

# ISSUES IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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

## **Abstract**

*The paper focuses primarily on the current issue militating against the proper teaching and learning of English Language in order to bring growth and productivity to the nation. It therefore, examines the problems of teaching English studies at the junior secondary school level, negligence of the teaching of Literature in English by the teachers teaching English Studies, mastering of the language, reading/comprehension and mother tongue interference. The paper highlights 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 productivity to the nation. It finally gives some suggestions or remedies on some of the issues raise so as to enhance the improvement on the usage of the language by the learners in schools.*

English language is a major core subject of study in the Nigerian education system from primary, secondary schools to tertiary institutions. Because of the importance attached to English Language as the basic language of formal education in Nigeria, official language of government and private administrations, communication, business transactions and that of written textbooks in all subjects taught in primary, secondary schools and tertiary institutions, the teaching and learning of the language is given prominence in terms of period allocation daily.

Emphasis is placed on both oral and written mediums as a way of encouraging the learners to internalize the rules in order to be competent in general communication. National Policy on Education in Nigeria (1998: 13) stipulates that primary education is to inculcate permanent literacy and ability to communicate effectively in English, while the policy on secondary education states that secondary education shall prepare the individuals for useful living within the society and higher education as well as inspire the students for self improvement and achievement of excellence. It also provides the opportunity to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, respect the dignity of labour and foster national unit with emphasis on the common ties that unite us in our diversity (1998:16).

The objectives of national policy on education in Nigeria give prominence to English language as the basic language that all the objectives of the various levels of

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education can be achieved. This accounts for why a credit pass in English language is made compulsory at the school certificate level for those aspiring to gain admission into tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It has recently been discovered that the teaching of English Language in primary and junior secondary schools is deficient in terms of methodologies applied during the lessons by the teachers, as a result many pupils and students perform woefully in public examinations and general communication. In order to check the trend especially at the junior secondary school level where the subject has changed over the years, because of the abolition of five years straight secondary education and the introduction of six-three-three-four system of education, literature has not been given effective teaching and proper attention it deserves, by teachers teaching English studies.

### **Problems of Teaching English Studies in Junior Secondary School Level**

At the junior secondary school level the subject is known as English Studies, which is a combination of English and literature. Previously, in the 1960s and early 1980s, English Language was taught from class one to class five as a separate subject from literature. During this period too, literature from class one to class five was taught as a separate subject with specific periods allocated to it in the time table which resulted in elaborate and effective teaching and learning of both English Language and literature in English by the students. The students were able to read and communicate fluently in English because of the knowledge and skills acquired through reading of literature.

In support of the teaching of literature as a separate subject in junior secondary level Okolie (2007:143) states that literature has contributed immensely and most profitably to the education and development in Nigeria, through the expressions of Africans world and lives in the writing of various nationals in Africa. It also helps the Africans to unfold themselves, analyse their dreams and aspirations, implement, their visions and project their image and personality. Therefore to teach literature as a separate subject from English will enhance the expression of African cultural values, focus and visions which the students must inculcate at an early stage in their educational programme so as to appreciate the society that they live.

With the integration of English Language with literature as one subject and tagged English studies at the junior secondary level, it does not provide the teachers with proper opportunities to teach literature exhaustively, as most teachers are interested in teaching English language, using all the available periods for English studies. What can be deduced from this aspect is that literature and English language are two broad subject areas as such both cannot be combined for effective performance if the lessons are to benefit the students. Undoubtedly, lack of serious study of literature affect students' communicative competence because they have not been exposed to varieties of styles in language usages, vocabularies and expressions which is only possible through the study of literature as a separate subject from English Language.

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Okolie (2007, 150) further postulates that reading of African novels gives one opportunity to slip imaginatively into circumstances and conditions of life beyond one's immediate milieu. Writing or reading a novel implies widening of the imaginative capability of the reader, the writer and the audience. Literature also increases the mobility of the individuals mind by widening his experience and imaginative capacity to enter into new situations. According to Jenkwe (2007: 165) literature is a fictive exploration of human experience both as educative and morally edifying field of knowledge. This assertion qualifies literature as a major field of study that should be given province in the junior secondary school.

Another major challenge facing the teaching of English studies at the junior secondary school level is lack of a single standard text book that comprises both literature and English as what we have in integrated science which is a combination of physics, chemistry biology. This lack of texts in English studies hinders the teaching of literature while promoting the teaching of English Language because only English language tests books are available. Teachers prefer the teaching of English language while neglecting the literature aspect to the detriment of the students. The teachers also concentrate in the teaching of grammatical rules which encouraging the students to read prose and drama literature texts for the mastering of communicative competence from stories and actions in literature books. Grammar is defined by Hornby (1981: 28) as the study of the forms, rules and usage of words in sentence. Therefore teaching English language alone cannot take the place of literature aspect in the junior secondary level, since literature entails cultures and traditions of human societies and their relationships with people and other natural things in their societies.

### **The Role of English Language as a Global Language of Communication**

English language was introduced into 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, Africa to Oceania. Crystal (1987) stated that English Language ranks at 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

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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 can not 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, China 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, 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.

### **Issues in 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 attitude 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 Nigeria 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 can not 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 expressions and poor sentences 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 can not be the language for growth, development and productivity to the Nigerian nation, because the pupils and students who imitate the literate, 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 propound 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 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.

## **How English Language Curriculum Should Be For National Growth and Productivity**

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 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) insists 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 text books in all subject.

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 aspects 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 school 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 texts books in all subjects ranging from sciences, social sciences to arts are written in English. Therefore, the use of English is indispensable for the nations 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 it is proper for the language curriculum to be globalize.

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 individuals 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 globalize 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 cognitively, 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, p. 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 profit fit into the new world order.

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**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 text books 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 text books to all pupils and students at the primary and secondary schools 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.

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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