revealed the errors they made in pronunciation, he did not take the teachers' and students' perspectives into consideration. He looked at the errors that the students made and concluded that the teachers did not do their work effectively. In as much as the teachers are to blame there may have been other factors that contributed to their errors. This research however, focused on the challenges involved in the teaching and learning of oral skills in English that may result from teaching content, teaching constructs and teaching context. It also determined the perspectives of teachers and students on the challenges involved in the teaching and learning of oral skills in English.

Oral skills in English are taught and examined in Kenyan secondary schools with the purpose of developing fluency and accuracy in speech communication. However, majority of students do not attain intelligibility at the close of their study. The overall performance of English still fell short of the mean score of 100 (50%) calling for innovation in curriculum implementation. This shows that not many secondary school students in Kenya are competent in oral skills in the English language.

It is on this basis that this study intended to examine the challenges experienced by the teachers of oral skills in English in relation to the teaching content, constructs and context and propose possible solutions in secondary schools in Kisumu East sub-county that continually performs dismally.

This study objective was to determine the pedagogical challenges involving teaching content in teaching and learning of oral skills in English. The research question that guided the study was: How do the pedagogical challenges of teaching content affect the teaching and learning of oral skills in English?

In an attempt to identify the pedagogical challenges involving the teaching and learning of oral skills in English this study was anchored on the theory of socio-cultural-constructivism which was formulated by Mascolo (2014).

In this case both the teacher and the learner actively participate in the learning process. As per delivery of the subject matter the teacher is expected to use socio-cultural and constructivism theory. The teacher is expected to make every effort to help the learner acquire and continually refine the skills to enable the learner interact with others effectively and confidently using oral literature (narratives, oral poetry, songs, proverbs, tongue-twisters and riddles). He/She is expected to act as a guide and participant in the learning environment.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study used concurrent triangulation design with mixed methods approach to determine the pedagogical challenges of oral English skills in secondary schools. The design was chosen as dictated by the nature of the study which primarily involves gathering of facts. According to Creswel (2007) concurrent mixed methods procedures are those which the researcher converges or merges qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of the research problem. The investigator collects both forms of data at the same time and then integrates the information in the interpretation of overall results.

The study was carried out in Kisumu East sub- county secondary schools in Kisumu County. It's performance in English language at the national examination level has been worrying (KNEC 2011-2013) and this guarantees the selection of the sub- County for this study.

The results of evaluation tests have shown over the years that Kisumu East sub-county continues to drop in performance of English language. A drop is also witnessed in the overall performance. All the subjects, a part from Kiswahili are taught in the English language. Therefore, if the students are not competent in the English language, then the other subjects are bound to be affected.

There were a total of 47 teachers of English and 4021 students in the 22 secondary schools in Kisumu East sub-county. There were a total of 4068 participants. Sampling is the process of selecting people or objects from a population in order to test the population (Kombo & Tramp, 2006). According to Mugenda & Mugenda (1999), a sample is a small subset of population that has been chosen to be studied. Mugenda & Mugenda (1999) and Kothari (2008) further says that the main factor considered in determining the sample size is the need to keep the sample manageable enough in terms of effort,

time, finance and human resource. For the purpose of selecting the study sample, Krejci & Morgan (1970) table of determining sample (see Appendix 1) was used to determine the number of schools, teachers and students to be used in the study. Simple random sampling was then being used to select the schools, the teachers of English and students for the study.

The Sample for the Study

Zones in Kisumu East Sub- County	Number of schools	of Sample	Number of teachers of English	Sample	Number of students	of Sample
Kajulu Zone	09	8	20	18	1920	150
Rweya Zone	07	6	16	14	1401	110
Ragumo Zone	06	5	11	08	700	91
Total	22	19	47	40	4021	351

Three instruments were used to collect data; questionnaire, interview schedules and observations. A questionnaire consists of a number of questions printed or typed in a definite order on a form or sets of forms (Kothari, 2004). Mark et al (2009) define a questionnaire as a data collection instrument in which each person is asked to respond to the same set of questions in a pre-determined order. A questionnaire is used to collect information because of their effectiveness in collecting data over a geographical area. They also save time spent to collect data. It is also free from bias of the interviewer since the answers are in respondents' words. This study used two questionnaires, consisting of both structured and open-ended questions. One questionnaire was administered to the teachers of English and the other one to the students. The interviews gave opportunities for soliciting slightly more details than the questionnaires. The purpose of using observation was to attempt and identify: Teaching and learning resources; The methods of teaching and in class writing activities; Teacher preparation and teaching aids/ materials. Content-related evidence of validity was used to validate the developed instruments. In this case the instruments were presented to my supervisors and lecturers in the department of Curriculum Studies and Educational foundation who are authorities in the area for their expert judgment on the content. Their advice was used in revising the questionnaires and interview schedules before preparation of final copies. Reliability of a test refers to its consistency, that is, regardless of what it measures, does it do so consistently. A test may be limited by certain errors, which include error due to time of testing, error due to content of the test and error due to scoring (Cohen & Marion, 1996).

Data collected were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The research data was edited, coded and checked to have the required quality, accuracy and completeness. They were then analyzed through descriptive statistics. Tables were used to supplement the qualitative discussion covering the open-ended questions. Percentage and means were also used to determine the impact of pedagogical aspects on the achievement in oral English skills. Mean score was calculated for overall level of agreement/disagreement of each statement. For mean score norm was 3.00. However, level of agreement was different for each statement. Information was presented in bar graphs, pie charts and tables. The descriptive nature of the research led the researcher to discuss in detail the various problems and issues found in this study. The analysis of these variables was done by the help of the computer software SPSS 18.0.

Thematic analysis was used in the analysis of qualitative data. The thematic analysis of data comprised six stages which included arrangement of data by transcribing interviews, typing the field notes and sorting documents into files, reading through the data to obtain a general sense of information, encoding all the data that emerged into categories, identifying themes and sub- themes, presenting and describing in detail the thematic information and forming direct interpretations based on each of the themes identified in the analysis.

3. FINDINGS

Pedagogical Challenges Involving Teaching Content

Factors involving teaching content of oral skills in English that affected the teaching and learning of oral skills included linguistics – articulation, pronunciation, oral poetry, and connected speech, oral literature, etiquette and non linguistics- body language and paralanguage . The findings are discussed as per the sub- themes.

Articulation of Words

The difficulties to do with articulation of words included substituting one sound for another, leaving one sound out, adding extra sound, pronouncing a letter that should be silent, adding a sound to make it easier to pronounce and transposing of sounds.

Substituting One Sound for Another

The study wanted to find out if the students had problems with substituting one sound for another sound in their articulation of English words. This was to ascertain whether articulation of words that is part of teaching content of oral English skills was difficult for the students.

Table on Substituting One Sound for Another as Reported by Students (n=295)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	55	18.6	18.6	18.6
	Disagree	44	14.9	14.9	33.6
	Strongly Agree	143	48.5	48.5	82.0
	Strongly Disagree	52	17.6	17.6	99.7
	Undecided	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	295	100.0	100.0	

In the table the students who consented that they had problems with substituting one sound for another were 67.1% while those who disagreed were 32.5% and only 0.3% of the respondents were undecided. This is an indication that most students might not articulate words correctly. The students then need to work closely with their teachers in order to internalize the concepts.

Table on Substituting One Sound for Another as Reported by Teachers

(n = 35)

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	15	42.9	42.9	42.9
	Disagree	4	11.4	11.4	54.3
	Strongly Agree	14	40.0	40.0	94.3
	Strongly Disagree	2	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

In the table, the teachers who said that the students had difficulty substituting one sound for another when articulating sounds were 82.9% (strongly agree – 40% and Agree – 42.9%) while those who disagreed were 17.1%. In comparison to the students’ response, the teachers had a higher percentage of those who argued that the students had challenges with substitution of sounds. During the interview with the teachers, the teachers confirmed that the students had difficulties with articulation of words. One teacher asserted that,

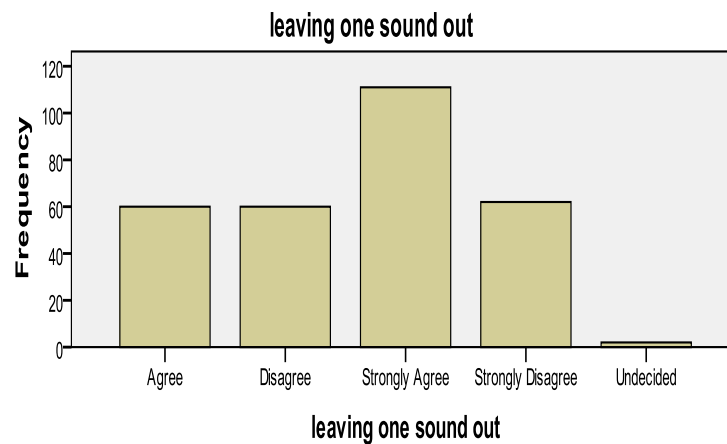
Students normally do not know how to articulate certain words in the English language. They substitute one sound for another when they articulate them and it is difficult to tell what the student is talking about. Sounds of /ks/ and / s/ normally are a challenge. It is difficult for most students to say words like ‘especially’ or ‘escape’. They normally feel shy to say such words. This may come about as a result of their previous language learning. This therefore prevents them from doing well in their exams. (T 4)

Geylanioglu & Dikilitas (2012) confirmed that students had difficulties articulating words in the English language especially, off-cited sounds such as schwa / ə /, voiced and voiceless th / ð- θ / and ng / ŋ / sounds. However the current study focused on substitution of sounds especially sounds of /ks/ and / s/. It was established that students had challenges with substitution of sounds when articulating a word. This is because if the students substitute one sound for another the intended meaning would be lost and communication would be difficult leading to dismal performance in the English language. The teachers and the students need to work together to enable the students to intelligibly communicate in the English language.

Leaving One Sound Out

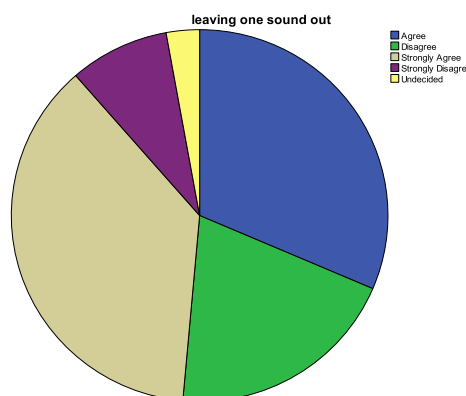
The study wanted to see if the students had problems of leaving one sound out when pronouncing words for example dropping initial letters after other words in sentences. This was to ascertain whether the students had difficulties understanding articulation of words within the sentences for intelligibility.

Figure on Leaving One Sound Out as Reported by the Students (n=295)



In figure 2.1a the students who acceded that they had problems leaving one sound out were 57.9% while those who disagreed were 41.3%. The response indicates that about half of the students might not utter English words correctly. It means not many students can communicate effectively in the English language.

Figure on Leaving One Sound Out as Reported by Teachers (n=35)



The figure indicates that the teachers who agreed that the students had difficulty leaving one sound out when articulating a sound were 68.5% while those who disagreed were 28.5%. When the teachers of English were interviewed, it was also noted that the students had challenges with leaving out one sound out when they articulate the words for intelligibility. One teacher maintained,

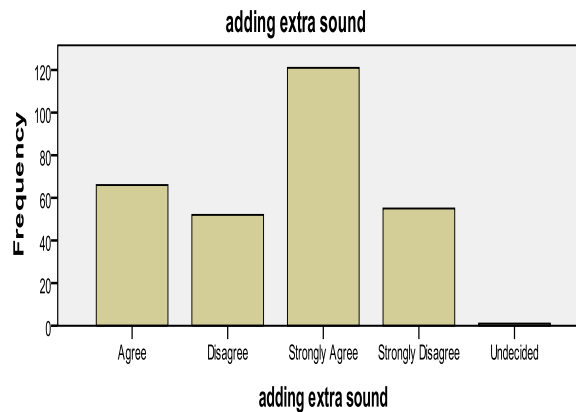
I find many students who have problems of leaving one sound out when articulating certain words. Some students do not articulate all the sounds when they speak. I sometimes find it difficult to understand what they talk about. Many times I have to constantly remind the students of the right pronunciation of words. (T 3)

Njoroge (2008) studied articulation of plosives (p, b, t, d, k, g) and approximants (l, r) and found that students generally had difficulty with articulation of words, the current study also found out that students had difficulty with articulation of words, however other than looking at articulation in general it focused on difficulty of leaving one sound out when articulating a word. The findings indicate that students had problems of articulation of words especially those within the sentences that affect their communication. This implies that the students might not communicate effectively and this might lead to dismal performance in their exams since they would just write what they say.

Adding Extra Sound

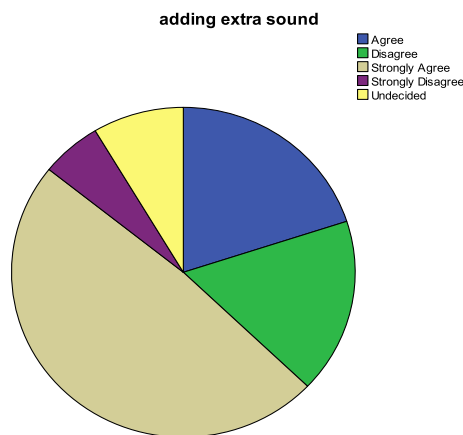
The study wanted to find out if the students had problems with adding an extra sound when articulating a word in the English language. This was to ascertain whether the students could meaningfully communicate in their articulation of words.

Figure on Adding Extra Sound as Reported by the Students (n=295)



The figure indicates the students’ views in agreement that they had a problem of adding extra sound when articulating a word in English language. The students who agreed that they had this problem were 63.4% while those who disagreed were 36.2%. If the students had this problem then it implies that the students might not perform well in their articulation of words.

Figure on Adding Extra Sound as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)



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The teachers too were in agreement with the students. The teachers who reported that the students had difficulty adding extra sound when articulating a word were 68.6% while those who disagreed were 22.8%. The interviews with the teachers also confirmed that the students had articulation problems. One teacher said,

I have noticed that many students have articulation problems. They may add sounds that are not there in a word. These would make it easier for them to articulate the words, for example words like 'athletic' for athletic or 'filum' for film. Sometimes it is not easy to follow what the student says. It may be because the students lack practice to internalize the concepts. (T 5)

Mwaniki (2013) noted that students add extra sound in words when they articulate words for example trouble for trouble and sikiream for scream. The findings of the current study too confirmed that students had challenges with adding extra sound in their articulation of words. This implies that most students find it difficult to communicate intelligibly in the English language because if an extra sound is added to a word the meaning would be distorted. It therefore means that the students might not do well in the exams. Cooperation between the teachers and the students would help a great deal to alleviate such challenges.

Pronouncing a Letter that Should be Silent

The study wanted to find out if the students had difficulty in pronouncing a letter that should be silent in a word. This was to ascertain the challenges that the students had in articulation of English words because this determines the level of their acquisition of oral English skills.

Table on Pronouncing a Letter that Should be Silent as Reported by the Teachers

(n = 35)

pronouncing a letter that should be silent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	11	31.4	31.4	31.4
Disagree	3	8.6	8.6	40.0
Strongly Agree	21	60.0	60.0	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

The students that acceded that they had challenges with letters that should be silent in a word were 91.4% while those students who disagreed were 8.6%. This percentage shows that the students had challenges identifying those sounds that should be silent and they might not do well in questions relating to silent letters in a word. They therefore need a lot of practice and consult their teachers to internalize the concept.

Table on Pronouncing a Letter that Should be Silent as Reported by the Students

(n=295)

pronouncing a word that should be silent

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	1	.3	.3	.3
Agree	74	25.1	25.1	25.4
Disagree	39	13.2	13.2	38.6
Strongly Agree	150	50.8	50.8	89.5
Strongly Disagree	30	10.2	10.2	99.7
Undecided	1	.3	.3	100.0
Total	295	100.0	100.0	

The teachers who agreed that students had problems pronouncing a letter that should be silent according to table were 75.9% while those that disagreed were 23.4%. Those who were undecided were .3%. This is a very big difference compared to the students' response. During interviews with the teachers it was established that many students still pronounce those letters that should be silent in a word when articulating a word in English. One teacher noted,

I normally find students with difficulty in pronouncing a letter that should be silent. Some students are not aware that English words do not follow spellings. They just read the words articulating all the letters. This could be because many speakers in the media also do the same. (T2)

Another teacher argued,

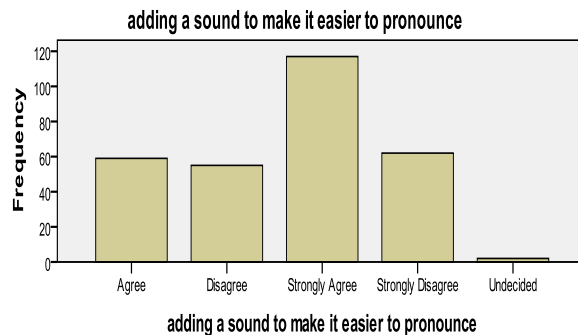
Many students cannot tell which letters should be silent in a word. Words like 'subtle' and 'subpoena' are difficult for the students to articulate, sound /b/ would always be sounded in their articulation (T 8)

The findings of Josiah, Rodunde and Robert (2012) that some of the undergraduate students could not articulate the word 'secretary' and 'warned' correctly resonates the findings of the current study. Many students still had difficulty articulating some letters, however in the current study it was established that students had difficulty with letters that should be silent in a word. This would mean that most students would lack confidence while speaking in the English language and might not perform well in their exams. It requires a lot of exposure to good English speakers if the students are to perform well. The teachers need to work together with the students for success in language acquisition as suggested by socio-cultural constructivist theory.

Adding a Sound to Make a Word Easier to Pronounce

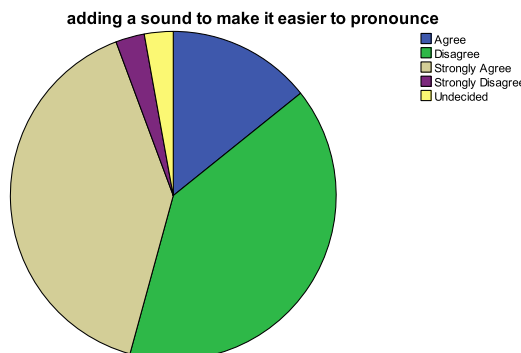
The study wanted to find out if students had problems of adding a sound to make a word easier to pronounce. This was to ascertain whether the students had difficulty in articulation of words in learning oral English skills.

Figure on Adding a Sound to Make a Word Easier to Pronounce as Reported by the Students (n=295)



The students who agreed that they had difficulty adding a sound to make it easier to pronounce a word according to figure 2.3a were 59.7% while those who disagreed were 39.6%. This finding is average. It means some students still had challenges with adding a sound to a word so not all the students might perform well in articulation of words. They need to practice a lot to get the sounds correctly.

Figure on Adding a Sound to Make a Word Easier to Pronounce as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)



The figure shows that the respondents who agreed that students had problems adding a sound to make it easier to pronounce were 54.3% while those who disagreed were 42.9%. The teachers also concurred with their students that they had difficulty with adding a sound to make it easier to pronounce. During interviews with the teachers the study found out that students had difficulty with articulation of words. One teacher stated,

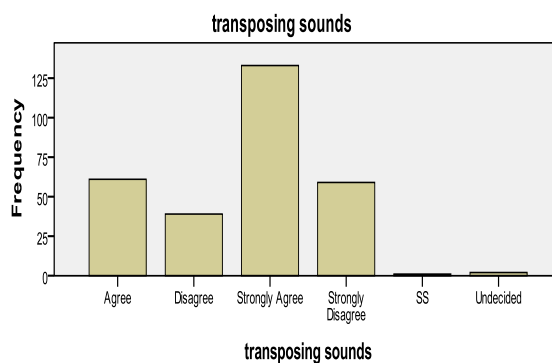
Some students add sounds like /r/ sound like 'idear' for idea and 'drawr' for draw. They find it difficult to comprehend how such words are articulated. The students need to work hard to get the sounds correctly. They should listen to the media that focus on correct pronunciation of the English language. (T 15)

A study by Hassan (2014) too indicated that Sudanese students of English whose language background is Sudanese spoken Arabic, had problems with pronunciation of English vowels that have more than one way of pronunciation in addition to the consonants sound contrasts. However the current study found out that some students would add some sounds to make it easier to pronounce a word in English language. This shows that most students might have had problems in articulation of words during their communication in the English language and poor pronunciation of words affects meaning. This implies that most students would lack confidence while speaking and they might shy away from answering questions in class since they cannot communicate well. It then requires a lot of practice to enable the students internalize the concepts.

Transposing Sounds

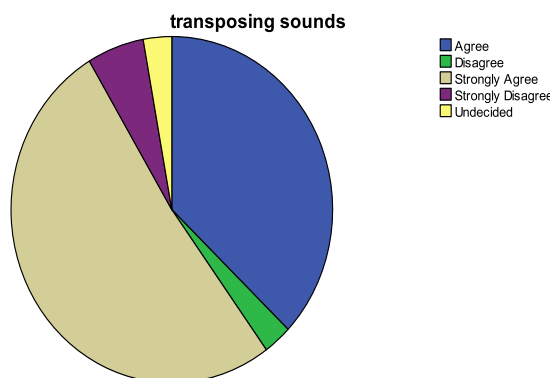
The study sought to find out if the students have problems with transposing sounds so as to ascertain whether the students have difficulty in articulating words correctly in English language since this was part of the content that the students are expected to master for intelligibility. The findings are presented in pie chart figures 2.4a and b.

Figure on Transposing Sounds as Reported by the Students (n=295)



The students who agreed that they had difficulty with transposing of words were 65.8% while those who disagreed were 33.2%. Many students had difficulty with transposing sounds. Many students normally confuse the spellings with articulation of a word. This would mean that not many students would do well in oral English skills.

Figure on Transposing Sounds as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)



The teachers who agreed that students had difficulty with transposing sounds according to figure 2.4a were 88.5% while those who disagreed were 8.2%. The teachers' response, too were in agreement with their students but the percentage was higher than that of the students. During interviews with the teachers, they confirmed that students had challenges with transposing sounds. A teacher said,

Students have problems with transposing sounds. Many students normally say 'aks' instead of ask in their conversations. They find it easier to articulate letter /k/ before /s/ sound. This means they would just write the words the way they say them and as to such it will affect their performance in oral English skills. (T 1).

Khamkhien (2010) in his study of Thai students also found out that students experience difficulties in speaking English language because most of the words are not in their native language. The findings of the current study too, indicated that there were difficulties experienced by the students in learning articulation of words in the teaching and learning of oral English skills. However the study looked at transposing sounds and found that the students had challenges with transposing sounds. Such mistakes in utterance would be transferred into written work and as to such it would affect the students' performance in oral English skills. This means that the students' communication may be hampered. Many of the students in this study too may have had challenges due to their nativity. This implies that there would be mistakes in spelling since what the students say is what they write directly. This would therefore make them perform poorly in the exams.

How Problems of Articulation Affect the Teaching and Learning of Oral English Skills

When the teachers were asked how the pedagogical challenges involving articulation affect the teaching and learning of oral English skills through the interviews and open ended questions, it was established that many students experience challenges with articulation of words therefore they might not perform well in their exams. One teacher believed,

When the students pronounce words wrongly, it affects meaning and most students develop fear and avoid speaking in the English language. They shy away from answering questions in class since they cannot communicate well. The students then would perform dismally in their exams. (T 9)

The students, through open ended questions, too consented that problems of articulation make them fail in the exams. One student said,

I end up giving wrong spelling of words in the exam. It gives me hard time deciding the correct word and thus makes learning difficult leading to low grades in English language. Sometimes I develop negative attitude towards English as a subject. (S 2)

The findings of the study by Tergujeff (2013) on English pronunciation teaching in Finland resonates the present study. The study found that the uses of communicative activities that explicitly focus on pronunciation are rare. However, plenty of implicit training is offered in the form of more general oral skills exercises. The overall approach to teaching English pronunciation can be described as *narrow*, as focus is clearly on the segmental level. Phonetic training as part of English pronunciation teaching only plays a minor role. Teaching learners to recognize the relevant phonetic symbols seems to be an objective at the primary level, after which the symbols are only sparsely used as a tool. Concentration on physical articulation and the use of phonetic terminology appears to be rare.

The current study too found that there were challenges involving the teaching and learning of content of articulation and as such the students might not communicate intelligibly. This is because poor articulation of words affects meaning. If students cannot articulate words correctly then communication would be difficult yet the main purpose of speaking is to relay messages with meaning. It calls for a lot of dedication for the success of communication. It is important for students to articulate words correctly if they are to succeed in their learning of oral English skills. Both the teachers and the students have to work together for success in oral English skills.

Pronunciation of Words

Stress Placement in Words

The study wanted to find out if the students had difficulty with the stress of words to give different meanings of a word. This was to determine whether pronunciation as a teaching content is a problem to the students.

Table on Stress Placement in Words as Reported by the Students (n=295)

stress of words

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	66	22.4	22.4	22.4
Disagree	37	12.5	12.5	34.9
Strongly Agree	156	52.9	52.9	87.8
Strongly Disagree	36	12.2	12.2	100.0
Total	295	100.0	100.0	

The table shows that the students had challenges with stress in words. The students who agreed that they had difficulty with stress placement in words to give different meanings were 75.3% while those who declined were 24.7%. Most students still don't understand placement of stress on words to give different meanings. They normally confuse the words end up writing them wrongly.

Table on Stress Placement in Words as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)

stress of words

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	14	40.0	40.0	40.0
Disagree	2	5.7	5.7	45.7
Strongly Agree	17	48.6	48.6	94.3
Strongly Disagree	2	5.7	5.7	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

The table indicates the teachers who agreed that the students had difficulty with stress placement in words to give different meaning were 88.6% while those who disagreed were 11.4%. During interviews with the teachers it was established that students had difficulties with stress of words. One teacher maintained,

Most students still don't understand placement of stress on words to give different meanings. They normally confuse between nouns, verbs and adjectives and since they cannot pronounce the words correctly they end up writing the words wrongly. More confusion comes about when they are asked to place stress marks on single words to give different meanings. (T13)

Ariff & Mugableh (2013) studied Jordanian international university students in Malaysia, revealed that students faced several language difficulties, for example, vocabulary, pronunciation, listening comprehension and the immediacy and interactive nature of spoken language. The current study is a confirmation that students had challenges with pronunciation of words with regards to placement of stress of words. According to the teachers most students find it a challenge to put stress on words correctly to give different meanings. This shows that majority of the students might not place stress appropriately when they communicate leading to distorted meaning of sentences. Such students therefore might not answer questions correctly when they are tested and might perform dismally in the exams. The students therefore need to work closely with their teachers so as to do well in oral English skills.

Stress of Words in Sentences

The study wanted to find out if the students had problems in placing stress on words to create meanings of different sentences. This was to ascertain if the students were able to effectively communicate in their conversations.

Table on Stress of Words in Sentences as Reported by the Students (n=295)

stress of words in sentences

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	73	24.7	24.7	24.7
Disagree	47	15.9	15.9	40.7
Strongly Agree	130	44.1	44.1	84.7
Strongly Disagree	44	14.9	14.9	99.7
Undecided	1	.3	.3	100.0
Total	295	100.0	100.0	

The respondents who consented that they had difficulty were 68.8% while those who disagreed were 30.8%. This indicates that a number of students had challenges with stress of words in sentences. Students do not place stress on words correctly. Most of their words in sentences will have the same treatment in utterance. This implies that the students might not perform well in oral English skills.

Table on Stress of Words in Sentences as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)

stress of words in sentences

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	14	40.0	40.0	40.0
Disagree	3	8.6	8.6	48.6
Strongly Agree	18	51.4	51.4	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

The findings from table show that the teachers who agreed that students have problems in placing stress on words in sentences were 91.4% while those who disagreed were 8.6%. The teachers concurred with the students that the students had difficulty placing stress on words in sentences. During the interview with the teachers the study established that students had difficulties with the stress of words. One teacher noted,

Many students do not place stress on words in sentences correctly. Most of their words in sentences will have the same treatment. They cannot place stress on words to give meaning. The most difficult part comes when they are told to identify the stressed words in sentences in written work. It becomes difficult to tell what the students intend to say. The spoken sentences are normally distorted. (T 10)

Howlader (2010) in his study of teachers' perspectives on importance of pronunciation and models of pronunciation found that there were disputes of different accents and suggested a neutral accent to be followed in communication. The current study however, shows that a number of students have challenges with stress of words in sentences. They are not able to communicate effectively since placing stress on the wrong word in a sentence would distort the meaning that was intended. It therefore implies that students might not do well in their exams. It calls for hard work on the part of both the teachers and the students if success in oral English skill is to be attained.

The Use of Falling Intonation

The study sought to find out if students had difficulty identifying when to use falling intonation in sentences. This was to determine whether the concept of falling intonation in the teaching and learning of oral English skills gave students problems

Table on The Use of Falling Intonation as Reported by the Students (n=295)

falling intonation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	72	24.4	24.4	24.4
Disagree	46	15.6	15.6	40.0
Strongly Agree	149	50.5	50.5	90.5
Strongly Disagree	27	9.2	9.2	99.7
Undecided	1	.3	.3	100.0
Total	295	100.0	100.0	

The students who consented that they had challenges with falling intonation were 74.9% while those who declined were 24.8%. The students agreed that they had difficulty with falling intonation. Most students still do not understand when to use falling intonation in their speech. This might lead to miscommunication leading to poor performance.

Table on The Use of Falling Intonation as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)

falling intonation

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid Agree	17	48.6	48.6	48.6
Strongly Agree	17	48.6	48.6	97.1
Strongly Disagree	1	2.9	2.9	100.0
Total	35	100.0	100.0	

The findings from the table show that the respondents who agreed that students had difficulty identifying when to use falling intonation were 97.2% while those who disagreed were 2.9%. During interviews with the teachers the study confirmed that the students had difficulty in using falling intonation. A teacher stated,

Most students still do not understand when to use falling intonation. Students have difficulty identifying when to use falling intonation. The students confuse between American English and British English in their utterance. Nigerian English also has effect on many students since many of them watch Nigerian movies. They look at it to be of great fun. It becomes difficult to correct the students once they adopt the language. (T 12)

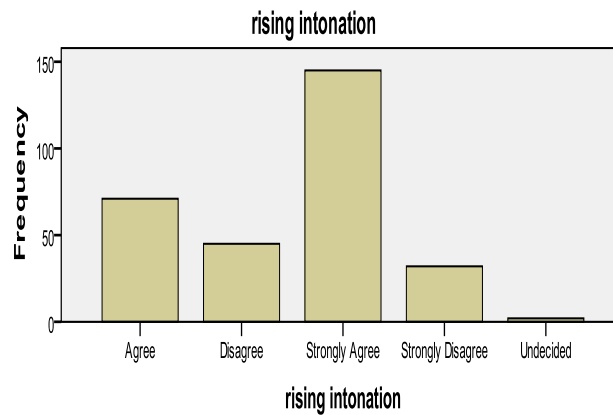
Lewchoska (2005) in his study of prosodic features among teacher trainees found out that intonation was perceived to be the most difficult aspect. The current study too has established that the students had difficulties with intonation as one of the prosodic features. According to the teachers students have difficulty identifying when to use falling intonation. This implies that a number of students might not communicate effectively since using a wrong intonation at the end of a sentence will distort the meaning that was intended. It also implies that the students might do poorly in their exams.

The Use of Rising Intonation

The study wanted to find out if the students had difficulty when to use rising intonation.

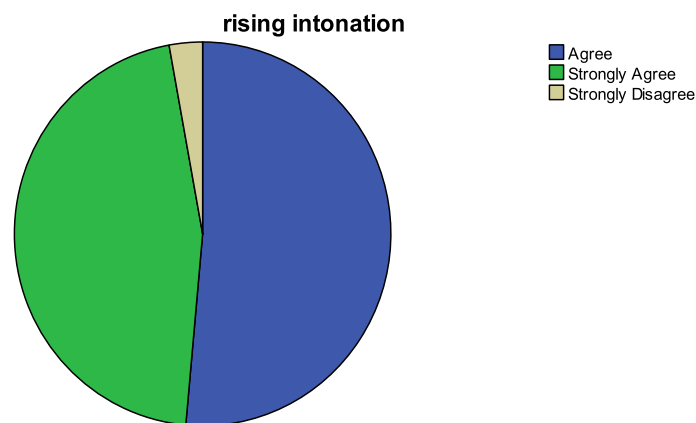
This was to establish whether the students were able to communicate intelligibly in their conversations.

Figure on Rising Intonation as Reported by the Students (n=295)



The students who agreed that they had difficulty with rising intonation were 73.3% while those who disagreed were 26.1%. Most students get confused on when to use rising intonation especially when asking questions. They also have difficulties with exclamation marks. This implies they might not communicate effectively in English language.

Figure on Rising Intonation as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)



The findings from the figure above show the teachers who agreed that students had difficulty identifying when to use rising intonation were 97.7% while those who disagreed were 2.9%. During interviews with the teachers it was established that a number of students do not know when to use rising intonation. A teacher maintained,

Students get confused on when to use rising intonation especially when asking questions. Many students have difficulty with WH and how questions. They also have difficulties with exclamation marks. A few students however, can use intonation with yes/no questions. (T 35)

Beltran (2015) studied English intonation patterns of non- English major student teachers in Philippines and found that the students carry the intonation and pronunciation rules from their mother tongue into English spoken discourse. This shows that many students are not conversant with rising intonation. It therefore implies that a number of students are not able to communicate effectively since using a wrong intonation at the end of a sentence would distort the meaning that was intended. Unfortunately, many studies had not focused on intonation. It then calls for more studies to be done in this area.

The Use of Rising-Falling Intonation

The study sought to find out if students had problems identifying rising- falling intonation in sentences. This was to determine if the students experience difficulty in communication. The findings are presented in the tables

Table on Rising-Falling Intonation as Reported by the Students (n=295)

rising- falling intonation		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	66	22.4	22.4	22.4
	Disagree	40	13.6	13.6	35.9
	Strongly Agree	160	54.2	54.2	90.2
	Strongly Disagree	27	9.2	9.2	99.3
	Undecided	2	.7	.7	100.0
Total		295	100.0	100.0	

The respondents who acceded that they had difficulties with rising- falling intonation were 76.6% while those who disagreed were 21.8%. Many students had difficulty identifying rising- falling intonation. They can't just comprehend how it works especially when they have to tell at which words the voice would be raised or lowered. This implies that the students might not perform well in their communication.

Table on Rising-Falling Intonation as Reported by Teachers (n=35)

rising- falling intonation		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	13	37.1	37.1	37.1
	Disagree	1	2.9	2.9	40.0
	Strongly Agree	21	60.0	60.0	100.0
Total		35	100.0	100.0	

The findings from the table show the respondents who agreed that students had problems identifying rising-falling intonation were 97.1 % while those who disagreed were 2.9%. During the interviews with the teachers it was also established that the students had challenges with rising -falling intonation and vice versa. One teacher said,

Many students have difficulty identifying rising- falling intonation. This is the most difficult part for the students. They can't just comprehend how it works, especially when they have to tell at which words will the voice would be raised or lowered. It requires a lot of practice for the students to get the concept. (T 18)

Tergujeff (2012) carried a case study on English pronunciation teaching among four teachers in Finland. The findings of the study showed that the teaching and learning was characterized as teacher- led to a great extent. The teachers also operated at the level of segmental features, even though supra segmental features of speech have been found to be more crucial for intelligibility than segmental and emphasis on supra segmental in pronunciation teaching has been suggested to be more effective than emphasis on segmental. The current study however focused on the students' difficulties in pronunciation and found that many students had difficulty identifying rising- falling intonation. This shows that a number of students might not communicate effectively since using a wrong intonation at the end of a sentence would distort the meaning that was intended. It therefore calls for thorough practice for the students to get the concept.

How Difficulties in Pronunciation Affect the Teaching and Learning of Oral English Skills

The findings from open ended questions and interview schedules established that most teachers believed that the students could not communicate well because of poor stress of words. One teacher noted,

Students tend to assume that intonation is the same as tonal variation hence affect learning of oral English skills. The students find it difficult to get meaning of stressed words and how to pronounce them as a noun or verb or adjective. There is failure to relay intended meaning or that correct meaning is not achieved. It makes the students experience difficulty in answering oral English skills questions since they are not able to differentiate meanings of words and sentences. (25)

Another teacher maintained,

Some students do not get the concept clearly leading to poor delivery of different messages. These challenges impede acquisition rate of listening and speaking skills. Most students are not able to express themselves understandably and so they lose interest. (17)

When the students were asked how the difficulties of pronunciation affect their learning of oral English skills they also concurred with their teachers that they cannot communicate effectively and they perform dismally in their exams. A student noted,

It bars me from answering questions correctly in the exams and so I end up failing. I do not get good grades in English. Learning becomes uncomfortable. It makes me to be afraid and avoid speaking in English. It makes English boring. Sometimes I lack confidence and cannot speak well in public. (S 20)

Xia (2013) studied gender differences in using language and found that women often like to speak in a high pitch voice because of physiological reasons, but scientists point out that this also associates with women’s timidity and emotional stability while men like to use falling intonation to show they are quite sure of what they are saying. Falling intonation also shows men’s confidence and sometimes power. The current study however focused on how difficulties of pronunciation affect the teaching and learning of oral English skills. The findings indicated that students had difficulties with pronunciation of words. This shows how the students face a lot of challenges in understanding the content of oral English skills. They might not therefore do well in their exams. This implies that most students still have challenges with prosodic features of the English language.

Challenges to Do with Connected Speech

Problems with Elision

The study sought to establish if the students had problems with elision. This was to ascertain whether the students found problems related to connected speech which is an important area in teaching and learning of oral English skills.

Table on Problems with Elision as Reported by the Students (n=295)

problems with elision		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	52	17.6	17.6	17.6
	Disagree	45	15.3	15.3	32.9
	Strongly Agree	152	51.5	51.5	84.4
	Strongly Disagree	45	15.3	15.3	99.7
	Undecided	1	.3	.3	100.0
	Total	295	100.0	100.0	

In the table, students who agreed that they had difficulty with elision were only 69.1% while those who declined were 30.6%. This occurs when a sound is omitted when pronouncing a word. Many students would be careful to articulate all the sounds in a word. This could be due to lack of knowledge of elision in a word during communication. They would sound more like speaking in their first language where elision is not observed.

Table on Problems with Elision as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)

problems with elision		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	15	42.9	42.9	42.9
	Disagree	2	5.7	5.7	48.6
	Strongly Agree	15	42.9	42.9	91.4
	Strongly Disagree	2	5.7	5.7	97.1
	Undecided	1	2.9	2.9	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

The table shows the teachers who agreed that the students had problems with elision were 85.8% while those that disagreed were 11.4%. This is a very high percentage compared to the students' views. During an interview with the teachers it was also established that students had difficulty with elision in connected speech. One teacher said,

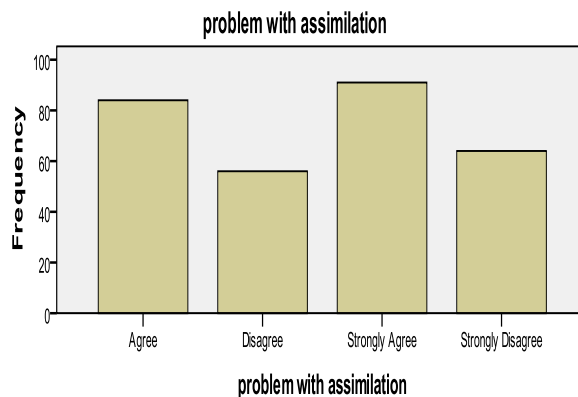
Students find elision difficult, they normally sound all the sounds in a word not realizing that there are some sounds that are elided in articulation for example the word didn't. Elision occurs when a sound is omitted and it is a typical feature of connected speech. It is a challenge to the students might be because of their previous learning experiences. (T 29)

Oladipupo & Akinjobi (2015) on the study of a socio-phonetic study of young Nigerian English speakers established that elision is considered a phonetically motivated process that is characteristic of connected speech, in that it enhances the ease of articulation. That males significantly deleted more boundary consonants than females, therefore, implies that male speakers (especially from high social class) are more receptive to natural phonological processes and are more economical in their articulation than female speakers, who tend to be more careful and formal in speech. The current study however looked at problems with elision and found that students find elision difficult. This implies that little attention has been given to elision. The students therefore might not perform well in oral English skills.

Difficulties with Assimilation

The study sought to establish if the students had problems with assimilation. This was to ascertain if connected speech content which is an important area in teaching and learning of oral English skills was difficult to the students.

Figure on Problem with Assimilation as Reported by the the Students (n =295)



The students in figure 3.2a accepted that they had challenges with assimilation with agreement at 64.1% while those that declined were 34.9%. The students find it hard to recognize assimilation in connected speech. Its wrong usage leads to producing wrong rhythm and intonation and their speech would become unclear and less fluent. It would be difficult to understand the student's utterance.

Figure on Problem with Assimilation as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)

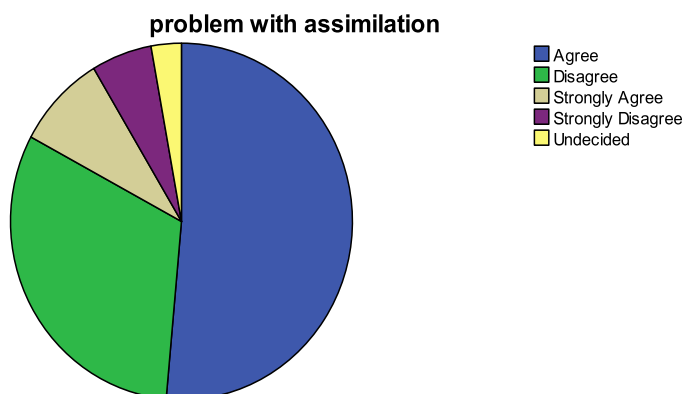


Figure 3.2b shows those who agreed that students had problems with assimilation were 60 % while those who disagreed were 37.1%. During interviews with the teachers it was revealed that students have difficulty with assimilation. One teacher noted,

Many students experience difficulty with assimilation. They find it difficult to say certain words in English language. Without using assimilation we sound too careful. This would lead to production of wrong rhythm and intonation and then our speech becomes unclear and less fluent. What is really worrying is when students try to apply assimilation rules of their own mother tongue they therefore become unintelligible. (T 22)

This study confirms what Baghrani, Shariati & Tajadini (2014) investigated on the effects of assimilation and elision on listening comprehension. They found that Iranian students lack knowledge of assimilation and elision as exercised in native speech. The current study found that students find it hard to recognize assimilation in connected speech. This implies that it would be a real challenge for native speakers to follow what the student says which may become a mixture of English and of their language. This may therefore lead to unintelligibility in oral English skills.

Difficulties with Linking Sounds

The study wanted to find out if the students had problems with word linking of /r/ and /l/ sounds. This was to determine the understanding of students on connected speech content that the students are supposed to master for performance in exams. The findings are presented in tables 4.3.2a and b.

Table on Difficulties with Linking Sounds as Reported by the Students (n=295)

problem with linking sounds		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	89	30.2	30.2	30.2
	Disagree	49	16.6	16.6	46.8
	Strongly Agree	100	33.9	33.9	80.7
	Strongly Disagree	54	18.3	18.3	99.0
	Undecided	3	1.0	1.0	100.0
	Total	295	100.0	100.0	

In the table many students agreed that they had difficulty with linking sounds as compared to the percentage of their teachers which was average. The students who consented that they had difficulty with linking sounds were 64.1 % while those who declined were 34.9%. The students normally speak each word individually. They do not understand how sounds are linked. It therefore makes it difficult to understand the native speaker’s utterances

Table on Difficulties with Linking Sounds as Reported by the Teachers (n=35)

problem with linking sounds		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	14	40.0	40.0	40.0
	Disagree	12	34.3	34.3	74.3
	Strongly Agree	4	11.4	11.4	85.7
	Strongly Disagree	3	8.6	8.6	94.3
	Undecided	2	5.7	5.7	100.0
	Total	35	100.0	100.0	

The table shows the respondents that agreed that students had difficulty with word linking were 51.4% while those that disagreed were 42.9%. An interview with the teachers established that the students had challenges with word linking. One teacher stated,

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Students have difficulty with the word linking. Many students do not understand how sounds are linked and it is hard for such students to understand how native speakers speak since they string words together. The students normally speak each word individually. Their speech therefore does not flow well. (T 17)

These indicate that students had problems with linking words. In connected speech sound 'r' at the end of a word may be pronounced or not, depending on whether following word begins with a vowel or with a consonant. Linking /r/ appears in situations when the letter 'r' is presented in the written form. Many students do not understand how sounds are linked and it is hard for such students to understand how native speakers speak. Their utterance would also be unintelligible to others.

4. SUMMARY

Looking at the challenges to do with pedagogical challenges involving teaching content, the study focused on articulation, pronunciation, oral poetry, and connected speech, oral literature, etiquette and non linguistics- body language and paralanguage.

The first teaching content that the study covered was on articulation of words. The study found that there were challenges involving the teaching and learning of content of oral English skills involving articulation of words and as such the students might not communicate intelligibly. The students had challenges dealing with: substituting one sound for another; leaving one sound out when articulating a word; adding an extra sound when articulating a word; pronouncing a letter that should be silent; adding a sound to make it easier to pronounce and difficulty with transposing sounds. There is poor articulation of words which affects meaning intended. If students cannot articulate words correctly then communication would be difficult yet the main purpose of speaking is to relay messages with meaning. It calls for a lot of dedication for the success of communication. It is important for students to articulate words correctly if they are to succeed in their learning of oral English skills.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that: The curriculum developers need to come up with comprehensive teaching and learning materials that would help the teachers as well as the students to succeed in teaching and learning content of oral skills in English language.

The study recommends that future studies be carried out on pedagogical challenges of teaching and learning of reading and writing in Kenya.

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