

# TEACHING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AT THE PRIMARY/JUNIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL IN NIGERIA: THE WAY FORWARD

---

*Olalere Waheed Raji, (Ph.D)*  
*Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education,*  
*Al-Hikmah University,*  
*Ilorin, Nigeria.*

## **Abstract**

*This work examines the teaching of English as a Second Language at the Primary and Junior Secondary School Levels in Nigeria. In this paper, various definitions of language as given by Linguists and language experts are explored. The examination of Second Language teaching is also examined. The roles of the language teachers in the second language activities as well as the teaching of English as a second language are exhaustively discussed. The paper, is motivated with due consideration for the increased demands for the linguistic knowledge of English Language by individuals and the generality of Nigerian society. More emphasis is placed on the teaching of English as a Second Language because of utilitarian functions of the language at the private and public domains. The paper, therefore, recommends that the language teaching in respect of English must be handled by professionals and qualified teachers in schools.*

**Keywords:** English as Second Language; Instructional Aids; Teaching.

Language is a code whereby ideas of the users about the environment and the world at large are represented through a conventional system of arbitrary signals for communication. There are some keywords which must be considered for proper understanding of what language is. These words are code, ideas, convention, system and communication. This in effect, means that language is a code, it represents idea about the world; it is a system; it is a convention; and it is used for communication.

Furthermore, Language could be said to be a means of social control, it is a collection of motor responses, it functions symbolically and so is used for verbal communication. Language is a unique human verbal communication. That is, only human beings had evolved a communication system with the properties of natural language. The existence and use of verbalized language is therefore one factor used to differentiate between man and animals. Language is man's principal means of classifying things and it is this classifying function that goes further towards accounting for the role of language as an organizer of our representations of experience.

### **Definitions of Language**

There are many definitions of language as there are experts and linguists. According to Halliday (1975), language could be defined in various ways depending on whether one is interested in dialects and those who speak them, words and their histories, the differences in language in different culture, the formal properties of language systems, language as an art medium, uses of language and the like.

Various scholars have given different definitions to language. Sapir (1921) defines Language as: "a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols".

Bloch and Trager (1942) state that language is "a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by which a social group co-operates". Bollinger (1968) defines language as: "a system of vocal-auditory communication using conventional signs composed of arbitrary patterned sound units and assembled according to set when interacting with the experiences of its users".

Furthermore, Osinsanwo (2003) states that "Language is human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of this noise, used systematically and conventionally by members of a speech community for purposes of communication".

From the above definitions of language, the following points are noteworthy:

- (1) That language is peculiar to human beings and that non-human language is not only stereotyped and unproductive but is also instinctive.
- (2) That it is a system of complex symbols which produces arbitrary but patterned sounds.
- (3) That it is used for communicating ideas, feelings and emotions.
- (4) That it is central to human experience and extremely vital to self-realization (Harrison Adeniyi, 1999).

### **The Teaching of English as a Second Language in Nigeria**

The language programme in the National Policy of Education makes English a core subject at the Primary and Senior Secondary School level in Nigeria. This is because English is a vehicle through which the content of education and societal values are transmitted to the new generations.

The objectives of English Language curricula as contained in the language syllabus by Federal Ministry of Education (FME, 1985) are to:

- (i) Provide students with a sound linguistic basis for further learning in secondary, tertiary and vocational institutions;
- (ii) Equip school leavers with a satisfactory level of proficiency in English Language usage in their places of work;
- (iii) Stimulate a love of reading as a pleasurable activity;
- (iv) Promote the art of spoken English as a medium for national and international communication;

These terminal objectives of the English curricula will no doubt if all attained shall enable the students to acquire communication skills for their future lives occupations (Azikwe, 1998).

The contents of the curricula through which the above objectives are expected to be achieved are given below:

- (i) Vocabulary Development;
- (ii) Comprehension (Oral and Reading);
- (iii) Grammatical Structures;
- (iv) Writing; and
- (v) Literature.

Oduşina and Ikegulu (1993) stated that the aim for packaging these elements is to promote in the students a systematic development of both the language skills and literary knowledge that they need for effective use of English in oral and written forms, and in addition to learning other subjects. One important aspect of the Junior Secondary English Curriculum is the integration of language and literature. The two components of language is hereby made complimentary (Azikwe, 1998).

### **The English Language Teachers**

The teacher of English should be a professional teacher who must be well versed in the language structure-Phonetics, phonology, Grammar, (Syntax and Morphology), and Semantics. In addition, he should be the one who has a deep knowledge of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and paralinguistics for methodological purpose (Olaoye, 1998)

Among others Azikwe (1998) opined that the teacher of English Language must satisfy the following requirements:

- i. They should be professionally trained and well-informed.
- ii. Their approach to teaching should be founded on principles, but they should not be dogmatic.
- iii. They should be constantly trying to improve themselves and update their knowledge in the subject.
- iv. They should be humble without being weak, firm without being autocratic.
- v. They should like their students, but if they do not, it should be disguised so that the students and others will not know.
- vi. They should know in very clear terms why their students are learning English.
- vii. They should be convinced within themselves about their beliefs on the nature of language teaching and learning.

Also in the teaching of English the following points should be noted:

- i. English is the basic tool for the teaching and learning processes.
- ii. The study of English in Nigerian schools must be based on the language needs of the individual and the larger society.
- iii. English enriches the life of the individual and enhances his understanding of social relationships.
- iv. Literature in English exposes the learner to the culture of others.
- v. The use of English goes beyond the school environment into other life endeavours.
- vi. Proficiency in English improves the personality and socio-economic status of the individual.
- vii. Teachers of English must be specialists in the Language Arts for effectiveness (Azikwe, 1998).

Furthermore, the teacher of English should be a role model. He should endeavour to speak good English at all times, and whenever people are in doubt about the usage of English words or expressions, he should be the type who has ready-made answer to such a task. Above all, the teacher of English is expected to have sufficient knowledge of error analysis, error gravity and correction. He should be a language detective whose ears are very quick in detecting pronunciation, stress and intonation errors (Olaoye, 1998)

The features of the English Language which the teacher should understand in order to teach the subject in various primary and secondary schools in Nigeria are:

- a. The form and function of the language. This encompasses grammatical categories, tense and aspect, lexis and structure etc.
- b. Phonetics and phonology of English

- c. Language in context. This involves teaching grammatical rules and exceptions.
- d. Register.
- e. Communicative use of the Language

To be able to handle English effectively in schools, the teacher of English should have knowledge of other related languages. It is no gainsaying that knowing the differences and similarities between language is very pertinent. According to the observation of Ingram, (1975), the degree of similarities between languages is the measures of how the competence in and the form of the languages already acquired help the learning of the additional one. The knowledge of the culture of pupils to be taught is desirable. This will ease the job of the teacher as there is relationship between language, culture and thought.

The above description is the readiness pertaining to language structures, culture and tradition.

### **The Instructional Aids**

Instructional aids are those materials that aid effective teaching and learning of subjects in schools. It makes learning permanent, and therefore, its importance in the overall achievement of every learner cannot be overemphasized.

In language teaching in schools, instructional aids should be judiciously used. As a matter of fact, concepts in language cannot be taught in abstract. This is because English is a Second Language in Nigeria, and because of this reason, a lot of activities that are learnt in language class appear to be obscure to learners. In order to unravel this mystery, instructional aids must be appropriately used.

Instructional aids start from those things-concrete and abstract which the L<sub>2</sub> learners have been seeing and using in their environments. If those things are within the reach of children, these must be shown to them, but if they are not, they could be improvised and or better still, the picture of such an object could be drawn on the cardboard, and displayed in the class.

Other teaching aids are tape recorders. These items are very useful in the teaching of speech work. It enables the learner to hear properly what is spoken to him. The aid is a very good material for the teaching of sounds at the JSS level. Students need to cultivate the habit of listening to news on radio especially the network News relayed via the federal radio intermittently everyday. This will help in preparing the learners to become good speakers of English.

Allied to the above, there are other teaching aids that could be used in language class. These are visual and visual aids. Examples of visual aids are: flannel board, charts, real objects (three-dimensional) etc.

The visuals are resource materials and devices that appeal to the sense of sight and touch as well as sense of smell. These are charts, mobile, films strips and slides, slide projector etc.

The instructional aids listed above are few examples of teaching aids that a teacher could select from. The number of those useful for language teaching are inexhaustible. The choice of them depends on convenience, topic to be taught, opportunity and time.

### **The Entry Behaviour**

The entry behaviour of the learner of second language (L<sub>2</sub>) is important. This is because the second language teacher would assume that the learner in his class has acquired proficiency in his first language (L<sub>1</sub>) before coming to the class to learn English. The knowledge which he has acquired in his native language will help him greatly to learn the new language very well. And as expected, those features which do not appear in his L<sub>1</sub> will bring difficulty to the learner as he progresses.

The differences in the acquired language and the language being learnt pose problems than being of help. For example, at the phonological level of English Language, there are some phonemes which exist in the language, whereas they are absent in most African languages. Let us use Yoruba as our reference point. The long vowel sounds such as /i: a: ɔ: u: and /ɜ:/ do not exist in Yoruba language, and likewise the diphthong (Glides) as well. The problem Yoruba speakers of English encounter here is that they find it pretty difficult to pronounce very well words that contain those phonemes identified above.

For the pedagogical purpose, the language teacher should therefore note these things and take them into consideration in starting and proceeding on teaching English as a Second Language (L<sub>2</sub>).

### **Step by Step Teaching of English as a Second Language**

Igram (1975) opined that language learning is an habit formation but factually, the ability to understand and speak it as the native speakers or nearer the standard of the natives is the concern of the Second Language (L<sub>2</sub>) learner. The inference that can be drawn here is that what would enable the language learner understand and speak the language is the first step to be taken into consideration. In this regard, the starting point is the learning of lexical terms. In this point, the teacher should start from the concrete things that are in the language acquired by the language learner and the target language wished to be learnt. Examples of those things to be taught are:

**House/Cooking Utensils:** Stove, pot, knives, spoons, table, chairs, desks, furniture etc.

**Parts of the Human Body:** Eyes, nose, teeth, hands etc.

**Household Instruments:** Hoes, cutlass, broom etc

After the lexical items might have been taught, the next thing to be taught is the word order in sentences. The teacher should consider the following things at this stage.

- (a) Subject and verb:                    s        v                    s        v  
   Dayo sang,                    Ibrahim washed etc.
- (b) A single verb:                    v        v                    v                    v  
   Go,        come,                    write,                    pray        etc.
- (c) Subject, verb and object:                    s                    v                    o  
   Fatimoh / washed / her clothes (SVO)
- s                    v                    o  
   Ibrahim /drove / a car (SVO)
- (d) Verb and Object:                    v                    o  
   Killed / a rat (VO)
- v                    o  
   Sang a song (VO)

After the language learners have mastered word-order in sentences, the next concept for them to understand is how to produce statements, questions, answers and commands in a second language. Let us consider the following examples:

- (a) Fatimoh went (statement)  
(b) Did Fatimoh go? Question  
(c) Fatimoh went. Didn't she? Yes, she did.  
(positive statement, negative question and positive answer)  
(d) Go (command)

While teaching the above concept, the teacher could use Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to illustrate his points clearly.

In addition, the language teacher should teach the pupils the basic rudiments of grammar. He should teach them singular and plural nouns as well as singular and plural verbs. He should explain the rule that guides the usage of singular and plural verbs in English Language. For instance:

- (a) She sleeps every night.  
(b) Bimbo comes to school regularly.  
(c) We eat rice every morning.

The learner of English as a second language needs to be taught tense and aspect, synonyms and antonyms. The language teacher should emphasize in the class that, contextual meaning is very important, and as a result of this, ample examples should be given to demonstrate this point.

**Examples are:**

- i. Ojo is in form four (class)
- ii. I don't know the form it will take (format, style)
- iii. I have not formed my questions (drawn)
- iv. Here, is the form for you to fill (a sheet of paper which contains vital information)

We should note here that while teaching the above concept, the teacher could combine Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Audio-Visual and Audio-Lingual Method to explain his points to enhance effectiveness.

**Methodology**

There are many language teaching methodologies which language teachers could use during the language class. Some of these are:

- i. Grammar translation method
- ii. Direct-language learning method
- iii. Audio-visual and audio-lingual method
- iv. Speech and dialogue method

Grammar translation method is based on the memorization of concepts. This method does not give room for thinking and creativity as concepts are learnt by heart. On the direct method; it is assumed that the spoken form of the language is the primary. The written aspect of the language which is more important is not taken care of.

The audio-visual and audio-lingual method on its part, needs instructional aids such as tape-recorder, radio, television and video-tape before it could be put in place. It is also very expensive to use in our schools.

What could be done in language class is to combine the two types of methods; that is, the direct and audio visual and audio-lingual methods. An example is the method of direct language teaching and the lingual with a short analogue to mention one's name, the names of other people, the name of a place and the name of something. This calls for listening and the use of the interrogatory sentences and answers.

Having decided the method to use in the class, the teacher would determine the area of the language to be taught. Take for instance, if the concepts to be taught

are register, the pupils should be taught the registered terms of the particular field. For instance, if it is 'Farming' or Agriculture or transportation, things pertaining to each of these professions should be listed and explained.

The next stage is procedure. At this stage, the language learners should be taught words and sentences step by step. The simple should precede the complex. It is important to mention here that the learners should be given the opportunity of participating at every step. In other words, the lesson should be pupil-centred approach. They should be given enough exercises to practise in the class. These should be marked and correction be made accordingly.

Finally, the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing should be our focus in the language class.

### **Conclusion**

Since English is a means of national and international communication, a passport to progress, and a language of commerce and trade, emphasis should therefore be given to it in our educational institutions particularly at the primary and junior secondary schools in Nigeria. This will go a long way in improving the standard of English Language in Nigerian schools.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the conclusion drawn above, the following recommendations are therefore proffered:

1. The government at all levels should ensure that only the professionals and graduate teachers in English language are posted to schools to teach the language.
2. There should be regular inspection in schools to ascertain the progress that has been made so far in respect to the teaching and learning of English in Nigerian schools.
3. The subject should be taught very well with simple illustrations.
4. Teachers should make use of appropriate teaching aids and methodology to enhance effective teaching and learning of the subject,
5. Finally, the four language skills-listening, speaking, reading and writing should be given preference in Nigerian schools. This will go a long way in ensuring that the learners become proficient in the language.

### **References**

Adegbite, A. B. (2010). *English Language Usage, Uses and Misuse(s) in A Non-Host Second Language Context*. Nigeria, Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University.

- Azikiwe U. (1998). *Language Teaching and Learning*. Onitsha: Africana-First Publishers Limited.
- Bloch, B.A. & Trager, G. I. (1942). *Outline of Linguistics Analysis*. Baltimore: Waverly Press.
- Bolinger, D. (1975). *Aspects of Language*, Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich.
- Corder P. (1975). Applied Linguistics and Language Teaching in J.P.B. Allen and S. Pit Corder (Eds.) *Language and Language Learning: The Edinburgh Course in Applied Linguistics* Vol. 2, London: Oxford University Press.
- Federal Ministry of Education (1985). *National Curriculum for Junior Secondary Schools, Other Languages: English, French, and Arabic*. Lagos: Federal Ministry of Education.
- Halliday, M. A. K. (1975). *Explanations in the Functions of Language*, London: Edward Arnold Ltd.
- Harrison A. (1991). *Basic Features of Language and Linguistics* in Ayodele A. and Harrison A. *Language and Communication: An Introductory Text* Vol. I.
- Ingram, E. (1975). *Psychology and Language Learning* in J.P.B. Allen and S. Pit Corder, op.cit
- Keefe, J. (1979). *Students Learning Styles: Diagnosing and Prescribing Programmes*. Reston, Virginia: National Association of Secondary School Principle.
- Odusina, M. Olu & Ikegulu, B. O. (1993). *Developing Curriculum in English Language*. In U.M.O. Iwobi (Ed), *Curriculum Development in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman.
- Olaoye A. (1998). *Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. Abuja: Ogunleye Publishing and Printing Press.
- Osinsanwo, W. (2003). *Introduction to Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics*. Lagos: Femolus-Fetop Publishers.
- Sapir, E. (1921). *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York.