

# THE ROLE OF TEXTBOOKS IN EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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## **Abstract**

Speakers of English as mother tongue are exposed to their language from birth. They pick the items of their language right from their immediate surroundings and need neither any form of instruction nor a book containing the grammar of their language for them to have mastery of it. This is not so with the learner of the same language as a second language. The learner aspires to learn it against the background of his native language. He needs official language instruction which is most often based on textbooks. So, his encounter with the language is based on written texts. To this end, this paper is aimed at enunciating the roles of textbooks in promoting the learning of English, their special features as well as the problems that are associated with the use of textbooks in Nigerian Schools.

Learning in schools is synonymous with textbooks. It is a manual which guides the teacher and the learner in the objectives of the subject. In the words of McArthur (1996: 951) a textbook is “a book prescribed as part of a course of study”. So, textbooks are an integral part of teaching and learning in schools and contain instructions on particular subjects. Divorcing one from the other is like separating the dancer from the dance. Marland (1986: vi) observed that “in most people’s minds, books and schools go together and it is presumed that books are valuable for learning”. A learner who enters the classroom to learn without text books should be likened to a farmer who goes to his farmland without a cutlass. When the learner owns a book, he will develop emotional attachment to it and this makes him want to study it often. Baldeh (1990: 63) went further to note that “the textbook is an indispensable vademecum to any learner who wants to make a success of his education. It is a necessary commodity in the teaching –learning strategy”. Meanwhile, it should not be over depended on because it is not a complete reservoir of the whole of the language. Teachers should always strive to provide supplementary reading materials whose major target is to provide motivation, variety, and enough practice to the learner.

In recent times, textbooks have been made accessible to learners through the internet. Some learners prefer reading these on-line textbooks from their computer screens to reading from the hardcopy, but many still feel more comfortable reading through the pages of the printed textbook.

## **The Need for Competence in English**

English is a world language as well as an international language used by the United Nations (UN), African Union (AU), European Union (EU), and many other organs providing international aids. It is the language of (North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) command as well as the language of space science and aviation. It is also the language of world trade, science and technology, international music industry, the world media etc.

In Nigeria, English performs a very vital role. Azikiwe (1998) observed that Nigerians learn the English language to:

- communicate with native and non native speakers;
- learn and understand the culture of the owners of the language;
- be able to do business with people other than Nigerian nationals;
- be able to politically fit into the wide comity of nations; and
- impart or acquire a particular knowledge or skill for future life, i.e. education of the individual .(21)

Nigeria is multilingual, multicultural, and multiethnic. It has over four hundred languages confined to ethnic borders and this makes communication almost impossible beyond one’s local environment. English is the language through which the tongues and tribes in Nigeria interact with

one another and with people from other nations of the world in the areas of business, education, politics, science and technology, etc. Furthermore, language is culture. Once you understand a culture you have understood the people: the way they live and think. Knowledge of the English language enables Nigerians to understand the culture of the English people as well as those of other peoples of the world. It is the language of commerce and industry, administration, law, education, politics, sports and the media. In fact, it is used in virtually all areas of human life in Nigeria. Writing on the popularity of the language in Nigeria, Adekunle (1995) pointed out that:

The English language acts mainly as the vehicle for that aspect of contemporary Nigerian culture which is now reflected in our history, educational system, administrative set up, our industrial and technological efforts, our political experiments, our international alignment preferences, our pattern of dressing, and to a large extent, in the attitude of Nigerian elite and most likely in the way these leaders of the Nigerian community structure reality. Equally significant is the fact that quite a substantial body of the intellectual endeavour of Nigeria are carried out and recorded in the English language (64)

Though many Nigerian linguists show negative attitude to the current prestige which the language enjoys in the country, it still remains the country's official language and is likely to remain so for a long time to come. To pass as an educated man in the country, one has to be proficient in the language. Proficiency in the language determines how successful one would be in all areas of human endeavour.

#### **English as a Second language (ESL)**

English is learnt and used as a second language in many countries of the world, especially those colonized by Britain and America. In such countries, the language occupies a position close to that of a native language since it is the language used in all spheres of life. It has a social, political, economic, commercial and educational role to play in them as well as in the individual lives of members of those societies. Quoting Journal of English as a Second Language (JESEL), Afolayan (1995) noted that:

1. ESL is usually the sequential second language of a multilingual person.
2. ESL may or may not be the sequential second language of a multilingual person.
3. ESL is a language in which a bi- or multilingual person conducts his every activities while sharing this role with another language in which the speaker has greater linguistic facility and intuitive knowledge.
- 4a. ESL is the language which has the sociocultural function of serving as an instrument of forcing bilingualism on its user country or community (usually an ex- colonial community in Africa, Asia or South America), and of turning such a community into a special second- language speech community of the language.
- b. It is the language which has the sociocultural function of serving another European country (such as Sweden) as a voluntarily chosen instrument for providing cultural enrichment and a wider window on the world, particularly in the field of politics, science, and technology.
5. The target of ESL for its teaching or learning within the formal educational system should ideally be World Standard English, modified by the local environment.
6. The target skills of ESL teaching within the formal educational system should include all four basic language skills of listening speaking, reading, and writing.

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7. The academic components of ESL study should include all three academic areas: literature in English, English linguistics, and the practice of English use.(125-126)

A language is a second language in a country when the citizens learn it after they have acquired their first language, but due to the inadequacy of the vernacular in communication beyond the local environment, they learn and use another language which in most cases is the language of the colonial masters. English is learnt as a second language in most of the countries colonized by Britain and America. It was the language for the creation of such nations. In other words, it is the language of wider communication in politics, law, business, sports, education, social life, etc. in those countries. Consequently, it is learnt by many after they have become proficient in their first language. Since it is a major language used nationally in such countries, and it is the most widely used international language, there is a great need for proficiency in it. In other words, the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing should be taught effectively since ESL learners need to be proficient in all of them. Again, the learners should not be expected to approximate to the Received Pronunciation because their first language constantly interferes in their use of the English language. Their target variety should be internationally intelligible and must have some local fragrance. This is because the learners must be equipped with the skills they need to cope with everyday activities and situations which play a central part in their lives

### **Teaching and Learning of English in Nigerian Schools**

Much is expected of teachers of English at the secondary school since the crux of what learners learn on the language is taught here. The learners, especially those whose parents or guardians are not educated, leave the primary school with a smattering knowledge of the English language mainly because they are taught by teachers who “are more of educational generalists than specialists” and who “integrate the key elements of elementary English teaching (such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing) into the whole fabric of the child’s experiences at school...” (McArthur 1996: 938-939). Teachers of English at this level of education are not trained to teach the language.

It is at the secondary level that students are exposed to the learning of English in the true sense of it since they are taught by language teaching specialists. So, there is a pressing need for the use of appropriate textbooks which have contents that are rich enough to meet the demands of the students as well as the objectives of the curriculum. When teachers have the appropriate textbooks, they go ahead to organize the learning experiences of their students. Where this fails, the students enter the tertiary institution with inadequate knowledge of the language.

At the tertiary level of education, the teachers are no longer language specialists but researchers in their different sub disciplines like grammar, phonetics and phonology, pragmatics, discourse analysis. More often than not, students who pass through the secondary school without adequate knowledge of the language have permanent vacuum created in their use of the language unless extra effort is made by the students themselves. Consequent upon this assertion, the discussion of English textbooks in this paper will concentrate on those used in the secondary schools.

### **English Language Texts**

English language textbooks are the texts written to provide instructions on what the learners should know at any given point so as to achieve proficiency in the language. Unlike speakers of English as a native language who grew up in an environment rich in the language items, the second language learner of English has his first contact with the second language through written texts. Consequently, the textbooks provide the experiences the learner needs to be proficient in the target language. Commenting on the role of textbooks in language learning, Baldeh (1990) quoted Alexander as stating that:

Whether we like it or not all language teaching is textbook- oriented. It therefore follows that the textbook must be a powerful sort of motivation which will exert pressure on learners and teachers alike. At the same time it must come to terms with classroom activities. (65)

Apart from using it as a guide in the classroom, the learner who desires to know the language uses it as a guide for his further studies outside the classroom. Since the major objective of language teaching is to impart good command of the target language to the learners, and a good textbook is a prerequisite for this, such textbooks should have some outstanding qualities. These qualities would be discussed under the following headings:

**(a) Content:** A good English language textbook must be richly equipped to meet the numerous communication needs of the students. English is a second language in the country, so Nigerian learners of English should use textbooks that have in-depth treatment of the four language skills- listening, speaking, reading and writing which he needs to use the language efficiently. Instructions on the text should reflect the natural order for the acquisition of these skills as we have listed them above. A major problem facing second language learners is that most of the textbooks lay more emphases on the acquisition of reading and writing skills. Little is often done on teaching speaking and listening skills. A study of some of the English language texts reveal that the least attention is paid to developing listening skill probably because examination bodies- West African Examination Council (WAEC), National Examination Council (NECO), National Business and Technical Examination Board (NABTEB), etc are silent on testing students listening abilities, Consequently, many authors abandon exercises aimed at developing the listening skill. The fact remains that as soon as the human child is exposed to his language, he starts the process of language acquisition by listening, followed by speaking. It is at a later age that he is introduced to reading, and then, writing. This order should be obeyed in the writing of English language textbooks so that the natural order of language acquisition will be maintained.

**(b) Qualification of the Authors:** Another issue of great importance in this paper is the qualification of the authors. Writing of English language textbooks is not an all comers' field. It is a well known fact in Nigeria today that people from other specialist areas trespass in the writing of English language textbooks simply because they have a ready market for them. This does not augur well with the learners, especially as they are not in the position to differentiate between the ones written by experts and those written by non experts. Writing of English textbooks is a task meant for English language specialists: people who are proficient in the language, and know how best the knowledge should be imparted to the learners. According to Etherton cited by Baldeh (1990): Many textbooks are written by authors who do not have a thorough command of the learner's mother-tongue, or who have never made a contrastive analysis of the two languages. The author then tends to concentrate on what he assumes is the universal core of English, with or without additional materials which may be essential to ensure success. Not knowing local problems, the author cannot provide solutions for them. (65)

An experienced writer of English language textbook in Nigeria should take cognizance of the fact that English is learnt in Nigeria as a second language by people who are already proficient in their native language. Consequently, they have to carry out contrastive analysis on the learners' language and the target language so as to find out the areas the learners are likely to experience some difficulties and those they can learn easily. This enables them to pay enough attention to those areas which the learners find difficult. Authors of English language textbooks should be specialists in English as a Second Language and Applied Linguistics. This explains the reason for the success recorded by writers of Intensive English.

**(c) Reflection of Students' Cultural Milieu:** In the words of Pearson, Nelson, Titsworth and Harter (2003:212), "culture can be defined as a system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and rituals that the members of a society use to cope with one another and with their world." We make sense of the world around us through our culture. The experiences we have had in life go a long way to influence our thoughts, words, actions, and so on. Experience plays a major role in learning. It has been established that learners learn faster when the contents of their lessons reflect their experiences.

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It helps them to relate the new ideas being introduced to them to what they already know. Supporting this assertion, Ausubel quoted by Macau (2006:24) stated that “learning takes place through a meaningful process of relating new events or items to already existing cognitive concepts or propositions”. Learning is facilitated when learners are able to link a new experience introduced to them, to an experience they have had in life since new individual items that come into the brain always have to be connected to existing knowledge for learning to occur meaningfully. Previous experiences provide a base upon which related new ones are interpreted. Emenyonu (1993) affirmed that:

Common sense tells us that students comprehend materials more easily when they already know something about the topic.... This, prior knowledge during reading provides the reader with a base for comprehending. The text being read is then interpreted relative to the reader’s schemata or knowledge base. (5)

Learners who live around the coastal areas cannot experience any difficulty reading and comprehending passages on sailing, sea food, fishing, because they are more or less familiar experiences to them. Nigerian learners of English would understand a passage on Masquerades better than they would understand a passage on ballroom dance, snow, or summer holiday. So, writing reading passages for them using any of these unfamiliar backgrounds will surely inhibit learning as they have no previous experiences to relate them to. It is in the best interest of learners if authors use what the students already know to lead them to what they want them to learn.

**(d) The Lay-out of the Textbook:** The manner in which the ideas expressed in the textbook are presented determines the ease or otherwise with which the text is read. Presenting the contents of a page in two or three columns as the case may be makes reading clumsy as learners have to read through different columns all within the same page before the meaning intended in the page can be interpreted. Of the English language textbooks consulted, such arrangement is found in English Project for Secondary Schools and New Oxford Secondary English Course. English language textbooks are read intensively for purposes of evaluation and deserve a better arrangement to facilitate comprehension. They are unlike newspapers and magazines which are read selectively. Where on the other hand the contents of a page are printed conventionally from the left margin to the right margin and back to the left margin, the prints are quite legible, and reading is made easy. This type of presentation is used in Intensive English, NERDC (Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council), and Comprehensive English.

### **Problems Associated with English Language Textbooks in Nigerian Schools**

There are many problems that plague the use of English language textbooks in Nigerian schools. Some of these include:

1. **Piracy:** Piracy is a cankerworm that has eaten deeply into the fabric of our educational system. Many a time, textbooks, including those of English language, are illegally duplicated by miscreants whose sole aim is to make gain out of other peoples’ intellectual property. Such copies pose problems to learners because they are poorly produced. The prints are always difficult to decipher and give the impression of poorly photocopied work on cheap papers. The papers themselves are not of uniform sizes and are held by very weak bonds. Within the shortest time, they start falling off, and this has a negative impact on reading.

2. **Recommendation of inappropriate textbooks:** Sometimes, some textbooks are recommended for use in schools in preference to others just because the author or publisher has a ready market at the Ministry of Education, and not that the book covers the scheme of work extensively. Presently, many English textbooks in circulation were written by graduates of other disciplines. Such textbooks should not be recommended for use in the school system because the authors are not knowledgeable enough to go into that venture. Learners’ interest should be paramount in the choice of English language textbooks because the target of our educational system is to promote effective learning of the language.

**3. Constant change of English language textbooks:** Another major problem facing the use of English language textbooks in Nigerian schools is that they are changed regularly. Today, it is English Project, tomorrow, Intensive English, and the day after tomorrow, it is Effective English. Cases abound where a student used three different kinds of English textbooks written by different authors within an interval of six years. This odd arrangement affects learners adversely because it does not promote continuity. Also, it does not augur well with parents as they end up buying different textbooks for their younger children who would have used the textbooks read by their older children simply because a new textbook has been recommended

**4. Cost of textbooks:** English language textbooks are relatively costly. Many Nigerians live in abject poverty, yet they have a minimum of four children to train in school as well as meet other household demands. Many a time, it becomes difficult for them to procure textbooks for their children. When this happens, such learners are driven out of the classroom. Truly, learning of English is almost impossible in the classroom without a textbook, but driving them out of the classroom will naturally inhibit learning. English language teachers and the school authorities could liaise with booksellers and publishers to make the books available to the learners and make them pay in installments.

**Conclusion:**

English is a very useful language both nationally and internationally, and incompetence in it marks one out as an illiterate. Anyone who can neither read nor write the English language in Nigeria today has no place in society. Consequently, there is an immediate need to promote its effective teaching and learning in our schools. One way of achieving this aim is to ensure that students are taught with well written English language textbooks, as they are the easiest access they have to the language.

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