

SOUND LANGUAGE SKILLS: TOOL FOR DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA BEYOND THE YEAR 2020

Mustapha Bala Tsakuwa

Abstract

English initially came as a foreign language in Nigeria. It is now in the country as the language of administration, instruction, inter-ethnic communication and business transactions as well. In fact, English is considered as the language of socio-economic and political development by Nigerians. A good grasp of the language skills gives room for smooth progress and development in the one's endeavour in the nation today. It is therefore, an imperative to an average Nigerian to possess the skills for individual development and the national progression beyond year 2020. This paper looks into the history of English, its roles in the country and the objectives of teaching it in Nigerian schools. It also looks at what Vision 2020 entails. The English language skills are discussed and their significance is shown to the teeming populace of the country as they remain as a nation for proper development. The paper recommends that conducive teaching-learning environment should be provided, relevant and sufficient instructional materials should be supplied for teaching the English language skills of oracy and literacy, and qualified English language teachers should be recruited for proper development of the individuals and the nation at large beyond the year 2020.

Key words: Skills, tool, development

English language was initially the language of the Anglo-Saxons (the Angles, the Saxons and the Jutes), a group of Germanic people who conquered the native Britons (Celts) in the Island of England at about 450 AD and divided the area among themselves (Egwuogu, 2003; Medubi, 2007; Adeniyi, 2011 and Crystal, 2012). There is no doubt today that, English has grown-up to a status of World Major language based on the political, economic and demographic criteria, and also it is the best-spoken World language (Sabe, 1995 and Alabi, 2007). Ur (2012) believes that English language is being used for all kinds of functions worldwide today. It has been across the globe, accepted as an appropriate medium of communication of international diplomacy, academics, business and official dealings of nations (Igboanusi, n.d.).

Though English is regarded as a foreign or second language in Nigeria, it has attained a high stage of importance in the country because of the vital functions it plays. English language plays a key role in the political, economic, social, educational and religious life of Nigerians as they interact and remain as a nation. It also serves as an international language of communication to the country. Tsakuwa (2010) argues that the importance of English language to Nigeria and Nigerian education system cannot be overemphasized. English is significant in the schools' curriculum and in fact, it is a compulsory subject right from primary four of schooling up to secondary school level, and a major requirement for employment and admission into tertiary institutions (Adeniran, 2013 & Adelabu, 2014).

With regard to the roles, which English language plays in Nigeria, Bamgbose (1971), Medubi (2007) and Alabi (2007) has the same opinion and understanding that:

Of all the heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of the colonial administration, probably none is more important than the English language. This is now the language of government, business and commerce, education, the mass media, literature and much internal as well as external communication.

Mustapha Bala Tsakuwa

Looking at the above mentioned status, significance and functions of English language in Nigeria, and to Nigerians, it could be deduced as wisely argued in Nojeem (1998), Adeniyi (2011) and Danbaba (2012) that the objectives of teaching English language in Nigerian schools could be as follows:

1. To establish firm, and strengthen the basic English language skills of the learners.
2. To enable the students have sound knowledge of the modern English language.
3. To familiarize the students with various forms of literature written in English language.
4. To give Nigerian students an avenue of learning English language skills, and be able to properly communicate among them - especially those that have different languages or ethnic groups.
5. To make Nigerians to have ability of interacting with non-Nigerians in their international transactions and official matters.
6. To assist the students with basic approaches and strategies for meaningful promotion of teaching and learning of English language and literature in the Nigerian schools.
7. To make Nigerian students have better understanding of other school subjects which are taught in English language.
8. To provide Nigerian school graduates with sufficient level of proficiency in English language usage at places of work and business.
9. To develop the students' listening, speaking, reading and writing skills to enable them undertake higher education without many problems.
10. To contribute to every Nigerian's intellectual, personal, socio-economic, political and professional growth and development.

Erastus (2013) observes that language can be a sound contributing tool towards strengthening a nation and the realization of the national development. He affirms that "There is a close relationship between language and development and meaningful development cannot take place where linguistic barriers exist".

Nigeria as a country has set a strong vision for her fruitful and dynamic development that by the year 2020 the vision could be realized. The vision is known as vision 2020 or Nigeria Vision 20:2020. The set Vision is a national effort that aims at developing Nigeria, making her to be in the association of the world's 20 leading economies by the year 2020. It is a long term developmental goal designed to push the country to the leagued of the most important 20 nations of the world by the 2020 economic-wise. Attainment of the Vision would enable the country achieve a high standard of living for its citizens (Ezekiel, 2011 and Ottuh, 2013).

According to Nigeria Vision 20:2020 (2010), the Nigerian Vision 2020 was developed by Nigerian government for the Nigerian people, and it involves a process of systematic commitment of all stake holders across all levels of the government and the Nigerian societies. The Vision is therefore, a meeting point for Nigerians, regardless of ethnicity, political inclination, economic status, belief or creed, to achieve a common cause of positioning the country on a sustainable development through transforming it into a second economic modern society. The main objectives of the Vision are to: Make efficient use of human and natural resources to achieve rapid economic growth and: translate the economic growth into equitable social development for all citizens.

As shown by the Nigeria Vision 20:2020 (2010), the specific actions to be taken in achieving the objectives include: Urgent address of the most serious constraints to Nigeria's growth and competitiveness, uncompromising pursuit of economic transformation from a mono-product to a diversified and industrialized economy and investing in human capital to transform the Nigerian people into active agents for growth and national development (Ezekiel, 2011 and Ottuh, 2013).

Sabe (1995) argues that for a student, or any non-native English speaker to be able to communicate properly in English, he must have a sound linguistic competence of the language, not only in oral or verbal form, but also in the written aspect of the language. English has four basic language skills.

The Four English Language Skills

Like other languages, English language skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing. The first two are considered as primary skills or skills of oracy, because they could be acquired in normal/social way without any explicit or intensive training, while the last two are secondary skills or skills of literacy, they could be learnt at school usually (Adedimeji, Alabi, & Abdullahi- Idiagbon, 2013). Listening and reading are also receptive skills, the others; speaking and writing are productive/expressive skills.

Proficiency in language skills today determine how an individual is in terms of civilization and education. It also proves his ability in handling issues that require oratory and writing in all his human endeavours. The extent to which an individual performs in interviews, administration, teaching, learning, politics, business transactions and social interactions among others, largely depend on his aptitude in manipulating the language skills. Developing sound language skill could be seen as essential ingredient for human development and, of course, national development. This is because nation's growth and development depend on individual citizen's development. Socio-economic, political and religious developments indeed are based on linguistic development that can development of a man. It is the linguistic development that can give man an avenue to appreciate, plan and pursue other forms of development.

Listening Skills

Listening is considered to be the process of decoding verbal expressions, paying due attention to what is being expressed, and deriving meaning or making sense out of the expressions. Listening is beyond hearing. In fact, it is argued in Adedimeji, Alabi, & Abdullahi-Idiagbon (2013) that hearing, attending, understanding, remembering and responding are components of listening. Listening is believed to be "the most frequent form of communication". About 53% of people's waking time is spent on listening. It is also considered to be the most difficult language skill out of the four language skills of a second language, and is taken for granted.

A lot of Nigerians, in both academic and non-academic setting, more especially students, are observed to have poor listening skill, particularly in context where English is used as medium of communication. This is because of the presence of unqualified English language teachers, lack of proper and sufficient teaching aids for teaching-learning environment and narrow exposure to the language at home and school among others (Adedimeji, Alabi, & Abdullahi-Idiagbon, 2013).

Speaking Skill

Speaking is seen to be a complete process which involves the use of organs of speech properly to produce speech sounds which are meaningful in context of communication. In personal development of an individual, possessing sound speech dexterity is very crucial. As a global language of profitable business, it would be good for every Nigerian to be able to speak well in English for proper social, academic, economic and political development. With this, good understanding of English language phonetics and phonology is paramount and highly needed by individual Nigerians.

Reading Skill

Leeds (1956) in Fadeyi (2007) views reading as "searching for the thought that was in the mind of the author and which lies in the meaning of the words which are before the reader" Aliyu (1996) sees reading as "a way of building up meaning from what has been put down in written form". Reading skill is considered to be multifaceted language process which involves the ability to go through a written or printed material, attempt to interpret it and get meaning out of it. Reading is an act that entails the engagement of the eyes, the brain and the heart with attempt to understand not only the technical meaning but also literary one. Reading therefore is done at the level of sign/symbol identification and meaning conception (Adedimeji, Alabi, & Abdullahi-Idiagbon, 2013).

Tsakuwa (2013) argues that reading is considered as one of the indices used in measuring national development. It has three fundamental stages, namely: pre-reading stage, reading stage and post-reading stage and it can be scanning reading, skimming reading, intensive reading or extensive reading. Factors that can affect reading include: the text, the simplicity or otherwise of the text, the reason/purpose of the reading, the state of mind of reader, the place/environment of reading, the seat, the sitting posture and the time of his reading.

Writing Skill

According to Tsakuwa (2013), the term *writing* can be defined as a product or process. As a product, writing is a piece of written or printed work. While as a process, writing can be defined as act of putting down feelings, ideas, and thought on paper using graphic symbols. Writing is the process of putting down signs, symbols or letters on a paper or a surface of something. Writing is an extra ordinary complex academic activity that incorporates thought processes, feelings and social interactions. As also viewed by Muodumogu & Unwaha (2013), it is an act of creatively and imaginatively putting down ideas, feelings and opinions using the correct letters, signs or symbols. Writing is the second means of communicating feelings, ideas, opinions, information, etc. to people (Tsakuwa, 2013). A writer has to organize his thought and present his points logically. The writer has to identify the purpose of his writing, the topic of the writing, things or components of the writing and distinguish among facts, fictions fallacies and opinions in the writing.

Okotie (n.d.) believes that writing skill is important in the totality of second language development and learning. It is usually not fully understood by learners. Writing is the ultimate of the four basic language skills and it determines the great extent and the success of learners in both internal and external examinations. It is among the advantages of writing also that it educates people on certain public issues, it entertains people and it keeps the records of events and agreements. It also gives people an avenue to express their feelings, ideas or passions and positions especially concerning their political affairs and the state of development in their country.

Collins and Sommers (1985) in Duruamaku-Dim and Duruamaku-Dim, (2006) listed out three steps/stages of writing which are to be followed logically before the writing becomes meaningful and error-free. These are pre-writing step, writing step and post writing step. During the pre-writing step, the writer must think well, and get relevant factual information from books, lectures, his experience or other people's experience. He should plan on how to present the relevant information in organized and meaningful manner. At the writing step, the writer should develop his thought, ideas or points into meaningful paragraphs with acute and simple explanation on each point/idea presented in the writing. The writing at this stage could take the format of essay, letter, report or article among others.

At post-writing step, the writer should read his writing and edit his draft accordingly. He might chip in some points/ideas to improve the writing more. He should check every word used in the writing to make sure the diction is appropriate. Sentence structures, paragraphs development and linking/transitional words should be checked accordingly. He should check and make sure that the writing is free from grammatical blunders, spelling errors and punctuation flaws/mistakes. Mechanics of writing should be considered. All these go in line with the submission of (Tsakuwa, 2013 and Adedimeji, Alabi, & Abdullahi- Idiagbon, 2013).

There are certain things that can affect the writing of a particular writer. Such things include: The writer's competency in the language which he writes with, the topic which he writes about, the environment where he sits for the writing, the organization and the presentation of the writer's thought, point or ideas and the writer's life experience and exposure among others (Tsakuwa, 2013). Normally every piece of writing has about five main parts, these are the title of the writing, the introduction of the writing, the main body of the writing, the conclusion of the writing and the name of the writer. These are summarized as structural patterns of the writing which are the beginning, main body and conclusion in (Ahmad, 2001).

Language has been playing a vital role at individual and national development. As the basic medium of communication, language is considered as vehicle of expression of ideas, feelings and thoughts. Like Erastus (2013) and Adedimeji, Alabi, & Abdullahi- Idiagbon (2013) argue that “there is a correlation between linguistic versatility and development in all its ramifications”.

For Nigeria to achieve her stated goals of education, as presented in the National Policy on Education (2004), and realize the Vision 2020 for proper development, the English language skills should be considered duly. This is because; the language is an indispensable and sound tool for actualization of the Vision developmental processes which are formulated and articulated through the skill of literacy.

As part of the implication, it could be deduced that having a sound listening skill could make one to understand and appreciate the differences that exist among Nigerians in spoken English, by so doing misconception and interpretation which result to misunderstanding could be avoided. Meaningful development would therefore reign in the nation beyond the year 2020.

Proficiency in speaking skill could facilitate mutual interaction among Nigerians, and between Nigerians and non-Nigerians within the context of globalization. Such interaction could improve the economy of the populace, because people can speak fluently at intelligible rate locally and globally. Both the oracy and literacy skills are essential towards the development of the country beyond the 2020.

Furthermore, possession of good reading skill would enable the Nigerian citizens to have access to various reading materials across the globe which are produced mostly in English language. Nigerians could read like newspapers, magazines, circulars, flyers, pamphlets, bulletins and other educative notes which are written to enlighten people on health issue, agriculture, education, business ventures etc. reading such materials would make the citizenry to create more tools for development, or improve the existing ones or even develop better method of using the tools in order to increase economic productivity and achieve success beyond the Vision 2020.

Mishael and Ngozi (2011) argue that writing is supposed to be taught according to the content, organization, expression and mechanical accuracy. The writing skill therefore could help in enhancing domestic and foreign trades and shooting up the development of Nigeria beyond the set scope of the Vision 2020. This is because business transactions and agreements could be made successfully through writing – especially in this modern day of computer.

Conclusions

Among the language skills, listening is considered to be the most important, but often taken for granted while writing is the most intellectual and complex. Second language users of English are expected to be proficient in all these skills, and of course in academic circle, they are required to be conversant with all the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills.

Like any other country, the development of Nigerian nation has to be assenting and progressive into a sound literate society. The development should be multi-dimensional in nature involving the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in the English language so that Nigerians could communicate properly and effectively in running their daily business. This could boost their socio-economic, political and moral life beyond the year 2020.

Recommendation

This paper, therefore, recommends that conducive teaching-learning environment of the four English language skills should be provided. Relevant and sufficient instructional materials should be supplied for teaching the language skills of oracy and literacy. The learning of the skills should be more practical and realistic in meeting the needs of the populace. And qualified English language teachers should be recruited for proper development of the individuals and the nation at large beyond the year 2020.

References

- Adedimeji, M.A., Alabi, T.A. & Abdullahi-Idiagbon, M.S. (2013). The implications of language skills for development in Nigeria. In O. Ayodabo & N. Butari (Eds.) *Issues in language and linguistics: Perspective from Nigeria, I.*(pp: 170-183). Kaduna: Language study group of Nigeria.
- Adelabu, B. (2014). A contrastive analysis of adjectives in English and Yoruba. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 2(4).
- Adeniran, A. (2013). *Linguistic and sociolinguistic situation in Nigeria: A collection of essays and articles of Adekule Adeniran*. A. Ayodabo, (Ed.). Ilorin: Haytee Press and Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Adeniyi, F. O. (2011). *Introduction to sociolinguistics and the history of the English language*. Ilorin, Nigeria, Haytee Press and Publishing Company Ltd.
- Ahmad, S.B. (2001). *Essay and letter writing techniques. Remedial English: Reading in General School Studies*. No.5. General Studies Unit, Bayero University, Kano.
- Alabi, T. A. (2007). Language contact: The Nigerian experience with English. In O. Obafemi, G.A. Ajadi & V.A. Alabi, (Eds.). *Critical perspectives on English language & literature*. (pp: 78-95). Ilorin: The Department of English, University of Ilorin.
- Aliyu, J.S. (1996). *Improving your performance in English*, A.B.U Press Limited Zaria, Nigeria.
- Bamgbose, A. (1971). The English language in Nigeria. In J. Spencer, (Ed.). *The English language in West Africa*. (pp: 35-48). London: Longman.
- Crystal, D. (2012). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of the English language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Danbaba, N. A. (2012). Resources and methodology in teaching. A paper presented School of Curriculum Development, Federal College of Education [Technical], Gusau.

Sound Language Skills: Tool for Development in Nigeria Beyond the Year 2020

- Duruamaku-Dim, G.C.E. C & Duruamaku-Dim, J. (2006). Computer literacy in kindergarten and primary school. *Journal of Educational Improvement*, 3.
- Egwuogu, C.B. (2003). Language and communication towards the adoption of English as the world's lingua franca in *Jonfoell Journal of Nigerian, foreign and English language and literature* 1(3),(pp: 179-192).
- Erastus, K.F. (2013). Examining African languages as tools for national development: The case of Kiswahili. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*.6 (6).
- Ezekiel, A.A. (2011). Perceived impact of primary education on the attainment of Nigeria vision 20:2020. Proceedings of the 2011 international conference on teaching, learning and change. *International Association for Teaching and Learning (IATEL)*.
- Fadeyi, E.T. (2007). *The essentials of general English*. Challenge Publications Ltd, Jos.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2004). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos, NERDC Press.
- Igboanusi, H. (n.d.). Perspective for English language teaching in Nigeria in the context of global English. In S.T. Babatunde, & D.S. Adeyanju, (Eds.). *Language, Meaning and Society: Papers in honour of Prof. E.E. Adegbiya at 50*. (pp: 18-29).Ilorin: Haytee Press & Publishing Co.
- Medubi, O. (2007). A history of the English language. In O. Obafemi, G.A. Ajadi & V.A. Alabi, (Eds.). *Critical perspectives on English language & literature*. (pp: 1-13). Ilorin: The Department of English, University of Ilorin.
- Mishael, N. C. & Ngozi, N.R. (2011). Teaching essay in Nigeria from the examiner's Perspectives. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 2 (4).
- Muodumogu, C. A. & Unwaha, C.O. (2013). Improving students' achievement in essay writing: What will be the impact of mini-lesson strategy? *Global Advanced Research Journal of Arts and Humanities (GARJAH)*. 2(6) (pp: 111-120). Retrieved from: <http://garj.org/garjah/index.htm>.
- Nigeria Vision 20:2020: Abridged Version: Draft. 12 December, 2010.
- Okotie, V. T. B. (n.d.). Teaching continuous writing in Nigerian secondary schools: Strategies, problems and suggestions for improvement.
- Ottu, J.A. (2013). The role of religion in the realization of vision 2020 in Nigeria. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*. 3(2). www.iiste.org.
- Sabe, C.S. (1995). An analysis of written errors of senior secondary school students in English language: A case study of some selected secondary schools in Bauchi metropolis, Bauchi State. (Unpublished B.A Ed. Project). University of Jos, Nigeria.
- Tsakuwa, M.B. (2010). An analysis of students' errors in written English compositions in some selected senior secondary schools in Gombe metropolis. (Unpublished B.A. Ed. Project), Gombe State University, Gombe, Nigeria.
- Tsakuwa, M.B. (2013). *An introduction to writing skill*. (Unpublished Manuscript).
- Ur, P. (2012). *A course in English language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

