

ENGLISH LANGUAGE: A VERITABLE INSTRUMENT FOR FOSTERING TEACHERS' EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper examined teachers' education in relation to English Language. No nation can develop without proper education of its entire citizens while the teacher stands out as the coordinator of all the living resources in the school system. The teachers' role is unquantifiable. Right from the formative years to the higher institutions, the teacher is there to inform, reform, mould, re-mould, instruct the learner, develop his three domains and to finally bring out the best in him while he contributes his own quota to his own development and that of the Nation. The focus of this paper, therefore, was to provoke rethinking and stimulate renewed discourse on English Language as a veritable instrument for fostering teachers' education in Nigeria and proffer solutions that will help prospective teachers to use English Language for both oral and written communication that will meet both national and international standards of correctness and intelligibility without recourse to what would be acceptable by Nigerian standards but incorrect by global standards, such that at the end, the society and generations yet unborn will benefit immensely.

Keywords: *English language, teacher education, fostering global standard*

INTRODUCTION

Education is the cornerstone of any nation and the development of any nation depends largely on the quality of her education which in turn depends on the professional qualification and occupational competency of the teachers. Ajeyi (1998) succinctly asserts that education unlocks the key to modernization, but the teacher holds the key to that door. This view corroborates Alifa (2003), who states that teachers have a role to play in the development of a nation especially in bringing up leaders and intellectuals of tomorrow who will sustain the nation. The importance of teachers can never be over-emphasized. At all levels of learning - Daycare, Kindergarten, Nursery, Primary, Secondary and Tertiary, one meets a teacher. They are the foundation stones for these children.

In fact, Igwe (2000) opines that the teaching profession is a unique occupation and that the quality of the services of teaching in Nigeria directly influences the future of the nation and its citizens. Nigeria, as a nation is beset with so many problems such as illiteracy, corruption, nepotism, bad governance, leadership problem, economic recession, greed, indiscipline, etc. It is believed that these problems will become surmountable if there is a proper and well-articulated teacher education programme, when language as a medium of instruction is well understood.

Teacher education as the training arm of the teaching profession is charged with developing knowledge and skills as basis for practice. It prepares personnel for entry into the profession of teaching. Teachers are the ideal nation builders. Oyekan (2000) sees teacher education as the profession of professional education and specialized training within a specified period for the preparation of individuals who intend to develop and nurture the young ones into responsible and productive citizens. As enumerated by the National Policy on Education (2004), the objectives of teacher education include:

- (a) To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of our education system.
- (b) To further encourage the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
- (c) To help teachers to fit into the social life of the society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives.
- (d) To provide teachers with the intellectual and professional backgrounds adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of their country, but in the wider world, and
- (e) To enhance teachers' commitment to the teaching profession.

THE STATUS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN EDUCATION

English Language is the official language in many countries of the world including Nigeria. English Language as a colonial linguistic legacy has been the country's official language since the exit of our British colonial administration. It became the language of Trade, Education, Judiciary, Government and of instruction in our institutions and by default the lingua franca. Its importance in the educational sector and even in the labour market cannot be over emphasized. Bamgbose (1971), however, observes that of all the legacies of colonial administration in Nigeria, perhaps none is as important as English Language. It is indeed the dominant vehicular tool of communication. The entrenchment of English Language is indeed most apparent in the area of education to the extent that the scientific, cultural and technological knowledge in most part of the world could only be obtained through the English Language (Bamgbose, 1971).

On the importance of the English Language, Tiffen (1980) asserts that in English-speaking Africa, English Language is required for many purposes. Jegede (1990) submits that the backbone of the country's educational system is English Language. He further points out that students' ability to undertake higher education on any discipline depends on their achievement in English Language. The implication here is that students' inability to comprehend the English Language will automatically affect the whole system of education. Adebija (1994) further highlights other cardinal roles of English Language in Nigeria as a second language serving as a mediator in the face of Nigeria's multilingualism which makes it the official Language and a key to educational

advancement and worthwhile employment. As the language of trade, administration, national and international communication English Language has assumed greater responsibilities in Nigeria and the globe. He emphatically submits that admission into post primary and tertiary institutions of learning depends on one's performance in the English Language with Mathematics as its second.

THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG STUDENTS IN COLLEGES OF EDUCATION

The present state of English Language usage among students at all levels of the country's educational system has been a source of concern to language teachers, other educators and the public. The concern stems from the unpardonable inadequacies evident in students' use of English Language. Many even shamelessly discuss in their dialect to the hearing of their lecturers. This shameful use of their dialects however stems from their inadequacies in the language and their inability to develop themselves. The admission process in our various colleges, places so much emphasis on paper certificate with a credit pass in English Language as a requirement. Students therefore go to various "miracle centres" to get their various "good" grades in English Language without being able to make simple and correct sentences. On this, Jibowo (2003) asserts that student teachers are expected to be proficient and competent users of the language not just for their own advantages but because they are transmitters of knowledge, ideas and contents. Oyewole (1999) also actually expresses his doubts on the competence and ability of National Examination Council (NECO) to conduct a credible examination in Nigeria. Candidates with highly doubtful academic competence were grossly awarded excellent results in the first examination conducted by the council in June 2000 (Oyewole, 1999). The reason was political. The NECO was introduced by Northern Nigeria Policy Makers to favour students from the north in place of the higher standard exhibited by the traditional West African Certificate School Examination. By introducing NECO, the low performers in the southern schools and many in the north were favoured.

THE ISSUE OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

The issue of mother tongue education in Nigeria is not a recent phenomenon even though it was given a prominence in Language Education. Recently, the erstwhile Minister of Education, Professor Babs Fafunwa ordered that basic education in Nigerian schools be given in the child's mother-tongue. The issue of mother tongue predates our colonial era that education in the mother tongue was jettisoned for English Language because it was the language of commerce and even education. Immediately after independence and even during the colonial period, the development of English Language as a status and official language has been assumed.

The first language which is the mother tongue (L1) is acquired while the subsequent ones are learned. For this reason, every second language (L2) learner goes through what can be described as a harrowing experience in his acquisition of L2 because the learner tends to see the L2 in terms of the L1. The grammatical apparatus already programmed into the mind of learners of English as a second language through their first language interferes with the smooth acquisition of the second language. The second language users have learnt the rudiments of the L1 before learning the L2. There is therefore, a negative transfer of patterns of L1 to L2. This negative transfer of patterns is technically referred to as transliteration. The transfer ranges from phonological, syntactic, lexical as well as semantic patterns. Babawale (1988) asserts that this problem of language interference of course is not limited to this level of language analysis (phonology) alone, it is also found at the morphological, syntactic and semantic levels. It is to be added that the issue of interference is not peculiar to a particular ethnic group, rather it is evident in various ethnic groups in Nigeria and even Africa in general. Faloye (1990) succinctly puts it that Africans generally are noted for their imperfections in their speech in English Language.

Phonology: This is the branch of linguistics concerned with the analysis of sound systems as they function in languages. It is also applied to the sound system. Some English consonants are absent in the Yoruba consonant system.

Examples:

/θ/	as	in	thing
/ð/	as	in	thing
/V/	as	in	vim etc
	as	in	cheat, church

A Yoruba speaker/student is therefore tempted to substitute /V/ for /f/, /t/ for /d/, /ch/ for /s/ etc. For instance,

This	becomes	/dis/
Vim	becomes	/fim/
Church	becomes	
Thin	becomes	/tin/

Syntax: This is the arrangement for words, phrases to form sentences. In Nigeria, interference manifests itself when there is the transfer of the pronoun for example, Awon/won into English. “They” which is used by some students to mean he or she as a sign of respect to an older person, example, “They are calling you” when in actual fact should be he/she is calling you.

Lexis: This is a term used in linguistics to designate the total vocabulary of a language or sometimes the vocabulary used in a particular text. In Nigeria, we have uncountable words that are meaningful to us when we use them but which we consciously or inadvertently use as English words

Examples:

Garage for Motor parks

- Long leg for human connection
- Buttock power for woman influence or woman power
- Go slow for traffic jam or hold up
- To wash car for to celebrate one's new car
- To chop money for enjoy money

The areas of interference are numerous. It is therefore left to the student teacher to read wide, listen to educated native speakers and have the right exposure to be able to pronounce correctly. He must also know the various inconsistencies in the English Language, for instance, /k/ in English which is variously spelt as in:

Key	/ki:/	ˈk
Come	/kʌm/	ˈc
Quay	/ki:/	ˈq
Cup	/ /	ˈc
Ewe	/ju:/	

gaol as

These spelling inconsistencies are quite different from Yoruba Language where the words actually assist a writer orthographically. Second language users should strive for competence in the use of the official language since their communication will not always be limited to their environment. There is therefore the need to use the language in the correct manner where it will have international correctness and intelligibility.

ATTITUDE OF SOME STUDENT TEACHERS TO SOME ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS: READING AND SPEAKING

Reading: This is one of the four skills of every natural Language. It is a receptive skill. It is getting information from a printed material. It is important to know that one can not make a head way in life without an insatiable appetite for reading. Needless to mention that a student must read his or her course material before he/she can pass any prescribed examination. Whether one is reading for examination purpose, or swatting for pleasure, the underlying factor remains that one is getting informed. Obi-Okoye (1997) posits that the reading skill is an important skill needed in order to unlock the gates of wisdom through the prints. It is the process of communication by the means of graphic symbols through which most learning take place. A lot has been said about the importance of English Language in Nigeria, it is worthy to note that English Language enjoys a profusion of pedagogical materials which contrast sharply with the indigenous languages.

However, it is heartbreaking to state that students nowadays do not have reading culture. Hence, Faniran (1998) holds that despite the fact that the study of English Language always requires reading, many Nigerian students learning English hardly do any serious and systematic reading and lack the techniques of this important skill. The reading habit of students in Colleges of Education

is very poor. The reason for the poor reading state of the students being home and environment. Nigerian homes could be divided into two groups: the privileged and the less privileged backgrounds - poverty, with the latter constituting the largest number. Most students from literate homes have access to reading facilities such as text books, other books like novels, story books, newspapers, magazines and electronic gadgets like radio, television and computer. They may also have parental encouragement and interest in their academic pursuits. Students or children from this background in most cases perform better in reading and have a stronger vocabulary base. On the other hand, students who come from illiterate homes have little or no access to reading facilities. From empirical evidence, many students of the Colleges of Education are products of less privileged backgrounds, hence, their poor reading habit. They neither read for pleasure because there are no pedagogical materials nor even have a serious attitude to reading for examination purpose. Lawal (1993) argues that the reading habits of Nigerian students are poor because they read only to enable them pass examinations. They do not read to gather information nor for pleasure or as a culture for the acquisition of knowledge.

Reading is central to intellectual development because of the significant role it plays in the life of an individual. It is the gateway to understanding written materials as well as all subjects in the school curriculum. It is not only confined to print in a book but is linked to one of the functions of education itself, that is, the production of an educated one. It is, however, sad to know that students handle this very important skill with levity. In fact, the reading of their course material is not done and indeed, during lectures only few of them are observed to have their course materials. Faulty reading habits like head movement, pointing to words, vocalization, sub-vocalization, regression, rhythmic eye movement clearly manifest whenever students are involved in the reading exercise. The advantages of reading to a learner who wants to make headway in life are numerous. As Omojuwa (1997) succinctly enumerates, reading helps a reader to obtain information, develop vocabulary, draw inference, classify, observe, analyze, criticize, identify relationships, differentiate styles, draw conclusions and make generalizations.

Speaking: This is another skill of the English Language. It is a productive skill and next to listening. A child at birth spends the silent period to listen to sounds and utterances produced around him, which it later attempts to produce or imitate. Language is a human activity. Obadare (2008) asserts that language is a peculiarity of mankind and a viable instrument for expression. Language and man can never be separated. It is unquestionably the most-outstanding characteristic that distinguishes man from non-thinking animals. The primary aim of language is for communication which may be intra-personal, interpersonal or mass communication. With the Nigerian population of over one hundred million people and a complex language situation, English

Language unavoidably remains the major unifying factor. Students in the Colleges of Education have no other choice than to learn how to speak the language since it is the same language they are going to use as medium of instruction after graduation.

It is observed that many students in the Colleges of Education are not proficient and competent users of English Language. This prompted Jibowo (2003) to maintain that students in our higher institutions lack basic proficiency and that as a matter of necessity, they need to grounded better in English if their teaching must be effective. Speaking is all about applying rules that guide production of sentences in a given language. Bello (2002) asserts that speeches become bad when a speaker is only concerned about getting the ideas through rather than how the message is passed. He also adds that it is very important that students in higher institutions train themselves to speak correctly by speaking widely. It is observed that many students in the Colleges of Education feel so comfortable discussing more in their dialects than English. We learn a language by speaking so goes the saying, and Kadri (1988) believes that the problem students have towards English Language is compounded by their *laisser-faire* attitude. It has also been observed that many of the students fail in their examinations because they are not able to interpret questions. The time is therefore ripe for student teachers to moderate their discussions in their dialects and learn to speak in English Language for a greater part of their time during studies, as well as devote time to reading literatures.

TEACHING PRACTICE EXERCISE AND THE USE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

The teaching practice is a period to assess the teachers in training, a period to understand whether the would-be-teacher has the prerequisites to teach. But it is a common sight to behold student teachers standing in front of their pupils/ students making blunders in English Language. It is common to hear student-teachers saying, "Who can remember me what I teach you yesterday?" rather than "Who remind me what you were taught yesterday?" and also making blunders on the chalk-board during orthographic representation. That is why Akere (1993) cited by Awonusi (2004) maintains that in spite of the fact that English Language continues to be the dominant language of instruction in the educational system, there is evidence everywhere that the standard of English expression is very poor and students lack the proper knowledge of the communicative tasks at the various levels of education.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

to say that a teacher is a role model is purely stating the obvious. Teachers and the medium of communication (language) can never be dichotomized. Students-teachers must therefore as a matter of necessity take the learning of English Language more seriously in Nigeria. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- i “Reading” as a course should be introduced into the school curriculum.
- ii Teachers in training and out of training must cultivate the habit of reading wide. Newspapers, Magazines and educative novels must be part of the pedagogical materials they must read if they must improve in the use of the Language. As society is a dynamic one so also is Language. Teachers and learners of English must keep abreast with new methods of teaching and learning.
- iii Teaching is not just a profession to be described with a wave of the hand as it requires dedication, honesty, intelligence, love, sympathy, empathy and the ability to impart knowledge and ideas that will help in shaping the behaviours of the pupils towards the derived goals of the nation.
- iv Lecture halls in our colleges should no longer be congested so as to have a conducive atmosphere for teaching and learning.
- v Within the confinement of the school, emphasis should be laid on the use of English Language as a medium of communication.
- vi Efforts should be made by the government to make colleges of education attractive and not to be as a place to go when all hope is lost.
- vii Government should seriously look into the numerous miracle centres around us to avoid a student with high grade in English who is not able to construct simple and correct English expressions.
- viii Entrance examinations and interviews should be conducted under a very strict atmosphere to ensure that only competent students are admitted.
- ix Student teachers should be encouraged to read good narrative texts written by native speakers and also to listen to educated native speakers on CNN, VOA, BBC, so as to acquaint themselves with the appropriate use of the structural forms of the language. These will go a long way in reducing the problems that often confront second language users.
- x Efforts should be made to create occasions for the learners and the native speakers to interact by way of organizing excursions to countries where English Language is spoken or by inviting educated native speakers to interact with the learners by giving talks on contemporary issues.
- xi Language learning should not be totally and effectively confined to the classroom. Learners should be exposed to outside classroom conditions and experience where they would have the opportunity to put the language into proper practical use.
- xii We are indeed in the information technology era and the whole wide world has been transformed into a global village. Student teachers can not afford to sit on the fence. If teacher education must be functional, a meaningful teacher education at present must use ICT devices.

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