

# VALUE RE-ORIENTATION IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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## **Abstract**

*Everybody knows the importance of English language in a multilingual society like Nigeria. Without English language, interaction, education, commerce and the rule of law would have been a difficult endeavour right from the primary school up to the tertiary level. English is done as a subject and it is also used as a medium of instruction. For it to be properly used, there has to be a teaching and learning of it. This paper discusses English language education, its importance, its problems and recommendations for re-orientation.*

In every society, there is bound to be interaction among the people and language plays an important role in this interaction. Nigeria, being a multilingual nation, has no indigenous language that emerged as the official language. There are so many languages as there are so many ethnic groups in Nigeria. For communication and interaction to be effective, there has to be an acceptable common language to all. This particular language happens to be English which is alien to Nigeria. This is to say that English serves as a medium of inter-ethnic communication and as a unifying factor among speakers of the indigenous languages, (Nwankwo 2006).

## **The Role of English in Nigeria**

The role English language plays in Nigeria is so clear and obvious. Without English language which is serving as a lingua franca, the coming together for social intercourse would have been a difficult one. According to Tiffen (1980) English language is language of administration, law, national press, commerce and politics. Most importantly is the medium of imparting knowledge right from the pre-nursery to tertiary levels of education. The issue of the language policy which says that mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment should be used in the first three years of the primary school is not feasible owing to the multiplicity of languages of immediate environment.

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The use of English language has become a tool for measuring standard in education. One hears people say standard of Education has fallen simply because people do not have a good command of English language when making selection for job opportunities. This shows that good command of English language should be an exclusive concern of the educational system. It is unfortunately observed that learners of English language are faced with a number of problems at every level of education. Learners, according to Nwankwo (2006) exhibit poor mastery of English language. This lack of mastery has a negative effect of impeding the learning of other school subjects since English is the medium of instruction. Oluwole (2006) believed that a high level of proficiency in the language of education will result in corresponding mastery and high level of performance in other subjects.

## **English Language Education**

Talking of education is talking about teaching and learning. English language education has to do with teaching and learning of English language. The teaching is meant to help the learner learn English effectively. The four language skills are to be developed properly. Onyema (2006) noted that language education is intended to develop learners' competence in using receptive language (listening and reading) and expressive language (speaking and writing). Chindaya (2006) saw language learning as the process of acquiring a set of skills just as one has to learn certain other skills. Language skills or better still, language behaviour is governed by a set of rules which have to be mastered and absorbed by the learners. Wilkins (1982) believed that language education has to do with successful impartation of language skills which need to adopt the communicative approach to language teaching. This, in essence means that language teaching is no more a study of rules, but how to use the language and use it appropriately and correctly.

Just as the whole education system is suffering a serious decline, so is English language education and quite a lot of things are responsible for the decline. Here are some of them.

### **Problems of English Education**

➤ **Lack of Qualified English Language Teachers:** It is a known fact that most of the schools right from pre-nursery to primary and to secondary schools lacks teachers who are trained in English language. The assumption that anyone who speaks English can teach it is a total fallacy. This particular assumption has really made some head of schools to commit serious blunders by assigning teacher of other subjects to teach English. One cannot give what he/she has not. How can one who manages to express himself in English teach accurate usage of the same language to the young learners. So, lack of English language trained teachers is posing problem to the mastery of English language.

➤ ~~**Value Re-Oriented in English Language:**~~ ~~**Inadequate Practice of English Language:**~~ Learners of English language do not often practise the use of the language regularly. Practice makes perfect. The secret of learning a new language is in using the language all the time. It is in doing this, that errors and mistakes are made and corrected. Fodeh (1990) believed a good learner is actively involved in the learning process if he participates and communicates with others and practices the language of his own accord. This does not happen because learners are comfortable in expressing themselves in the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment. This can be because most of the learners are surrounded by illiterates or people who do not see English language as language that can improve on.

➤ **Lack of Reading Habits:**-The extensive reading culture is no longer existing in our schools. people no longer have time to inculcate a reading culture unto the younger ones just because of the many pursuits of life. For any student to go through and survive his/her academic life, more time is to be spent or devoted to reading which is one of the four skills of any language. Egeneg (2006) believed that a child who does not learn to read, sees the wrath of the educational system descend on his or her head. Any excellent performance and academic achievement depends much on the ability of the learners to read extensively.

➤ **Negative Attitude Towards the Use of English:-** It is appalling to see how negative some parents, peer groups and society react to the teaching of English language despite the pride of place it occupies in the nation. Most people feel it is an alien language and one should not bother much about it hence, the code-switching most speakers engage in. Most often, people prefer the native language even in a situation where it is not necessarily needed. Most people discourage people who want to major in English Language education claiming it is a very difficult subject. They prefer History, Christian religious Knowledge, Social Studies which are good on their own but should not replace English language.

➤ **Inadequate Learning Infrastructure and Facilities:-** In Nigerian schools there is gross inadequate infrastructure and facilities. There are no computer sets, language laboratories, good English textbooks

and novels, journals and magazines. Some of these facilities go a long way in helping the learners learn almost all aspects of English language-speaking, reading and writing skills inclusive. Library, is seriously non-existent in most of the schools particularly the primary and secondary schools where it is most needed. Where the infrastructures and facilities are not available, learning becomes difficult for the learners.

- **Limited Time Allocation:-** In most of the schools especially the primary and secondary schools, little time is allotted to the teaching of English language. In these sense, much is not taught and learned and practice becomes difficult. This is in line with what Jegede (2006) pointed out that the time usually allotted to the study of English language is not simply sufficient to either teach or learn adequately to meet the communicative objective it requires. All this is because the curriculum planners do not see the importance of English language even though there has been this constant complaint of poor performance in English language.

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- **Teacher-Student Ratio:** Considering the large number of students in each class in our school, it becomes too difficult to cater for individual language problems of the students. Recently over NTA news, a school was reported to have over one hundred and seventy students in a class. The question is how can a teacher handle and cater for these numerous students particularly when it comes to teaching writing? The need for one student may not be the need of the other especially when the students come from different educational and family backgrounds.
- **Examination Malpractice Problems:** The spade of examination malpractice in our society these days is very alarming. People no longer get bothered about the genuineness of certificates paraded all over the place. The system in Nigeria fails to apprehend those who perpetuate examination malpractice and it has been the order of the day eating up the foundation of our educational system. The effect is that students with or without little knowledge in English language are admitted into higher institutions. This trend creates the problems of having a large number of students that cannot be taught the workings of the basic language principles. This also slows down the progress in the course of making use of the language at the general academic level. The study of the language at the level of register and specialism is hindered. If the foundation is faulty, whatever is built on it will definitely crash or collapse.
- **Lack of Refresher Course and Retraining:** Most of the English language teachers in our schools do not bother to go for refresher courses or retraining not even conferences, seminars and workshops where new techniques, methods and new knowledge are got. When they want to attend, the authorities do not sponsor them because of lack of good funding of the schools. Johnson (2006) saw it that the English language teachers are not exposed to induction process, seminars, workshops and interactive sessions which will acquaint them with novel ideas, methodology and current status of the language.

#### **Conclusion**

English language plays a vital communicative role in Nigerian society. It is used in our schools as a medium of instruction from primary level to tertiary level. It is a subject that must be passed at credit level in the secondary school before one's admission or occupational requests are considered. It is a language that has also made inter-ethnic communication and interaction easy, and it is seen as a

unifying force in this country. Having this status makes it imperative on all stakeholders to have a rethink on how English language is treated and handled as no indigenous language can yet be accepted and regarded as the official language.

### **Recommendations for Re-Orientation**

There is a need to create awareness in the populace that English language has come to stay with us and therefore should be given all the seriousness and attention if it is to be used correctly. Correctness in the use of English language cannot be hidden and is also used to measure standard of education in our society.

English language teachers should be employed for the schools. Nobody else is expected to teach English except one who is trained in English language and qualified as one.

Enough time should be allotted to the teaching and learning of English language in order to give room for enough practice. Teachers and students should be motivated to use English language in their interactions. In so doing, mistakes are made and are corrected. Practice makes perfect and time is needed for that.

Libraries are to be established and equipped with books in our schools. These books should be at the level of each grade and then those learners are encouraged and motivated with incentives to read these books with a view to sharing their reading experiences with others. It is only reading that can make for academic excellence and should, therefore be made to be in place in our schools. The infrastructures and educational facilities that enhance teaching/learning of English language should be made available. Computer sets, good classrooms and school environment, language laboratories, television and others are quite necessary in the English language education. Good books and workbooks in English language are also of utmost importance to English language education.

Classes in Nigerian schools can be and should be decongested for proper management and handling, if a teacher has thirty-five to forty students (35-40) in a class, the teacher will be able to cater for their individual language problems. In a small class, assignments, class works, tests, quizzes and home-works can be given quite often to create room for interaction and corrections.

There should not be clamor for paper qualification only, rather performance and communicative competence. Learners and teachers should be encouraged to do what is right instead of indulging in cheating and examination malpractice which cause laziness and sluggishness in the teachers and learners.

Teachers of English language should be made and encouraged to go for conferences, seminars, workshops and other refresher courses in order to freshen up their ideas, techniques and methods of English language. They should be allowed to go for in-service training to up-date their knowledge as well as teaching skills. They will be exposed to the new technologies that are used in teaching. Often times, the authorities concerned will not allow the teachers to go for any course for fear of the fact that the teachers are very few in the school. By so doing, the learners and the teachers are not treated fairly because they will be revolving round old and archaic ideas and knowledge.

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Debates and other activities well organized will enhance English language education in our schools. Incentives, wages and other motivational gifts and prizes can be part of a re-orientation for English language education. Special allowances for English language teachers can do the magic of retaining these teachers in the schools instead of leaving them to jump out to look for greener pastures elsewhere.

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