

THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM: THE NIGERIAN DEFENCE ACADEMY EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

In the Nigerian society, English is primarily the language of education and government. Its position as a tool for education is enunciated in the National Policy on Education (1981) while the stamp of government is conferred on it in the 1979 National Constitution. Since then, the teaching of English for General purposes has undergone a lot of transformation. The General purpose English which has always been for all students has failed to achieve the desired goals for university education and today, we talk of English for Academic purposes. Today, according to Alexander, K. et al (2013), the programme emerged as a panacea to fill the gaps the General purpose English has created. This paper is therefore, out to announce by way of analysis and discussion the 'state of the Art' of the programme with a view of suggesting ways to improving it in the Nigerian Defence Academy as a military University.

The English language has become the most important language in the world today, and its position has been compared with that of Latin in medieval times. Not surprisingly, therefore, the language has been discussed in a very large number of publications ranging from diachronic and synchronic grammars of the language to its sociolinguistics in different parts of the world.

According to Ayo (2010), a substantial number of persons around the world speak English as a second language, and the fate of the language in such situations has also been the object of study during the last quarter of a century. In West Africa, the pioneering publication in this connection was Spencer (1971) which presents a picture of the way in which the language has been adapting to its relatively new West African surroundings. Two years later, Sey (1973) examined those processes of adaptation in Ghana and broached the thorny problem of standards of correctness, a problem that had already begun to generate a lively debate in Nigeria. Sey's book on Ghana was followed six years later by Ubahakwe's (1979) in which the various functions and varieties of the English language in Nigeria were discussed by a galaxy of Nigerian linguists. Various aspects of the English language in Nigeria continued to be discussed

in learned journals, as the present paper points out, but three which have come out in book form deserve to be mentioned. They are, Kujore (1985) Jowitt, (1991) and Schmied (1991) the last presenting a panoramic view of the English language in the entire continent of Africa.

Following such precious work and given the importance that the study of the sociolinguistics of the English language in Nigeria has assumed in the Nigerian universities, as well as the growing debate over an optimal language policy for Nigeria, it is perhaps not too soon to have a study such as the present one which attempts, from the perspectives of an individual writer, to provide an overview of the language in the Nigerian Defence Academy in its academic status.

The English language made its debut in what is now known as Nigeria in the sixteenth century as a foreign language while at the same time producing a pidgin. In the middle of the nineteenth century, with Christian missionary activities in southern Nigeria during the period of informal colonization, the learning of the language became institutionalized. As the educational system expanded, social varieties of the language began to emerge, and Nigerian Pidgin, originally a medium of international communication, became primarily one of internal communication among the various peoples, particularly in the coastal areas.

It started in the Nigerian University system as General English for all students but today, it is English for Academic purposes. It is so because students are expected to present good academic writing with clear beginning, middle and end which should be written in standard, relevant English with forceful and confident voice. Good academic English in other words should have ISCE: intelligence, substance, clarity and energy. Academic English projects intelligence when it contains insightful ideas and cites authoritative sources; it is substantial when ideas are developed in enough detail so that readers grasp the knowledge the writer is conveying; it is clear when grammar, sentence structure, organization, punctuation and diction are sound; it has energy when the student uses a strong and confident voice in a fluid and vigorous style. Academic English fulfills a purpose. It presents the findings of a research study or project, it presents factual and objective information about any number of topics, it makes a case or presents an argument in favour of any number of propositions. The purpose of academic English can also be encapsulated in a thesis or thesis statement which is developed and elucidated. Academic English requires the rhetorical modes of every discipline to be used in composing their texts. In this **bid**, the Nigerian Defence Academy is not an exception.

The Status of English in the World

The rapid spread of English in the last 300 years or so has qualified it for the status of a world language which performs global functions. Banjo, A (2010) observed that some of the functions of English in this respect are outlined below:

- a. As the language of international communication, co-operation and understanding, English is today a language of many bilateral discussions, negotiations and agreements/ treaties signed between several nations. It has come of age as the language of international summits, conferences, seminars and workshops. It also functions as one of the main languages of the United Nations Assembly, apart from being used by other bodies such as the OAU, UNESCO, IAS, WHO, UNICEF and ILO.
- b. The world has come to reckon with the use of English as an influential language in the production and documentation of literary materials. Writers in different countries and culture produce literary works with English as the mode of expression. Thus, English has contributed to the world's literary excellence and many noble prizes have been won by writers who use English as their medium.
- c. English is today the dominant language of science and technology, having overtaken competing languages like French, German and Russian in this respect. The success-story of English in this respect owes much to the emergence of the USA and the UK as champions of scientific and technological excellence and as superpowers. The computer /internet revolution aided the spread of English.
- d. In boardrooms, banking halls, the international money markets, business transactions take place in English. The London Stock Exchange, the American Down Jones or Wall Street which are indicators of the World's business climate all have business dealings conducted in English. Letters of credit, quotations on the stock exchange and money markets, debentures, stocks, etc all depend on English.
- e. The English language is one of the world's most influential languages in above and below-the-line functions as a means of information. It is being successfully used as the language of political propaganda in the West, thanks to the tremendous influence of radio and television, especially the BBC, CNN and the VOA. As radiovision programmes are beamed across the globe in English, Western cultural, political and economic values are successfully marketed. It is also used for intelligence gathering as well as political disinformation and /or misinformation by the CIA, MISAD, etc.

Again, according to Ebenezer, (2008) since English plays such a dominant role in all spheres of our national life and is used extensively in the Nigerian environment, the second language status may be inadequate.

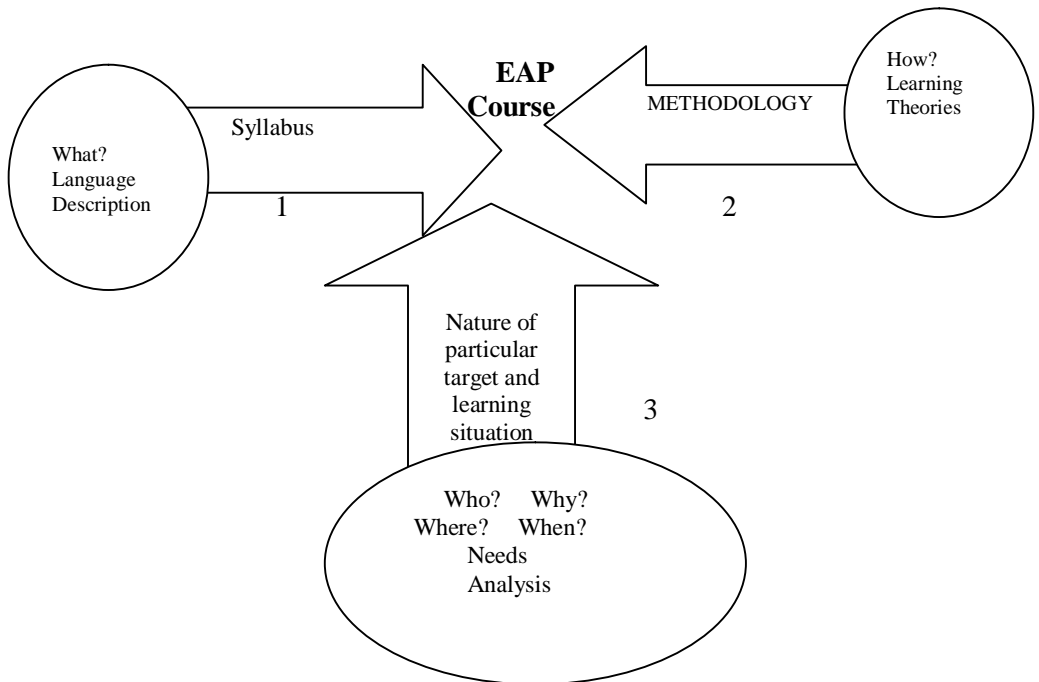
The EAP Programme

With the failure of the General use of English in Nigerian Tertiary institutions, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is substituted as a panacea.

The EAP Programme is informed by why the student needs to learn, those involved in the physical. And in order to fully address these reasons, in the course design, the author maintains that the needs Analysis is necessary. This is presented diagrammatically below. The programme is called different names in various universities. Some still call it General English, some use of English etc. Whatever name it is called, the focus now is towards academic purposes.

Factors to be considered in an EAP Course Design

Figure 1:



Source: Adapted from Hutchinson and Waters (1987:22)

We see at once that the most basic requirement for an EAP course is the identification of target and learning situation. This is largely dependent on a needs analysis.

Needs Analysis could take the forms of questionnaire, interview, observation, data collection and informal consultation. Needs are determined by necessities, lacks and wants.

Necessities are professional/institutional needs; needs as dictated and demanded by the target situation. A Military Officer, for example, needs to understand military policies. Necessities are therefore subject essentials.

Lacks are the areas of need which the learner is yet to acquire. An awareness of learner's lacks is not just an index of his deficiency(ies) but reveals areas of proficiency. Lacks are gaps that should be filled in the EAP programme.

However, the content and range of any course in specialist English such as EAP depends on six main factors:

- i. The time available for such a course
- ii. The level of understanding or use of the specialist English required
- iii. What particular language skills are necessary
- iv. What vocabulary is essential either because of the frequency of its use or because of its contribution to the basic understanding of the subject
- v. What the specific linguistic problems of the group and the aspects of the cultural and educational background which may have any bearing on these.

Finally, the knowledge of what skills and vocabulary are necessary and *the* extent these have been already acquired needs to be established. In order to determine this, a fairly wide knowledge of the cultural and educational background is useful if not imperative: otherwise many of the assumptions, conscious or sub conscious, on which teaching materials are based, may prove to be false.

The Poor English of Cadets in the Nigerian Defence Academy

Students of the Nigerian Defence Academy are called 'cadets'. They are named so because of the military implication of their training.

Today, there is a general notion that English Language is everyman's subject and that a graduate in any field of study can successfully teach it, at least up to secondary school level. Yet, there is the continued hue and cry over the bad English of university students and graduates; an issue which has become a matter of grave concern to educationists, parents and the general literate public. 'Why is this so', has been the usual question to which different answers have been postulated.

According to Okerekeme (1992), most of these answers have blamed present day teachers of English language. Kwasau, (2005), expressed the high expectations and

subsequent disappointment of lecturers in other departments when he observed in the Nigerian Defence Academy that:

Lecturers from the various feeder departments are already complaining that cadets are not prepared enough in the Department of General Studies where English for academic purposes is taught. These various departments look up to this department as a service department to bring up their students to an expected level of preparedness (in English language), independence of thought, originality and creativity at lectures as well as study.

This blame on Lecturers of English in NDA is done directly or indirectly. In 2013, the provost of the Nigerian Defence Academy in a circular to all faculties and departments titled “External Examiner’s reports for the 2012/2013 academic Session” had this to say ‘Some of these observed lapses by the external examiners are as below’:

- a. Answers to questions are too brief
- b. Answers lack specific and local examples
- c. No illustrations even when stated clearly in the question papers
- d. Key components missing in all abstracts
- e. No attempt to explain sample frame
- f. Students could not differentiate between research problem and Justification
- g. Literature review not in tune with objectives of the study
- h. Almost all cadets have editorial problems
- i. Conclusions seem not to emanate from data collected or literature review
- j. Poor English Expression.

The Provost in a similar circular accused the English lecturers of not caring about the poor English and poor expressive ability of cadets. In an anguished response to this circular the then Head of department of General Studies also coordinator of English Studies Dr KA Ayuba, stated on the body of the circular to his secretary as follows, “Sec, please bring this to the attention of all academic staff and make this part of agenda for discussion during the next meeting with staff”.

From these negative evaluations of the situation, it is obvious that no overwhelming impact has been made on cadets English by the EAP course. Does this then, mean EAP lecturers have not done their job conscientiously or that lecturers in other disciplines are better teachers in NDA? To answer this question, the author would say that considering the large number of cadets taught all first year to third year cadets and the large volume of work done in one academic session by very few lecturers, it is obvious that EAP lecturers in NDA are among the most hardworking university

teachers. One is then tempted to ask why the impact of their hard work is not satisfactorily felt in the cadets' use of English.

A critical analysis of the situation will reveal that many problems militate against the effective teaching and learning of EAP in the Nigerian Defence Academy.

The first of these problems is one of poor academic background in English language of the cadets admitted into the Academy. The fact that cadets enter the Academy too poorly equipped to use and understand English adequately for purposes of university work, led to the teaching of English and Use of English course from the first year to the third year. This is designed to strengthen their control of the language. Nowhere in any Nigerian University English for Academic purposes is taught for three years. Almost all Nigerian universities teach it for only one year. The problem is further compounded by the failure of cadets to defend their WAEC/NECO O'level grades in English, especially as they are categorized according to their O'level result in English. Perceiving this problem, Ngozi Anyaegbunam writes:

In designing the first year Use of English courses, there is an understood assumption of a certain standard of O Level attainment in English language proficiency. Experience over the years has, however, proved that the first year students who are supposed to have got their credit in English language at the G.C.E. O Level, need to go through even the course content designed for remedial students.

This constitutes a veritable obstacle in the path of effective teaching, for EAP courses are designed for students who are already adequately if not well grounded in the basic grammar and usage of the English language. With this assumption, the course emphasizes reading, writing and research skills and speaking skills. Thus, while a lecturer concerns himself with the more sophisticated skills required in university writing, cadets' writings still abound with elementary grammatical errors.

There is the problem of attitude. This includes the uncommitted attitude of cadets and their know-all syndrome. Kwasau (2005), condemns this uncommitted attitude of lecturers in other disciplines towards improving the English of their cadets when they write and speak wrong English. Some of our colleagues in other disciplines specialize in blaming English lecturers rather than stooping low to see their role as university teachers using English for both communication and instruction. The author believes that one explanation for the lamentable standard of many cadets' English is the illogical attitude on the part of some lecturers that a lecturer of some other discipline is not supposed to correct cadets' English. The fact is that every lecturer who uses English as the medium of instruction is in effect, a teacher of English whether he realizes it or not. The care he takes with words in lecture notes and handouts, the standards he sets and

particularly his comments on written work (including the work of assigned authors) – all these affect the quality of a cadet’s writing. No cadets can reasonably be expected to improve with each piece of work unless the lecturer takes time to appraise what is well-written and points out errors. How else can the cadet know what he should emulate and avoid in future? Unless NDA lecturers demonstrate in word and deed that good English does matter, cadets may be forgiven for assuming it does not.

The stubborn know-all attitude of some cadets is perhaps the one impediment that renders them most mentally and psychologically opaque to learning and to taking corrections in their usage of English. This is because most of them who feel adequately proficient in English to study in the Academy, do not take the course serious but regard it as one in which they can effortlessly score an ‘A’. They feel they have come to the Academy to specialize as military officers and not as English men, so why waste valuable time and energy that could be utilized to better themselves in their areas of specialization on such a course as EAP which merely duplicates their knowledge? We all know that without motivation learning can hardly take place and, of course, that which has not been learnt and known cannot be applied.

Another problem is that of the large number of cadets taking the EAP or Use of English course. This perennial problem has rendered the effective teaching and assessment of cadets a herculean if not an impossible task. The Use of English course is compulsory for all first year to third year cadets. Only six lecturers teach all these cadets who number over a thousand. Thus, although lecturers overwork themselves in order to ensure effectiveness, they do not seem to be making adequate impact on cadets’ English. The fact that this problem of number is not peculiar to the Nigerian Defence Academy is cold comfort.

Closely linked with the problem of large numbers is that of lack of adequate classrooms to accommodate cadets during lectures. Sometimes, lecturers have to argue profusely over lecture rooms because of conflicts in the general faculty timetable. Perhaps, the worst problem in this area is the lack of spacious office accommodation, for English lecturers to enable them consult with cadets in order to guide them in problematic areas and in the tedious research paper assignments. With two or three lecturers sharing one office, the rooms are often so crowded as to defeat the noble goal of effective teaching and research.

Lack of teaching aids like relevant text books, tape recorders, language laboratories etc. to enhance the teaching of the course has also made effective teaching difficult in the Nigerian Defence Academy.

The problem of time is a major one. Within a period of one academic session, English lecturers in NDA are expected to remedy the poor grammar of cadets fresh from secondary school and also teach them the study, reading, writing and research skills required to see them through university education. This time limitation has imposed restrictions on the attainment of the comprehensive objectives of the EAP course. To be able to do the necessary groundwork that the secondary schools failed to do, English lecturers in NDA need more time to provide a solid base on which the more sophisticated reading and writing skills could meaningfully take off.

These are only some of the most disturbing problems and are in no way exhaustive. Are there possible solutions to these debilitating problems confronting the effective teaching of EAP in NDA?

Conclusion

Despite these numerous problems militating against the effective teaching of EAP in NDA, there is no doubt that the course has proved useful in equipping the cadets with the receptive and expressive skills required for a successful military officer with university education.

Having this achievement in mind, EAP lecturers should take up the present day hue and cry over the poor English of cadets as a challenge to work harder and achieve a more noticeable impact on the English of cadets as their products. With the moral support of every stakeholder, the teaching of EAP course will be a more rewarding experience for both the cadets and the lecturers in the Nigerian Defence Academy as a military university.

Recommendations

Based on the myriad of problems identified confronting the effective teaching of English Academic Purposes in NDA, the following recommendations are made:

1. That cadet becomes more responsive as learners of English while lecturers in other disciplines accept their role as 'teachers' of English. This will go a long way to better the English of cadets.
2. That the period for teaching the course be extended to four years; the two years being devoted to the necessary groundwork of remedial nature and the last two years to the more sophisticated language skills needed for university level work.
3. That more lecturers be made available to aid the realization of the objectives of the more elaborate EAP programme.
4. That lecturers be motivated to undertake self-improvement programmes including higher degrees in English, workshops on English language and research.
5. That EAP lecturers analyse the language needs of their cadets and formulate their teaching goals based on these. In this regard, lecturers should be ready to

work harder and to change their teaching methods to suit these goals for this is the mark of a good teacher of language.

6. That if need be, the EAP course content and course objectives be occasionally revised and redefined based on the language needs of the cadets as diagnosed. In this direction, the co-coordinator of EAP in NDA should work closely with co-coordinators of the course in other universities.
7. That adequate and spacious office accommodation be provided for lecturers to facilitate out-of-class lecturer-student official correspondence.

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