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## Re-Generating English Language Teaching For Poverty Eradication in Nigeria

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By

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### **Abstract**

*The paper focuses primarily on regenerating English language for poverty eradication, self-reliance and National Development. It therefore examines concepts like regenerating, poverty, self-reliance and national development. The role of English language as a global language of communication, current issues in English language teaching and how to regenerate English language teaching for poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development were discussed. Recommendations that are likely to improve the teaching of English language for poverty eradication, self-reliance and national development were made.*

Despite the attention that the education sector has been receiving, performance in English language (oral and written) has not recently witnessed any remarkable improvement. This is notwithstanding the fact that when SSCE, GCE or NECO, NABTEB results are released each year, many candidates come out with C's, B's or even A's. This is also in spite of the fact that every year, Nigerian Universities that have departments of English, English/Education, Linguistics, Language Arts, Churn out graduates with second class upper or lower Division and even first class results. One would have expected that with the number of those who have direct contact with English Language learning on the increase, the cry about woeful oral and written performance in English Language in Nigeria would have been a forgotten issue.

### **Poverty in Nigeria**

Poverty is a social malaise which is predicated by the incapacity of a state to carry out some functions and the unresponsiveness of the government to the economic and social condition of the people. Poverty has been defined variously by various specialists. For example, Dewit (2000), defined it as a terrible living conditions in *Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction, Volume 12 No. 1, July, 2016: ISSN 2276-9684* 242

which one cannot afford the basic things of life such as good feeding, accommodation and clothing.

Furthermore, Abraham (2000) defined poverty as a pathetic life situation in which a person lives from hands to mouth, and as a result finds it difficult to eat three square meals a day or eats whatever is available to him. In Nigeria where about 30% of the population lives on less than one US Dollar a day, it is an issue for concern. This is because poverty can do a great damage to the development of available workforce which has often been considered as a great asset to nation building and a sustainable economic development in any country.

Other African countries whose citizens also live below one US Dollar per day include: South Africa 23.7%, Botswana 34.7%, Lesotho 50.4%, Zambia 84.6%, Niger 61.5%, Ghana 40%, Mali 52%, North African countries tend to do better in relation to the incidence of poverty. Other countries whose Citizenry live below one US Dollar include Egypt 7.6%, Algeria 1.6% and Tunisia 3.9% (UNESCO, 2000).

From all the various definitions advanced about, it could be deduced that poverty is a pathetic socio-economic situation in which a person finds it difficult to acquire the essential things of life that can keep body and soul together, by extension poverty could be viewed as inability to fulfill economic and social life aspirations and ambitions.

#### **Rational For Poverty Alleviation**

In order to reduce poverty in Nigeria the government has embarked upon various programmes and strategies; some of the programmes are discussed below: Directorate of Food Road and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI). The Directorate of Food Road and Rural Infrastructure was established by decree no. 4 of 1986. The Directorate was to gear all its efforts toward the development of the entire rural areas of Nigeria in order to improve the quality of life of the rural dwellers. The establishment of DFRRI was not only a radical departure from previous programmes but also recognized the complementarities associated with basic need such as food, shelter etc. The DFRRI had tremendous impact on the rural area. For instance, between the time of inception in 1986 and 1993, DFRRI had completed over 278,526 km of roads. Over 500 rural communities benefited from its rural development, no doubt provide for the necessary basic infrastructure that can stimulate the growth of agro-allied small scale enterprises in rural areas. It also influences the Agricultural production between 1992 (Ogwumike, 1995). However, with time DFRRI could not sustain the tempo with which it started, hence it ended up not living up to expectation and became defunct (National Planning Commission, 1994).

### **The Concept of Self-Reliance**

Self-reliance is defined by independence. It is the ability to think and act without the help or influence of others; the ability to decide what you should be or do. It is one of the basics of effective community development in Nigeria as it is in most of sub-Saharan Africa. There is no gain saying that the concept within the discourse of community development and is linked to similar terminologies; self-help, mutual help, indigenous participation and rural development. Self-reliance encourages the need for people to improve their living conditions using home initiatives and resources at their disposal. This concept is being given great attention and considered as a new blue print for community development. Anyanwu (1992) posits that the widespread acceptance of this concept in the development planning of most African countries has the tendency to give greater stimulus and cohesiveness to community development in these countries.

Thus Ojameruaye (2004), defines self-reliant economic development as that type of development that relies on the human and material resources of the economic unit whose development is the subject of discussion. In other words, it is development that relies on “internal” resources as opposed to development that relies heavily on “external” resources. It is pertinent to note that self-reliant development is not autarky: it should allow for “external” support, however, it is propelled and sustained by “internal” resources. Consequently, one general objective discovered in economic plans or blue print of continental, regional, national and state organizations or government is to promote self-reliant development. This means that in as much as rural economics are encouraged to pursue policies of self-reliance and strive to ensure “autonomy” they should allow for substantial external support. Ojameruamaye contends that in many cases external resources do make a difference and can challenge the independence of the economic unit. Hence, self-reliance ought to be reviewed as a continuum that is bounded on the left-hand side by parasitism and on the right-hand by autarkic but which does not include both boundaries. This we can talk of different degrees or levels of self-reliance; the farther an economic unites to the right-hand side of the continuum, the more self-reliant it is.

### **The Role of English Language As A Global Language of Communication**

English language was introduced in Nigeria from the English traders, missionaries and administrators who came into different parts of Nigeria from 1842 (Eka 2000). In Badagry, the missionaries established schools even before the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 to form the country Nigeria. Right from that time up till this present day, Nigeria places English Language above all 515 local languages. English is the only official language of communication in government, educational institutions, commerce, industries, politics, social interactions, law, judiciary, economics and many other issues.

The role of English as a global language of communication is measured in the context of its geographical spread around the world from Europe, America, Asia,

Australia, and Africa to Oceania. Crystal (1987) stated that English Language ranks as the first among the top 20 languages in the world which is used and adopted as official language in many countries. It is also the language spoken as the first language by many technologically advanced countries in the world.

English Language no doubt is an effective mechanism for technological acquisition, growth and productivity in Nigeria. Even though Fafunwa (1975) postulated that people appreciate, study and learn better if they are taught in their indigenous languages, but Essien (2003) succinctly stated that “even the most ardent nationalist would not deny his children full access to English” for the simple reason that it is the dominant language in Nigeria and the whole world.

Although English is a good language in Nigeria, it is a basic tool for national growth and productivity because it enhances the acquisition of knowledge, transcends various ethnic and linguistic barriers, professions, economic, political and social spheres. The knowledge obtained from formal education in Nigeria is through English language, so there cannot be any national growth or (productivity without proper teaching and learning of English language. For instance, no student gains admission to read at the university in Nigeria without a credit pass in English language to our educational system.

English language as a global language is quite developed and standardized over the years to accommodate new technological development. The modern information communication system (ICS) like computers, internet and multimedia systems make use of English language extensively. Even though other developed nations like Russia, France, Germany and Italy make use of their local languages in the development of their computers and other technologies, they still rely on English as the basis of their communication of technological development. That is why they equally study English language to fall in line with the global language. Hudson (1980) explained that for a language to be developed it should be standardized with orthography, literary works, and references books, used as language of instruction in schools, media and education. As can be observed globally, English language has all the basic requirements as a developed as well as international language.

### **Issues in English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria**

English language is the only official language by the attitude of educational policy makers, curriculum planners, and the teachers of the language, the pupils and students studying the language. It is not an understatement to say that the language has not given its pride of place and serious attention as it used to be some decades ago simply because many educated and uneducated people see it as a foreign language.

Those who postulate this idea are in the majority so their attitudes tend to affect the teachers and learners of the language. Eyo (2004), observed that policies are made to discourage its teaching and learning at the early stages in Nigerian children's education, so unsuccessful attempts have been made killing it through the introduction

of indigenous languages. The indigenous languages do not serve the basic useful purposes of education, integration and communication as they should. Emphasizing on the importance and relevance of English language, Udofot (2000) noted that “English is the language of computer programming and the internet” and as such, Nigeria cannot afford to be illiterate in the language that controls the world affairs.

The unseriousness and deplorable standard of English in Nigeria is decried by Ndimele (2005). He lamented that “language like all organism depends on their environment for survival” but he further explained that the Nigerian environment in this generation of speakers is totally unfriendly to English not because of deviation and creative characteristics of language in contact but due to “ungrammatical expression and poor sentence structures prevalent among users. the supported this view and added that “the English used by many Nigerians of younger generation may have English words and expressions but little English grammar and meaning”.

This kind of spoken and written English cannot be the language for growth, development and productivity to the Nigerian nation, because the pupils and the students who imitate the illiterate, and educated non-English majors, will never pass examinations in English even their major subjects and disciplines. This shows that the teachers of English and the education curriculum planners have failed the nation because of their inability to produce new pedagogical methods to enhance the effect of studies in the language at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Udofot (2002) identified home background and the quality of primary and secondary education as factors which affect the standard performance in English. The poor performance of English at these levels of education can be attributed to the influence of the parents, society, teachers and that of the learners. Where the majority of parents are illiterates they cannot interact with their children in proper English. Some even use Pidgin English and the children copy same from them. Therefore, background affects their communicative competence more than any other factor.

English as a developed language which has its code, principles and practice. Language though, defined by Block and Tragers (1945) as “a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a group communicate”, has rules governing sentence structural pattern and symbols that guide its usage. Majority of those who use the English language in Nigeria do not observe these rules, that is why they make ungrammatical expressions that are ambiguous to proficient speakers and listeners. When this happens, there is usually a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the message by the listeners.

As the language of global communication and influence, Udodata (2004) propounded that English language now serves the function of providing interconnectivity between communities and persons in our global village and that man can enhance this global interconnectivity through co-operation and understanding in the study and appreciation of English language. There is need for a change of attitude if we must employ English as a global language.

### **Re-Generation of English Language Teaching For Poverty Eradication**

The need to standardize the curriculum of English so that pupils and students can obtain maximum benefit while learning the language is important so as to help them become competent in the language. English language is a language with many problems in terms of its phonology, semantics and syntax especially to non-native second language learners as Nigerians. The essence of studying any language is to enable the language learners to be competent in the language and to be able to communicate in the language effectively. Communication between the speaker and the listener can only take place where there is meaning and intelligibility in their utterances. The variety of English in Nigeria from the phonological perspective should be the received pronunciation (RP) as expressed by the native speakers of the language.

The native speakers of the language according to Roach (2000) insisted that English should not be adulterated with idiosyncratic regional or dialectal varieties. For the curriculum to be effective globally, it should emphasize on proper pronunciation, intonation and stress pattern in morphology and syntax of the language. It therefore means that teachers of English language at all levels should be especially trained in the language art so as to bring their performance to the native speakers' level. If this is done, the learners will be able to speak and read with the language better than before and this will aid their understanding of what they read from the textbook in all subjects.

Also, the curriculum of English should serve the needs of the nation first before considering its global interest and should incorporate international issues so as to globalize the world view of Nigerian learners. The modern scientific inventions and new vocabulary should be incorporated as an integral aspect of the language study.

In this era of information technology, computers connected to internet should be provided to secondary schools because it will enable the students to obtain first hand information about the modern approaches toward the teaching and usage of the language. The curriculum of English language should be broadened and enriched to accommodate ideas, opinions, concepts, passages, events, issues, and incidences that happen in other parts of the world so that students in Nigeria can be conversant with happenings outside Nigerian situation.

The importance of spreading the content of the language curriculum is that, it will prepare the minds of the students of the things that they will come across when they meet with foreigners either within the country or outside. It will enable them compete favourably with educated people outside Nigeria and Africa in terms of providing them with issues that they can discuss thereby giving them confidence in their abilities. Globalizing the curriculum content will not in any way jeopardize the interest of the nation as some critics would say, but will rather expose the learners to modern concepts and usage in communication and knowledge.

### **National Development**

A country well being depends on its economic development (Nwogu, 2009). An economist by name Walter Rodwey in Igweh (2004), asserted that development in human society is many sided phenomenon which is complex and means different things in different societies in different situations and to different thinkers. Musa (1985), in his view saw the concept of development as an Euro American term though culturally based, used to characterize the relative standard of living of the people between the highly industrialized nations of the North and the consumer import development nations of the South.

Igweh (2008), stressed that the most suitable definitions of development may be that which is based on the experiences of the developing countries which is cited by seers in Igweh (2001). He defined development in terms of reduction in the levels of poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and income inequality. However, Folodun, Omogiafor and Ezeaku (1999) in Nwogu (2009) emphasized that national development as well as economic development which is defined as the attainment of a number of ideas of modernization such as a rise in productivity, social and economic equity, improved institution and values". Economic development is thus an important part of general development in any society.

The main objective of economic development is rise in the standard of living and the general well being of the people in an economy where almost everybody can be self-reliant. What the education curriculum must do is to obtain oral language equipment from English and install in language laboratories, in school, so as to help the students and teachers especially at the secondary level to study the language effectively.

In order to re-engineer the English language curriculum of schools, there is a need for the use of information communication system as done in the advanced countries of the world. Kohn (1998) state that for good language learning, it is discovered that these conditions are not possible to attain without the help of information communication Technology (ICT).The important of ICT to the learners autonomy, communication is to have utilitarian value, it must be cognitively, affectively socially usefully and that is when motivation is aroused in the learner. Thus when information communication technology is to have utilitarian value, it must be cognitively, affectively. And where it is socially useful and that is when motivation is aroused in the learner. This is when information communication technology can be useful in the teaching and learning of English. Then Ekah (2004) postulated that given the panoply and the secured position of English in Nigeria, the available choice is to teach and learn the language within the acceptable international standards so as to enable the people fit into the new world order.

When talking about national growth and productivity in terms of the language of education, the first thing that should come to the minds of curriculum developers should be how to develop the curriculum of English language so as to serve both the global and the country's needs. One should think of the importance of English as a global language of communication and the recognized language of formal education in the country. English is used for the teaching of every subject taught in Nigerian schools. Moreover, all the textbooks in all subjects ranging from sciences, social sciences to arts are written in English. Therefore, the use of English is indispensable for the nation's growth and productivity. The current multi-communication system and internet make use of English as its first language. All the important information on the web sites are given in English. So the importance of re-engineering the curriculum cannot be overstressed.

Once the curriculum content of the English language taught in Nigerian schools is globalized, our students who seek admission into foreign schools will perform well when tested in the subject. Globalizing the language curriculum through the internet according to Braid (1998) is the individual's right to information, freedom of expression, access to information and new technologies of information. This opinion justifies the globalizing of the language curriculum of schools in Nigeria.

Language relativity to national growth and productivity is supported by Shobomehin (2005) who observed that in any developing or developed society, the development of language determines the effectiveness of communication which in turn, determines the development of human and material resources of that society. English as taught according to the curriculum contents should be developed to embrace current global trends and standards so as to bring technological growth and productivity to the nation.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria as a nation is lucky to be a colony of the British nation, the original owners of English language which is the most widely spoken language in the world and the language of information and communication technology used throughout the world. Already the nation is involved in language teaching globalization, so what is needed now is how to broaden our national language teaching curriculum to fall in line with the global standard and global trend by incorporating the modern science and technologies into the curriculum. Moreover, the use of Information Communication System in schools should be considered by the educational planners and administrators so as to expose the teachers and students to new methods of teaching and knowledge acquisition. Proper teaching and learning of the language will bring growth in science and technology to the nation since all the textbooks used in teaching all the subjects in our secondary and tertiary institutions are written in English language. Effective interpretation of scientific thoughts will lead to the acquisitions of western technology and the development of indigenous technology also.



### **Recommendations**

- (a) The nation, state and local governments should give prominence to the teaching and learning of English language by supporting English education programmes.
- (b) Regular conferences, seminars and workshops should be organized for English teachers so as to update their knowledge about latest developments and vocabularies incorporated into the language because of scientific inventions and new technology.
- (c) New practical teaching approaches should be adopted by teachers of the language through the introduction of new skills to encourage the teachers in the practical usage of the language. This would enhance communicative competence of the learners.
- (d) Government at all levels of education should recruit more English language specialists from the College of Education and the Universities to fill the existing gaps in the schools. Non-English language graduates should not be allowed to teach the subject because they are incompetent.
- (e) Government should provide Standard English Language textbooks to all pupils and students at the primary and secondary school levels because these schools are the bedrock of education. The earlier they are exposed to reading and writing in English, the better for the nation.
- (f) English Language courses should be taught to students at the Colleges of Education, the polytechnics and the Universities at least for about six semesters before they graduate. This will enable them to be proficient in the language usage.

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