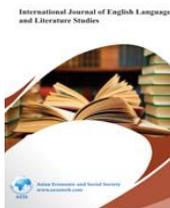




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AN ASSESSMENT OF THE COMMUNICATIVE AND DEVELOPMENTAL NEEDS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN A MULTILINGUAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Communication in a monolingual society, poses no problem to man as everybody would make use of the one available language for that purpose. This is not so in Nigeria where there are about 514 indigenous languages existing side-by-side the English. Although English as a foreign Language has taken the number one position even within the country, the rate of development has not been very easy for the users. This obvious communication reality calls for proper teaching of the English language especially at the foundation level. This paper examines the communicative needs of the learners of the English language in a multilingual Nigeria of the 21st century and identifies inadequate manpower development, poor method of teaching, lack of learning materials/ text books, teachers' lack of commitment to duty and students' lack of interest in learning as impediments to effective English language development. It concludes with the way forward on the parts of government, school administrators, teachers, parents and students.

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Contribution/ Originality

This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the communicative needs of English language learners especially in a multilingual nation such as Nigeria. It identified some of the impediments to effective English language development and proffers solution on the way forward.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The essence of language teaching in Nigerian schools is to improve the communicative competence of students in English Language. Language does not only distinguish man from other creatures but also endowed man with the authority to communicate. With language, man controls his entire environment. Language is more than an instrument for the conveying of ideas. It is an instrument for working on the feelings of others, for self expression and helps the user in achieving self-assessment. English Language is the language of education in Nigeria and many other countries of the world. For this very reason students study

English Language from pre-nursery to the university level. The essence of this is to increase the communicative competence of these learners. Language affects the opportunities and possibilities of acquiring knowledge, being in the world, exploring the world and enjoying the world. That may explain why every community tries hard to safeguard her language. Their efforts are justified by the general assertion that, language is universally recognized as a powerful index of culture and identity. As repository of culture, societies are set apart from one another because of language.

This cultural identity which language bequeaths to man has resulted in increasing conflicts especially in multicultural societies such as Nigeria. For instance, since Nigeria asserted her independence from her colonial lords some four decades ago, it has not been possible for her to come out in practical terms with an indigenous national language that can unify the ethnic groups. The Federal Government adopted the language of the three major ethnic groups; Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba as the three major Nigerian languages, with the hope that consequently, one would emerge as the official language of Nigeria. This is not to be because every language in Nigeria, including the minority languages, needs their own language to be recognized as supreme. This type of language loyalty exhibited by the different language communities has conspired to render the indigenous languages in Nigeria impotent in this present era. The Federal Government equally introduced the teaching of Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo (major Nigeria languages) and other minority languages into schools so that in the long run one of them (the major languages) will be adopted as Nigeria's official language. Since then, there have been reactions and counter reactions on what most people view as imposition of another group's languages on the minority groups.

The so called major languages have not thrived significantly beyond their geographical boundaries because of the obvious lack of teachers to teach them in schools. In the same vein, the acclaimed minority languages have not made any appreciable impact even within their domains because of the speakers' negative attitude to their language among other things (Udosen, 2002). All this has prepared the ground for English, an imperialist language, to thrive and take the number one position among the 394 to 400 Nigerian languages (Elugbe, 1998) and more recently Lewis Paul (2009) has given a new number as 514. Thus, English has assumed the privileged position as a national, official language of education, government as well as an international language in Nigeria. How do we empower the learners with this all important language? This is where

developing the language through the scheme of work to be taught comes in. This paper sets out to examine:

- (1) Language and communication in a multilingual Nigeria.
- (2) The role of English language in the Universal Basic Education programme.
- (3) A situation analysis of the current Universal Basic Education (UBE) English language curriculum development and finally, the paper concludes with some recommendations.

2. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION IN A MULTILINGUAL NIGERIA

Language according to the New Webster's dictionary is described as the organized system of speech used by human beings as a means of communication among themselves (p.554). The organized system of speech accounts for why languages are different because each speech community has certain agreed upon symbols for conveying meaning among them. A new person to the community would have to learn those agreed upon signals in order to interact meaningfully with them. A baby born into the community acquires the language naturally and eventually uses it freely to express his desires. In all this, what stands out is that language performs communicative role in any society. Multiculturalism on the other hand indicates plurality of cultures. 'Culture' here, refers to the totality of a group's way of life and the manner in which the group transmits their patterns of behaviors from one generation to the other. Multiculturalism serves as a bridge towards the reformation of national identity.

The needs of the present age, demands that her citizens are culturally sensitive and internationally focused so as to have a better orientation towards the future. Multiculturalism emphasizes that every individual irrespective of the race, ethnic groups/class, gender etc should be treated with equal value. This mentality encourages the expression of the diverse cultures by the various groups in the society. (Njemanze, 2014)

Man has been categorized as a social being who relates with others through interactions. This social nature of man has been largely influenced by language. Language has been a great instrument to the enhancement of the common ties of society. The popular Sapir-whorf hypothesis affirms in strong form, that language determines thought. Eka (2000) attests to the usefulness of language to man. The author affirms that language enables man conceptualize, depict and even portray the complexities and nature of his environment. Thus, the environment, determines how versatile the language will be, largely because language serves as a major instrument for its exploration. This brings us to the issue of communicative role of language in a multilingual Nigeria.

Language has been known to perform many different communicative functions. Language can perform the following roles thus making it possible for man to lead satisfying life.

- Informational role: when information is freely given and promoted in any society or corporate system, understanding is made easy and natural coexistence becomes possible.

- Language can be used to express emotions, happiness, bitterness, indifference, anger or even situations; love or hate can be expressed using language. When thus used it is said to perform expressive role.
- Language can also be used to open up a channel of communication and establish contact with others. An example is 'Hello' over telephone; or do you follow me? This is often referred to as physis role or contact function of language.
- Language can be used to direct the activities of other people or influence their behavior. In that case the language is performing a directive role.
- When language is used to seek compliance or control over the forces of nature as in the case of prayers or incantations depending on one's belief, the language in such instance is said to assume ideational role
- Language serves a performative role when an utterance leads to sudden changes in the real world; for instance, the condemnation of a criminal in a law court.

The fact that language can serve man in these various capacities indicate that man can adequately fulfill its social, ethical, political, educational or economical, functions.

However, in a multilingual state like Nigeria where the indigenous languages have refused to grow towards national and international statutes, the English language becomes more relevant in communicating these feelings and activities. It is the English language for now that the child needs to solve all his problems. He has to read textbooks, browse the internet and receive instruction in school through this language. Indeed, education for the development of the total man emphasized by the National Policy on Education (NPE) is achievable through the English language. It becomes imperative that its curriculum would be adequately developed.

3. ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CURRICULUM

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) according to NPE (04) is of nine year duration comprising six years of primary education and 3 years junior secondary education. It includes adult and non- formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adult and out-of- school youths (sec 7:15).

The goal of basic education among others includes: developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to it vigorous promotion:

- Reducing drastically the incidents of drop-out from the formal school system(through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);and
- Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life - long learning ([Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2000](#)).

In all this, English language plays a very important role. In the first three years of primary school, it is taught as a subject and from primary four it becomes the language of instruction throughout the UBE and all levels of education. In the core curriculum of each level, it occupies the number one position.

The aim of teaching English language according to the curriculum prescription is for the learners to acquire literacy skills and ability to communicate effectively (NPE 20). Most of the children come from homes where English is just a school language. Yet all of them need to learn the language well enough to achieve the goals stipulated for them to avoid dropping-out. At this foundation level therefore, English language plays vital roles in their lives. For instance, they have to learn English for concept development in all subjects in the school curriculum;

- Personality as well as intellectual development;
- Formation of positive attitudes to education;
- Effective exploration of the environment; and
- A healthy socialization process.

The UBE learners would derive satisfaction and personal fulfillment if they are helped to use English in ways described above. Then the foundation would have been laid for subsequent skills that would enable them lead useful lives within the society and for higher education.

There are two categories of UBE products: those that would have the mental and economic abilities to pursue further education; and those that would not. Those who cannot further their education are to function in their communities, survive and contribute to their development. They have to take to vocation of their choice to support themselves and even their future dependants. Among the survival skills they need most are communication skills to transact their businesses profitably. For those who can pursue higher education, their success also depends on their communicative proficiency in English as the language of education and learning in the various disciplines.

Thus, either way, the English language curriculum occupies central position in the lives of these young Nigerians. Failure to lay a solid foundation at this stage always lead to future failures and consequent indulgence in many anti-social behaviors such as examination malpractice that is currently rocking the nation's education system. Effective communication in English as a second language in Nigeria presupposes effective curriculum development in the language. But is the basic education curriculum effectively developed?

This question becomes necessary especially when it has been established that the school is the main centre for learning English among most Nigerians (Iwara, 2002). It has been shown that early literacy programmes in public schools are inadequate in terms of exposure and the kinds of activities involved (Adelore, 2002) making it difficult for learners to acquire solid foundation for language learning later in life. Evidence also abound that the performance of most school children in WAEC and NECO examination in recent times has been consistently below average (Ihejirika, 2011).

3.1. Impediments to English Language Curriculum Development

The role English language plays in the present and future lives of learners' demands that its curriculum be adequately and effectively developed. That way, the students will experience personal joy and fulfillment in the modern world of technology where they happen to belong.

Effective curriculum development which enhances effective curriculum implementation would normally address the following areas:

- (i) Manpower development.
- (ii) Method of teaching.
- (iii) Materials/textbooks.
- (iv) Teachers' and students' attitude towards teaching and learning.

A situation analysis of these areas would help us know whether we are really preparing the learners adequately for their future happy lives.

3.1.1. Manpower Development

Manpower development refers to the teachers who transact the curriculum. Since the teacher is a very important factor in any education system/level (NPE, 44), we may want to ask: How qualified are the English language teachers? Are the qualified ones enough in number to man the schools? Studies have consistently shown that qualified teachers of English language are in short supply (Obimbu, 1995; Mohammed, 2000; Udosen, 2005). A tour of the schools in our locality would present an awful picture. In many schools with a population of over five hundred students, one often finds only one teacher of English teaching in such a school. In such cases, what the school administrator does is to assign the language teacher to senior section and neglect the junior section. Where they show concern, the tendency is to deploy any teacher to teach the junior. As reported by Udosen (2005), teachers who specialized in government, Ibibio or Marketing are deployed to teach these beginners. This caliber of teachers cannot effectively implement the integrative English studies curriculum stipulated for schools in Nigeria.

Again most teachers have outlived their usefulness due to lack of exposure to seminars, workshops and conferences. As a result, they are not aware of "new programmes, knowledge, novel instructional objectives and methods" Nwagwu (2003); Ekpo (2000) blames teacher ineffectiveness on the teacher education programme that has failed to adequately equip the teachers with the relevant skills to make them function well in the 21st century classrooms. Thus, the problem of insufficient manpower development hinders effective English language curriculum development.

3.1.2. Methods of Teaching

Another thing that impacts on curriculum development is method of teaching. Methods of teaching language are as important as the curriculum content and as such determine to a great extent how children learn. Curriculum development aims at introducing new approaches and methods to improve teaching and learning. However, a tour of the education system from Primary to secondary will reveal one thing; that the method of teaching most subjects including English is somewhat like what Nnadozie and Nwogbo (2004) tagged the "traditional method of instruction". In this type of method, the teacher does all the talking and almost everything while the learners remain passive listening to him. The authors put it this way:

Traditional methods of instruction are in vogue. By this one is referring to a situation where the teacher uses a lesson plan to direct the students through a given sequence of material. An attempt is made to transmit the material to the students by means of lectures and other verbal explanations and demonstrations. The students are forced to cover essentially the same lessons and the textbook is employed as the basic instrument of instruction.... The students are required to listen to the teacher, and must study the materials which the teacher thinks are necessary....This is also the process in the entire education sector beginning from pre-school to tertiary education system (Nnadozie and Nwogbo, 2004)

The picture painted by this quotation is that of classrooms that are mechanical and sterile, devoid of opportunities and activities for learners to express themselves and practice the language required of them in the real world. The teachers' preoccupation is how to cover the syllabus for examination purposes. Therefore, activities that would have stimulated the learners and enriched their experiences are carefully avoided or skipped (Adelore, 2002; Okebukola, 2002; Udosen, 2002). And yet, these children need to manipulate things in order to learn especially in learning a language that is not their own. The present ways of teaching in the schools encourages rote learning and is partly responsible for drop-out incidences which the programme intended to forestall.

3.1.3. Materials/Textbooks

Textbooks and teaching/learning aids are essential for effective curriculum development. But these days a lot of teachers complain that students do not have the recommended texts nor do they have supplementary texts that could be used to reinforce classroom learning. Part of the problem with textbooks is that the prescribed texts are oftentimes not available in the market and so make it difficult for students to acquire them. At other times, the texts cost so much that most parents cannot afford them for their wards. Another dimension to the problem is that most parents have been made to believe that Government has supplied textbooks to the schools and that the texts are there for their wards. It is difficult to convince this crop of parents otherwise. One can imagine what happens during a reading comprehension lesson in a class of about 50 students with only 5 of them owning the text. Assuming three children share a text, that means that the teacher concentrates on fifteen children out of the fifty. What happens to the rest of the children who are in the majority without textbooks? Yet as Ekpo (2000) shows, the content of knowledge embodied in the curriculum is conveyed to the learners through communication channels such as textbooks and other devices. Instructional materials are necessary for effective curriculum development. This is especially so in the case of English, where its teaching and learning are better facilitated with the use of material. The use of teaching material helps to reduce the abstractness of the language to something meaningful and relevant to the pupil's life. Njemanze (2010) asserts that, a creative teacher uses a variety of inter-related resources to achieve qualitative instruction. The use of pictures, charts, video, audio and other related material improve learning opportunities for L2 learners of English. In recent times, teachers never give thought to this. To them, it is the duty of

government to provide materials and where they are not provided, no effort is made to improvise them.

3.1.4. Teachers' and Students' Attitude towards Teaching and Learning

Most teachers lack interest in their job and this is evident in non-commitment to their work. Without commitment, no work can succeed. It is commitment that propels a teacher to expend himself/herself to prepare lessons, find out the task requirements of the topic on his pupils/students and the corresponding learning activities and materials he/she needs to create and improvise to facilitate learning. Today, most teachers run from shops to the school and back to their shops. No attention is paid to the learners' well-being. As major stakeholders in curriculum development, lack of commitment by teachers is a serious impediment to the realizations of the UBE goals. Most schools are overcrowded making it difficult for meaningful activities that promote learning to be performed.

Students' lack of interest in learning has assumed alarming proportion in recent times. Some of them feel that the only purpose for studying English is to pass examination. They fail to understand that the subject is important for communication, business transactions, interaction with people from other parts of the country or world as well as prestige and responsibility in the society. While we condemn this poor attitude to learning, we also want to remind ourselves that children learn better by imitation. In a final word from [Ogunkunle \(2009\)](#) he notes that teaching should embrace the following:

- teaching for understanding,
- teaching for assimilation,
- teaching for transfer, and
- teaching for performance.

Thus, adoption of the presented strategies would go a long way to improve the communicative skill and unless there is a change of attitude and concept by all concerned, curriculum development efforts will continue to be a mirage.

4. CONCLUSION

The paper examined the concept of language and relates it to the communicative challenges the child will face in the 21st century especially in a multilingual nation like Nigeria. While not discouraging the study of indigenous languages for the preservation of the people's culture, the paper has shown that the English language is the most relevant tool that the Nigerian child needs for solving his economical, social, political, educational and ethical problems in this 21st century world if they are to attain the needed proficiency level.

An analysis of the curriculum development process of the Nigerian Education Programme reveals that at the moment, we are not empowering the learners with the communicative abilities they need for functional survival in today's society. A lot needs to be done to forestall the poor

attitude of the teachers/students in order to enhance the quality of formal and informal communication in the English language.

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