

# RE-ENGINEERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND SELF-PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, attempt is made to present the needs and justification of re-engineering the English Language Teaching and Learning in Secondary School with the hope of developing the youth for employment and self productivity in Nigeria. The presentation touches on brief history of English Language teaching and learning in Nigeria, areas that need re-engineering in the English language teaching and learning, which include, the subject curriculum, the curriculum implementers and the learners. The presentation maintains that all these areas need support and modifications in order to achieve the desired results hence some strategies for adequate re-engineering of the mentioned areas are proffered.

It is a known fact that English language and its teaching are coeval with Nigeria. This is for the fact that English language and its teaching had been in existence even before the amalgamation of the two protectorates to form what is today known as Nigeria. Since that time to-date, English language has been designed to achieve different purposes. These include some purposes right from the missionaries colonial era to the present dispensation. The major aims of teaching English language during the missionaries and colonial periods were to produce natives who can read and translate the gospel and provide clerical workers to keep records and accounts of colonial administration. It was their aim to produce teachers of that language for teaching the children of Nigeria. After independence, teaching and learning of English language became intensified. This may not be unconnected with the fact that Nigerian leaders have not seen any nearby possibility of adapting any of the indigenous languages to serve as the language of central administration and unification of the then young nation. In addition, even at that time, English has already taken root as the language of international communication in many countries (Baldeh 1990).

## **The Need for Re-Engineering English Language Teaching**

English language as a subject that is held at high esteem and has passed through many epochs in its teaching and learning in Nigeria, needs a careful reengineering in its area of pedagogy in Nigeria. In an observation Abubakar, (2007) stated that;

*The need for effective teaching and learning of English language cannot be over-emphasized. It is however unfortunate that in Nigeria the problem of persistent poor performance of students in public examinations particularly in English language seems intractable. Even among graduates, the problem of inadequate proficiency in English language is also manifested. Many are incapable of expressing themselves: (page 41).*

Inline with the above observation, one can say that the problems of poor performance and inadequate expressions are caused mostly by lack of innovations in areas of the teaching and learning processes. One can also believe that the problem is from the content of the curriculum, which may not tally with the demand of the present situations and needs of the society in global communication. In any case, Abubakar (2007), agreed the need for re-engineering of the teaching of English language in the following words;

*“Therefore, there is need to re-engineer the teaching of English language, particularly, at primary and secondary levels of education to prepare Nigerian students and youths to adequately benefit and contribute to the globalization process”.*

Certainly, an individual cannot adequately contribute to any meaningful development unless one is able to communicate effectively to a large audience that can also team-up with such individual for further development. In addition, good employment and self-productivity are strongly attached to

access to variety of information and technical-know-how which are mostly available only in English language. Abubakar (2007), Innocent (2008) cited scholars' comments on the great availability of useful information for self-development of an individual in English language. e.g. Crystal (1997: 106) stated that; "Most of the scientific, technological and academic information in the world expressed in English and over 80% of all the information stored in electronic retrieval system is in English". Similarly, as far back as 1971, Mueller is said to have estimated that about 70% of the world's radio broadcasters and 75% of the world mails are in English. The great manufacturing countries – Japan and Germany use English as their principal advertising and sales media.

The international and national advantages of proficiency in English cannot be over emphasized, hence, its teaching has to be re-engineered in order to ensure meaningful or gainful employment and self productivity in Nigeria. This is because, proficiency in English is capable of facilitating efficient and effective development of perception, critical and innovative thinking abilities, acquisition of knowledge and its utilization for technological and national development.

The next area to consider is issues that need re-engineering in the teaching of English language in secondary schools in Nigeria. In this segment, the issues are many but the attempt it to highlight some vital issues surrounding the teaching and learning of English language. These include; curriculum content, the needs of the society, teachers and learners motivation. To ensure effective teaching and learning of English language these should be the areas of concern in this re-engineering process.

One of the most important areas that needs re-engineering in English language teaching in the Nigerian secondary schools is the contents of English curriculum. The current contents of the English language curriculum of secondary schools in Nigeria are mostly obsolete because of changes and developments. The reason is not far-fetch. To the best of knowledge of the writer, the curriculum was designed and approved in the last two and a half decades i.e. 1985 to date. Consequently, great majority of the new words and expressions that characterize modern communication are not available. Hence, the students only hear or learn them often wrongly outside the formal school system. e.g. expressions like ICT, Computer Language and other technical expressions are totally absent in the curriculum. To achieve desired goals of adequate English language education for employment and self productivity, the curriculum should be revised. It should be revised to include the needed expressions and terminologies that are currently and universally used by all educated people. It is a known fact that the present curriculum of English language for secondary schools include a section that gave examples of vocabulary items upon which the teachers will build their lessons e.g. words associated with Agriculture, Medicine, Law and other, but there wasn't any to show words associated with; ICT, Globalization, HIV/AIDS, Global warming and lots more. This is just what Rasheed (2008; 3) stated thus:

*Poor performance in SSCE English language examination, therefore will not change unless the curriculum is reviewed to reflect what the students know and can do. In other words, efforts should be made to educate the students and enable them to process other school curricula. After all, English is not only a discipline of study but also the medium of studying other subjects.*

The next area that should be considered in re-engineering the teaching of English language in Nigerian secondary schools is the teachers. Teachers have to re-examine themselves and understand their status. In this case, three recommendations proffered by Abochol (2006:41 – 41), are very relevant. He recommended that;

1. The teachers should first of all be committed to the teaching of the second language. This will place them in the right frame of mind to develop on their profession.
2. They must attain a higher level of personal education, which includes knowledge of the language, principles and methods of the language acquisition and learning. This will enable them to improvise relevant and appropriate teaching aids for learning.
3. They should put the learners first during teaching-learning processes.

It can be rightfully assumed that many if not all teachers wish and are willing to imbibe all the good qualities of teachers but due to some economic constraints that lead to social marginalization, some teachers tend to forget their responsibilities and engage in what they think can reduce their economic problems and social misfit, with which society look at them. Therefore, it is in this situation that the government and the society in general should give adequate motivation to the teachers. This is one of the efforts that should be made in order to achieve the goals of re-engineering the teaching of English language in secondary schools. Mohammed (2004:4) cited by Rasheed (2008:3) stated that:

*Unless concerted efforts are made to effect changes properly, our schools would continue to perform poorly and the falling standards mania will continue to haunt us, no matter how much money authorities will vote and hopefully spend on education in this (teachers motivation) and other areas.*

Teachers are generally considered as the bedrock of any educational system. It is often said no educational system can grow above the qualities of its teacher. Whatever this means, there is need for teachers to be re-engineered in order to provide correct and adequate linguistic input and exposure both within and outside the classroom settings. This is one of the ways through which teachers can ensure adequate interaction with the language, for no adequate English language learning can be achieved without interaction.

Students or learners also need to be re-engineered to learn the language with interest and enthusiasm. This is for the fact that no matter how well the contents of the lesson are prepared, if the learners are not interested in the lesson, the lesson will be a total failure. Hence, both teachers and parents have to motivate the learners by providing them with adequate information about the advantages of learning and mastering English language not only in Nigeria, but in the world at large. As much as possible, the negative and derogatory comments on English language should be stopped and discouraged among the learners. e.g. colonial language, imperialist language and so on. Instead positive comments like that of Achebe, cited in Innocent (2008:87) where he states that; “for me, there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it”. This shows that English language is not meant to totally dominate the indigenous language of the individual but to serve as a means of reaching wider audience with whatever information one wants to present.

In short teachers, parents and general public have to motivate the students to understand the social realities surrounding the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria. For instance, it has been established long ago that without credit pass in English language, there will be no admission into any of the Nigerian Universities or Tertiary Institutions, hence this is one of the social realities that should motivate students to redefine their attitudes toward learning of English language with all seriousness.

From the foregoing presentations, one take away any doubt as far as the urgent needs for re-engineering English language teaching in Nigerian secondary schools is concerned. It is also clear that the re-engineering should include the very vital areas that matter in the teaching and learning processes of English language as discussed. i.e. what to teach, who is to teach, how to teach and who is to be taught?

### **Conclusion**

All in all, the attempt is to highlight the need to re-engineer the teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian secondary schools with the hope of developing the youths for gainful employment and self productivity. Areas that need re-engineering include the subject curriculum, the curriculum implementers and the learners. Each area need some support and modification in order to achieve the desired results. Finally, strategies for proper re-engineering of the mentioned areas for adequate achievement of the desired results are presented.

### **Recommendations**

Attempt to present some possible ways that can practically facilitate the re-engineering processes of English language teaching in Nigerian secondary schools with aims of not only gaining employment from government but also that of self productivity in academic pursuit and life long employment include the following.

The first step is the need for the government to revise the current English curriculum for secondary schools so as to include the new terminologies and concepts of English language. It is obvious that current examination questions are mostly based on current issues in Nigeria and the world in general hence, these current issues must be expressed in current terminologies and expressions. This justifies the need for re-engineering the curriculum content.

Secondly, teachers who are to implement the curriculum should try to enhance and vary their methods of teaching. They should bear in mind that they teach students not only to pass a specific examinations but also to be self productive i.e. to earn a living with their knowledge of English language. This can only be possible if teachers teach the four language skills effectively. There is no doubt that adequate knowledge of the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of English language can provide opportunities of being; News writer, reader or reporter. It can also enable one to be a translator or even independent writer. So teachers should teach English language with aims of producing students that are not only good in answering examination questions but also good in making independent use of the language to achieve their personal interests. For teachers to achieve this kind of objectives, they should ensure adequate preparation of each lesson with clear statement of objective, which should be known to the learners because the tendency to be more serious in a lesson depend to a large extent on knowing the purposes of the lesson.

Thirdly, students should be motivated to change their attitude towards learning English language. They should understand that learning of English language is not only meant to pass examinations but it can also be a means to make a living.

It is also good to re-iterate many recommendations given to the educational administrators who are the representatives of the government. As part of their duty, they should:

- Ensure that teachers are properly motivated in areas of providing training and in-service training for them to update their knowledge of methods and techniques of teaching English language.
- Make teachers feel they are good and respectable workers like any civil servant. This should include wage payments, yearly increment and prompt promotions as at when due.
- Ensure adequate provision of teaching materials which include current textbooks, audio-visual and any other thing that will make teaching and learning enjoyable.
- Ensure adequate supervision of teachers to check out those with problems of truancy, inexperience and other negative behaviours with the aims of correcting and taking discipline actions where necessary.
- Encourage parents to assist the schools in ensuring good behaviour and attitude among their children – learners in the schools.

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