

PROMOTING TRANSCRIPTION SKILLS IN THE NIGERIA CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION (NCE) PROGRAMME IN THE 21st CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper objectively calls for promotion of transcription skills at the N.C.E level. The N. C. E graduates are meant to teach at the junior and senior secondary classes, so proficiency of the transcription skills- spellings punctuation marks, work usage and handwriting becomes a necessity. Specifically, this paper is of the opinion that it is only when the above skills are enhanced can students write effective essays and composition. The paper suggests that issues like large class size, teacher. Information and Communication Technology (ICTSs). Evaluation should be handled seriously since they are very important in promoting those skills . Introduction

Language is functional in one's daily activities and experience. Language therefore, is an instrument of communication. Language as communication is one attribute that sets human apart from all other creatures and binds humans together across all geographical barriers (Evans, 1987) The-communication skills an individual acquire are powerful influence on the person's lives. Successes in one's vocation are on most case related to communication skills. Anderson and Lapp (1988) note that the curriculum area that deals with the development and strengthening of communication skills is the language arts. The sub-areas: listening speaking reading and writing. These basic sub-areas are inter related because they all depend on the processes of thought.

Listening and reading may be classified as receptive, analytical or oracy skills because they represent the processes of the thoughts of someone else. While speaking and writing may be classified as synthetic, expressive, productive and literacy skills because they represent the process of sending or sharing of thoughts with others.

A Schematic and Functional representation of Language and Communication Skills

Receptive Analytical or Oracy Communicative language Skill		Expressive /Synthetic/ Literacy Communicative language Skill.	
Listening	Reading	Speech	Writing

Adapted from Unoh (1986); In Ekanaem (1993), Modified (Udom, 2006).

English language is the official language of communication in Nigeria and it occupies a prominent position as a medium of instruction at all levels of education, it is used also as a subject across all the levels. Yusuf (1998), notes that learners are expected to attain a high level of proficiency in the four basic skills and equal emphasis should be given to all the areas by both teachers and learners in order to excel.

In spite of this, there has been consistent outpouring of emotion and concern over the poor, performance of students in English Language at all levels of education Agbaje (2004) notes that President Olusegun Obsanjo during the 2004, principals of Nigeria Secondary Schools Conference noted that the outside world is laughing at us because our University graduates cannot speak English correctly. The concern of Mr President, arises out of the prominent position English Language occupies in Nigeria educational system since its incursion into Education Code of 1882, which recommended grants-in-aid to schools where English language was taught.

Yusuf (1998), also notes that there is no language that wields as much influence "socially, politically, economically and academically as English language. It is used to write other subjects. A poor performance in the subject invariably affects other school subjects

The Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E), in which this write up is concerned with is designed to provide non-graduate middle level teacher for the primary and junior Secondary classes is also affected seriously by this poor performance. Many writes have asserted to this. Examples of such are: (Eyibe 1993) Olajide (1997) (1998) and (2004). Yusuf (1998); Mangvwat (1997), Fadeyi (1997) and foweya (2003); in Udom (2006).

As already mentioned earlier in this paper, there are four basic communication skills vis-a-vis speaking reading, speaking and writing. This write-up is concerned with the last skill-writing because of this apparent neglect and yet it occupies a prominent position in one's educational pursuit (King-Stoops 1997, Owoeye (2003). The high percentage of poor performance of students in English" language simply means that the students cannot write effectively. This is because it is through the skill of writing that a student's is able to convey meaning of what she/he has been taught and be evaluated..To this end, Maduekwe (2005), observes that the "ability to write effectively apart from enhancing communication remains the most important skill in school and indeed after school."

The N.C. E student, therefore, needs to be proficient in writing skills so as to be able teach at the level they are being prepared for since those levels-primary and junior secondary classes are the foundation of ones educational pursuit. Most works on writing are usually on essay, compositions, narrative, descriptive, creative

and summary. The question, is how do they get to that level if the basic is ignored? This paper is of the opinion that in order for the above to be effective, and for the products of N. C. E. programme to be able to teach at the primary and junior secondary classes, the transcription skills writing should be encouraged. Competency in writing requires adequacy in skills such as word usage, spellings and handwriting.

The judgment that students performance in English language at all levels of education is low is based on the above (actors).

Writing Definition

Writing is the production of words. The purpose of writing is to communicate or to express an idea. Anderson and Lapp (1988:343), citing Flood and Stiles (1984), describe writing as a "sophisticated cognitive process in which the writer acquires, organizes and produce information". Before one writes anything, one has to think, so ability to express oneself in writing is dependent upon their ability to develop and relate ideas. Wiredu and Owoeye (1998), also confirm that writing skills-are complex and the most sophisticated of the skills required for language learning. They are related to other skills. Students who listen well and speak well usually read and write well. This is because as one writes, he/she selects, eliminates and arrange thoughts and ideas which become new insights and association and thereby new learning taking place. Linking writing to associations, Owoeye (2003), citing Raban (1985) defines writing as an act of putting down in conventional graphic symbols something that has been spoken, which involves the correct association of conventional graphic symbols with sounds. Just like other language skills, the amount of actual writing an individual is engaged in depends on an individual's background experience, interest as well as intellectual, and physical Maturity.

Raban (1995), in Owoeye (2003), enumerates areas of writing in which students must master as follows:

- « Learning to spell according to the convention of the language
- Learning to control the structure of the language so that what they write is comprehensive to their reader.
- Learning to select from possible combinations of words and phrases those which will the meanings, students have in mind.
- Learning copy, reproduce, recombine and write guided composition. -

In addition to the above, Goodman, Smith Meredith and Goodman (1986), list six goals for teaching written language as following: acceptable vocabulary and word usage, correct grammar, competent punctuation and capitalization and paragraphing, acceptable spelling; legible, neat handwriting and ability to express oneself easily and effectively in written communication. This-write-up is concerned with the proper attention being given to the above goals at N. C. E level.

Why Write?

Literacy, the world over, is to a greater percentage measured by how well one reads and writes. It is therefore, important to develop awareness in writing skills and its values. Unfortunately, little attention has been known to be paid to writing skills development. King-Stoops Owoeye (2003). Maduekwe (2005), notes that writing skill is very important as it plays a major role in meeting the personal and sociolinguistic challenges in an English as a second language nation as Nigeria. He went

on to state that writing enables one understands the content of their education and facilitates personal development in other areas. Students therefore, who cannot communicate effectively in written language has his/her intellectual and social activities greatly impaired especially in a country that is largely examination oriented like Nigeria.

The following therefore are advantages of writing as listed by Alelord and Cooper (1988), King Stoops (1977).

- > It makes special contribution to the way people think.
- > It contributes uniquely to the way we learn, E.g taking notes during Lectures.
- > It helps us to find out establish our networks of information and ideas.
- > It contributes to individual's personal development because when we write, we become active' thinkers and learners.
- > It connects us to others, communications with others.
- > Good writing makes special contribution to success in college and on job.
- > It helps to acquire those creative skills which will be valuable in later life,
- > It helps us to acquire the necessary transcription skills Spellings punctuation marks and handwriting.
- V- Keeps one engrossed and quite,
- > Produce artifacts which satisfy the writer, edify and entertain readers,

- > Helps to crystallize the writer's own feelings and opinions, sometimes therapeutically, often as the basis for further consideration,
- > Provide a record or plan which has implication for future action and work,

Factors Affecting Writing

Since language skill is a form of rehearsal to the other, it invariably means that the four use the same signal-words. The four skills would also be affected by similar factors. Apart from the other factors earlier mentioned in this work such as experience, interest, physical as well as maturity, writing could also be affected by the following.

(i) Perceptual Factors

Highly developed visual, motor control abilities, hand-eye-finger-arm, hand-grip abilities are essential in writing. Writers must be able to differentiate complex shapes and forms of letters, they must use the visual perception to develop an understanding of ways these shapes fit together to form words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs. Without these, developing these skills, writing becomes difficult.

(ii) Linguistic Factors

Linguistic factors are necessary. A child uses the same language that is made up of the same letters, the same sound correspondence and the same structure or syntax to convey meaning. Citing a study by Loban (1963), Anderson and Lapp (1988), note that children who come to school equipped with superior oral language skills also excel in the skill of writing Fatola and Kayode (1999), in Udom (2004) citing Shuniar (1965) and Chomsky (1965), also mention the importance of child's background in development of language skills.

(iii) Cognitive Factors

Wiredu and Oyeleye (1998) note that writing is a complex and sophisticated activity. This means that one has to think before writing. Similarly, Leeper, Skipper, and Witherspoon (1979), cite research evidence to show that writing is a cognitive process. Examples of such include (Piaget 1952, Vygotsky 1962, Britton 1970, Squit (1983); Arty, 1983, Wimock (1983), (Rice 1983, and Flood and Lapp (1986).

When writing, students must use their prior knowledge, analyze and synthesize information and then form concepts that they can meaningfully construct in prints.

(D) Affective Domain

Affective domain seeks to promote the interest, motivation and self-esteem among students. The interests and attitude of students towards their studies do have a great impact on their abilities to learn and perform in school. Writing skills are developed when one is highly motivated, when students are motivated, they will like to communicate with the world and recognize its usefulness. Isiugo- Abanihe and Maduabuchi (2006), confirm the above and noted that decades of research have revealed the important role of affective oriented instruction on learning. Citing Eggen and Kauchack (1997), the authors note that affective domain focuses on the teaching of attitude and values as well as the development of students personal and emotional growth.

Transcription Skills- What Are They?

Transcription skills are the necessary soul, ingredients, condiments, that constitute an effective writing. In other words, they are the elementary, primary requirements needed for a good writing. The concern that students performance is poor in English language and indeed other subjects is largely due to bad spellings, lack of punctuation marks, word usage and bad handwriting. Managvwat (1997), cites example of bad spelling such as "fetur" for future "advert" for a advertisement" and many others from students scripts in Federal College of Education.

Evans (1997), notes that spellings, punctuation marks, word usage and handwriting are transcription skills. They are the actual writing, interpretation. Without them, writing would be meaningless. Based on the writer's experience as a teacher in College of education, the above skills need to be revitalized among N. C. E students. The four transcription skills would be looked into briefly.

(A) Spelling Skills

Spelling skills are effective means to a written presentation, and they are fairly sophisticated skill. They are based on other language skills, background experience, listening, oral expression and reading. (King-stoops (1977) bad spelling make a written work uninteresting to read. Apart from that, the meanings of such work would

be difficult to decode. Students need to be very careful when dealing with spellings. Eyisi (2004) observes that spellings of words in the English language could-often be very deceptive. Pronunciation could, at times aid spellings, because spelling skills make use" of both visual and auditory skills. But Eyisi (2004) has warned that in many cases, pronunciation does not aid spellings or even give cues to it. Some words are often misspelt during pronunciation. Students are advised to make use of dictionaries at times. Goodman and others (1987) has advised that-teachers should bear the following in mind:

- Spelling should facilities the communication of written thoughts, not limit it: students should be encouraged to use English language as much as possible. This will help them to learn to-spell words are they use them.
- Spelling is developmental, as students are engaged in series of writing activities, so are their scope purpose and functions grow.
- Students should be made to understand that there are standard rules to spelling, since English, language is rule governed (Williams, 1989).
- The time to teach lesson is very important, spelling should be done in the context of writing.

(B) Punctuation Marks

Correct and good observation of punctuation marks is a prerequisite to an effective writing. A writing without observation of punctuation marks is like setting out on a journey without a clear vision as to purpose of the journey. Etame (2003), observes that nothing spoils a good writing like bad punctuation marks. Students write without dotting their I's and crossing their t's, no capital letters where it is supposed to be used, no full stops, comma or paragraphing. Eyisi (2004), explains the purpose of punctuation marks. That it is to "mark out strings of works into manageable groups and clarify their meaning or in some cases to prevent a wrong meaning being given. Citing, Oji (2000), she further notes that "a good command of the use of punctuation marks gives luster, perspicuity and vividness" to a writing. There are many of them but a few examples are presented on the graphic presentation.

(C) Hand Writing

Handwriting according Webster Comprehensive Dictionary, which could also be called Penmanship is a form of writing peculiar to an individual. It is a writing done by hand. Crystal (1996) explains that there are many other ways of presenting written language such as printing press, type writers, video display and word- processing Goodman et al (1977), observe that handwriting is a tool. It is a unique characteristic of an individual. As a perceptual function of an individual, visual skill and co-ordination is. needed in handwriting. This is because arm and finger movement eye-hand coordination, muscular control to grip the paper while writing, body position which are all peculiar attributes of an individual are important factors needed in handwriting. So handwriting being individualistic grows systematically from child hood. But unfortunately, this is not taken seriously by teachers. At times, teachers are known, especially in public schools not to teach this very important skills, but in private school, it is taken seriously.

Good handwriting is attractive, motivates a teacher and heightens curiosity about a student work. King -stoops (1977), notes that legibility in handwriting is not only a courtesy to the reader but is essential for communication.

The new Book of knowledge and Crystal (1996), list the following characteristics of handwriting.

- a it must be legible, clear and neat. Body posture, pen and paper position should not be taken for granted. Q Speed-writing in a hurry is the most cause of illegible handwriting because when letters are written carelessly, they become very difficult to read. Certain letters are written incorrectly e.g,e,a,n,u,l and so on.
- a Leaving enough margin improve appearance of the page; Q Spacing-spacing between letters, words and sentences must or the even or the writing will be difficult to read, a Handwriting must be within the linguistics and social conventions. It must stay within a single writing system and must be readable, and lucid.

Students at the N. C. E. level, should be reminded that scripts are not read in their presence in order for them to explain what they are writing, so handwriting is a necessary tool and should not be taken for granted.

(D) Word Usage

This is the ability to use correct and appropriate sentences. It consists of a lot of divisions among it. Example of such, is grammar. Eko (2002), states that expressing oneself in grammatically correct English should be an important goal for every student. Grammar consists of parts of speech which is very important in written

language, A sentence is group of words that expresses a complete thought. A good sentence must have a finite verb, A finite verb means, that there must be an agreement between a word and another in a singular or plural usage. Example: *The boy Sleeps: They came* here.

Finite verb also expresses concern about tenses in which students are very poor. A tense simply refers to the time an action, being or state of being taken place. A subject has two parts-The subject and predicate. Sentence construction is simply the proper use and manipulation of phrases and clauses. Students must be aware of these in order to make their writing meaningful.

Issues in Promoting Transcription Skills Among N. C. E. Students in the 21st Century

So far, this write-up has highlighted what transcription skills are and the need to encourage the skills among our N. C. E students because of the important role they play. Before any intervention measures could be given, it is necessary to consider the following issues that could either enhance or militate promotion of transcription skills. This section would be examined on the following headings:

- Q Large class population
- a Teacher Issues
- Q Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Issues
- a Evaluation Issues

(;i) Large Class Population

The issue of large class size is becoming a concern in all levels oi" education. Citing Onvvu (1998), Nwagvuu (2003), Offorma (2006), notes that the Universal Primary Education launched in (1976) brought about increase in school enrolment without a corresponding increase in teacher production (o match the population. She further observes, that this is what has led to overcrowded classrooms which an' being experienced today in all levels of education. At the college of education where the writer is teaching a group at least 500 students. One begins lo wonder how a lecturer can (each 500 students effectively. Williams (19S9), observes (hat for effective teaching of any language skills, it involves constant practice and correction of errors. Mow do teachers correct 500 students, give continuous assessment properly and return the students scripts after correction on time. The teachers health is even in jeopardy. With large class size, there is no individualization of instruction and student individual needs and interests are not known to the teacher. The outcome is that teacher might not know all (lie students he has taught.

(!>) Teacher Issues

The teacher is the final implementer in Ihc curriculum. The Nigeria government recognises (his and stales in the National Policy on i-xlucalion (NIMi, 2004), Ihat no education can rise above the quality of i t s teachers. As Odiba (2004) rightly observe, the teacher is the centre between knowledge and learning, lie (Oiiiba), fmlhei notes thai the "knowledge required to change the behaviour of the learner could only be attained by the role of a teacher". Offorma (2006), notes that the implementation of the curriculum cannot be effectively carried out if the teacher variables such as "competence, availability attitude, dedication and remuneration are faulty". In promoting transcription skills, the teacher issue is very important. The teacher has to be knowledgeable because "he cannot give what he goes not have". The teacher is a model in language learning, lie should be aware of things happening around him, as the world is moving into a global village, (he 21st century teacher to teach transcription skills should be knowledgeable in different use of ICTs to make his teaching easy considering the problem of large class size facing our educational institutions today. A teacher should be creative, providing the needed examples and offer a variety of learning experiences. In other to do (his, Anderson and Lapp (1988), mile that in language learning the teacher's general physical and. menial health, understanding the needs and interests of the learner, the procedures used in class to meet those needs, the variety and appropriateness of the procedures, new approaches to be adopted, are all decided by the teacher, the teacher decides this based on his knowledge of the background of his students in let ins of socio-economic and cultural background, the linguistic and geographical environment of his students. For all these, the teacher needs to be motivated in order to be able to do this, Ihc icacher should be constantly trained 'o update his knowledge. A situation where the teacher is not considered in scheme of things in education matters should be discouraged.

(C) Inloi million and Communication Technology (ICTs) Issues

Information and Communication technology (ICT) has become one of the basic important and necessary facility of a modern society these days. Umoren (2006), notes that many countries now regard understanding of ICT and mastering of the basic sills as part of the core of education alongside reading, writing and numeracy". She (Umoren), further slates that the purpose of ICT in teaching in school serves a dual purpose of acculturation and for more efficient instruction to take place. Since technology is a new culture, it is important that school produce individuals thai would be able lo face the new facts of life after leaving school. Okeke (2004), agreeing with the

above states that students exposed to the internet in high school/college are seen to regard web as a half tool in improving the quality of their academic research and written work. She also mentions that there is even a software such as Internet Essay Assessor and i-Rater that grades students' essays.

ICTs can help improve the quality of education especially, at this time that there seems to be no end on the issue of large class size. Umoren (2006), lists the following ways ICTs can enhance learning.

(a) Motivation to Learn

ICTs such as video, television and multimedia, computer software that combine text, and colour, moving images can be used to provide challenging and authentic content that will engage the students in the learning process.

(b) Facilitating the Acquiring of Basic Skills

The transmission of basic skills and concepts that are the foundation of higher order thinking skills and creativity can be facilitated by ICTs through drill and practice (very essential in transcription skills). Most of the early uses of computer were for computer-based learning (also called computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) that focused on mastery of skills and content through repetition and reinforcement.

Appropriate uses of ICTs can, if properly used, education sector in the 21st century ICT especially the computers and Internet brings about new invention in the teaching-learning process. It enhances active learning, collaborative learning integrative learning and evaluative learning.

(c) Evaluation Issues

This is a very important as attainment of educational goals and objectives are determined by evaluation. In language learning, evaluation should be a continuous process. But due to the factor mentioned in his work earlier, one begins to wonder how valid and reliable are these evaluations. Also, evaluation should focus on cognitive, affective, and psychomotor behaviors. But teachers are known to focus attention only on the cognitive, even in the cognitive, only the knowledge level is emphasized¹. But as observed by Isiugo-Abanihe and Maduabuchi (2006), that effective teaching method that integrates both cognitive and effective strategies activities are tools employed by the teacher to facilitate comprehension in the 21st Century". So evaluation should cover the three levels as transcription skills deal with all-cognitive, affective and psychomotor.

Recommendations

1. Since students are not distinguishing themselves in writing skills, there should be a school language policy at the primary school level. This is peculiar to different schools. Writing in languages is developmental, so the growth should be in effectiveness, not perfection. The policy will now take care of spellings, punctuation marks, word usage and handwriting.
2. Problem areas should be identified for example, errors in spellings, punctuation marks, word usage and handwriting. After this, the students should be grouped according to errors and teach as separate groups or needs.
3. Provision of ICTs in schools so that teachers and students alike can have access and being able to operate them.
4. Writing skills involve motivation both teachers and students should be motivated. Teachers with good working conditions and students good library facilities and good relationship with teachers.
5. Regular and consistent workshops, seminars, and conferences for teachers.
6. Employment of more professional and competent teachers in language arts.

Conclusion

In concluding this paper, the writer is of the opinion that in order to produce efficient and effective teacher manpower for the primary and junior secondary which is even undergoing new system of education-USE, the nucleus of writing-spellings, punctuation marks, word usage and handwriting should be emphasized in the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) programme.

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