
RE-ENGINEERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

By

Vero-Ekpris Gladstone Urujian
*Centre for General Entrepreneurial Studies,
Akwa Ibom State University,
Ikot Akpaden.*

Abstract

There is no way one can run away from re-engineering the curriculum of English Language because of the importance of English Language to formal education in Nigeria. It is also the language of modern Information Communication System (ICS) throughout the world. This paper examines the role of English Language as a global language of communication; problems militating against English Language teaching and learning in Nigeria; how to re-engineer English Language curriculum for employment and productivity in Nigeria. The paper concludes by highlighting the importance of English Language and what should be incorporated into the contents of the curriculum so as to bring its teaching and learning to international standard for the purpose of self employment and productivity to the nation. It finally gives some remedies that can be applied so as to enhance the improvement on the usage of the language by the learners in schools.

It is a generally accepted fact that Language Education leads to consequential social advancement. It is also true that language acquired is a durable capital asset, which increases the overall quality of life in any society. The power of language in nation building and national integration anywhere in the world has not been in doubt. It is believed that language is the medium through which the structural hierarchy of power is perpetuated and the establishment of truth, order and reality is attained. The federal government through the National Policy on Education encouraged language education and the setting of standards in our schools, hence, the emphasis on language education in the school curriculum at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. The National Policy on Education (2004) stipulated that the mother tongue (L1) should be used as the medium of instruction in the first three years of primary education.

Therefore, in the last three years of primary school and the first three years of secondary education, the mother tongue (L1) and English Language (L2) should be used side-by-side as medium of instruction. It is true that the use of the (L1) and the (L2) in the teaching and learning process does not only help in preserving the value of one's culture but also enhances one's understanding of the lexis of both languages. One

noticeable achievement in the federal government's language policy is in the fine-tuning of the 1925 memorandum on Education in British Tropical Africa in an attempt at enhancing the quality of English Language. While the standard of English Language was clearly stated in the curriculum, the memorandum saw the need to integrate the use of vernacular into the teaching of English Language as a means of enhancing the quality of the language as a medium of instruction in schools.

Problems of English Language Education

There is currently a proliferation of English variants especially in independent countries. The English spoken in the United States of America is not the same as that which is found in Nigeria or Canada. There is a distinctive difference between the Standard English language and the linguistic code English which is the transformed and subverted variants found in many countries. It is true that the Standard British English is confined essentially in the British Isles.

If the linguistic code which is integrated into the English language curriculum at various levels is taken as the standard in Nigeria, then we need not to discuss the *Standard* because it does not exist. The curriculum is there to guide the language teacher but how to implement it is another question. In a situation where unqualified teachers are allowed to teach English Language, neither standard nor quality will be attained. It is only in English Language that we have double standard especially at the tertiary level - one standard for those who major in English as a course and another for those who use the language in the acquisition of other courses - communication skills. It is only at the primary and secondary levels that one can find uniformity. The question that arises is, should communication skills which are geared towards teaching the rudiments of communicating in English be the standard for science, technology and management students. If so, it amounts to a reduction in quality and standard.

The Role of English Language as a Global Language of Communication

English Language was introduced unto Nigeria from the time the English traders, missionaries and administrators came into different part 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 of the ethnic groups in the country according to Urua (2004). English Language 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 round 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 to Nigeria. Even though Fafunwa (1975) postulated that people appreciate, study and learn better if they are taught in their indigenous languages, but Essien (2003:2) 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 second 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 any course at the university in Nigeria without a credit pass in English Language. This therefore underscores the importance of the 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 reference 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.

Problems Militating Against English Language Teaching and Learning in Nigeria

English Language as the only official language of education in Nigeria has been affected by the attitude of educational policy makers, curriculum planners, the teachers of the language, the pupils and students studying the language. It is not an understatement to say that the language has not been 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 colonial language.

Those who postulate this idea are in the majority so their attitudes tend to affect the teachers and learners of the language. Eyo (2004:32-42) 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 at killing it through the introduction of indigenous national languages. The indigenous languages do not serve the basic useful purposes of education, interaction and communication as they should. Emphasizing on the importance and relevance of English Language, Udofot (2000:35) 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 (2005:145). He lamented that "language like all organisms depend 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 creativities characteristics of language in contact but due to "ungrammatical expression and poor sentence structures prevalent among the youths and the current generation of speakers of English in Nigeria". Essien (2003:34) 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, semi-literate and educated non-English majors, will never pass examinations in English or even in 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 effective studies in the language at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels.

Udofot (2002:64-87) 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 has its code, principles and practice. Language though, defined by Block and Tragers (1945:5-10) 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, Udontata (2004:44-45) propounded that English Language now serves the function of providing interconnectivity between communities and persons in our global village and 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-Engineering English Language Curriculum for Employment and Productivity in Nigeria

The need to standardize the curriculum of English so that the 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 much 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 phonology 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 (2000:3) insist that English should not be adulterated with idiosyncratic, regional or dialectal variants. For the curriculum to be effectively global, 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 specially 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 what they read from the textbooks in all subjects,

Also, the curriculum content of English although should serve the needs of the nation first before considering its global interest 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. What the education curriculum planners must do is to obtain oral language equipment from England and install in language laboratories, in schools, so as to help the students and teachers especially at the secondary level to study the language effectively.

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 incidents 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 to 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.

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 systems 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 can not 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) as a guide to future developments in the use of information technology, 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 curricular of schools in Nigeria.

Language relativity to national growth and productivity is supported by Shobomehin (2005:56-63) 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.

In order to re-engineer the English Language curriculum of schools, there is need for the use of Information Communication System as done in the advanced countries of the world. Kohn (1998) stated that for good language learning, we discover that these conditions are not possible to attain without the help of Information Communication Technology (ICT). The importance of ICT to learners are, learners autonomy, communication-embedded targeted language learning, facilitation, touring and open pedagogic integration. If language learning for communication is to have utilitarian value, it must be cognitive, affectively and 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 (2004:57-69) postulated that given the panoply and the secured position of English in Nigeria, the only 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.

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 Communication Technology used throughout the world. Already the nation is involved in language 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 acquisition of western technology and the development of indigenous technology also.

Recommendations

- (a) The national, state and local government should give prominence to the teaching and learning of English Language by supporting language education programmes.
- (b) Regular conferences, seminars and workshops should be organized for English Language 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 Colleges of Education and the Universities to fill the existing gaps in 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 College of Education, the Polytechnic and the University at least for about six semesters before they graduate. This will enable them to be very proficient in the language usage.

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