

# RE-ENGINEERING ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR BETTER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*This paper focuses on the re-engineering of the teaching of English Language in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria. Its main thrust is to portray the new approaches and methods with which English Language should be taught so as to enable the pupils and students to understand the subject better and to be able to use the language to communicate effectively. In order to achieve this broad objective, emphasis is placed on the use of ICT and the use of functional-notional approach to make the learners to participate adequately during the language lessons. The methods that are used specifically encourage the pupils and students to study the language with ease and also help them to understand and discuss social, political and economic issues, because of their abilities to interpret meaningfully what another speaker of the same language says. Moreover appropriate recommendations are made as a way forward for the effective teaching and learning by both the teachers and students, so as to engineer self employment and productivity.*

Formal education system in Nigeria started with the advent of missionaries entry into Nigeria even before the creation of Nigeria and the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates to form Nigeria as a country in 1914. Although education, as at the time was meant to serve the missionaries who were interested in evangelisation of the people into Christianity, their major concern was to train interpreters who could interpret English to vernacular of the various tribes. Another major issue was for the people to be able to read and write, so as to serve the colonial government as clerical officers in the ministries in keeping records and court proceedings for the colonial government.

This situation prevailed until after independence and it extended up until the present day, as it is observed in the multiple functions of English language as the only official language of government at the federal, states and local government levels. Unfortunately, in spite of the language being used as the first language for formal education at the secondary and tertiary levels of education as postulated by National Policy on Education (2005), approaches and methods of teaching the language are not very effective for students understanding and application in other subjects or even in the learning of the language. One major problem affecting the language teaching and

learning is the inability of the teachers to incorporate new vocabularies of scientific and technological inventions into the lessons of the students.

In this era of information and communication technology with its diverse technology and scientific knowledge, English Language teachers should be able to acquire the communication systems and competence to use the Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to make language teaching a pedagogic teaching, for the benefit of the learners at the secondary and primary school levels of education. Every lesson should be geared towards giving the pupils and students practical participation, so as to integrate them into the learning processes. Moreover, the lessons should provide opportunities for the learners to put into practice in form of demonstration and performance, orally and in written expressions in and out of the classroom situation. Emphasis should be focused on functional grammar teaching and usage where aspects of literature are incorporated to aid communicative competence, while the rudiments of the language assist in syntactic study and analysis of the components and structures of the language.

### **Facets of Language Education for Efficiency**

Language has four basic skills which are necessary for effective learning of the language by pupils and students at the primary and secondary schools. These skills are listening, speaking, reading and writing, which are very important to the teaching, understanding and usage of the language by the learners. For the purpose of functional language usage, the learners should be taught how to study and make use of the language in all ramifications and for the benefit of all other subjects. Teachers should use functional-notional approach to teach the lessons effectively. Functional-notional approach according to Williams (1990:57) stated that priority should be given to communicative competence in language teaching. Contents should be emphasised without sacrificing grammatical structures and language activity should be organised around specific classroom situations for specific communication purposes. In order to fulfill this functional-notional approach concept in teaching English language, prose, poetry and drama literature texts must be introduced to the students and pupils, so as to guide them on the practical functional aspect of the language usage for effective communication.

Functional-notional approach can be evaluated with reference to contemporary language teaching methodology, because this approach is in line with the general emphasis on communication in the classroom and the society. It integrates the social aspects of language with concern for the role of the individual in language interaction, which is the essence of language teaching and learning. Using pedagogical principles as an aspect of functional-notional approach also entails introducing new linguistic forms in social situations which clarify their meanings in structures and vocabulary items. The teacher should further exemplify the human interaction appropriate to the situation in which the particular items of language are used. For instance traders and the buyers or customers are recognisable characters whose roles can easily be played out by the class

members. On the other hand, the teacher should extend or widen the vocabulary teaching and use of structures by giving opportunity to students to practice language functions in all varieties of examples. In this way, the class is given the receptive and production practice in the use of different aspects of language related to the target function. Azikiwe (1998:44) observed that teachers should plan learning experiences to interest the learners by using instructional materials appropriate to the learning situation. The students learn through what he or she does and through what the teachers do. Practical participation in the learning process will enhance students understanding of the lessons effectively, since it will stimulate their interest and attract their attention appropriately. The pedagogic method should be generously applied so as to give the students confidence in their abilities to perform according to the requirements of the lesson as directed by the teachers. In this way the learning experience will satisfy the learners otherwise they will not pay attention to the lesson. The teacher should use varieties of learning experiences and methods to accommodate all members of the class. Such methods should include discussion, demonstration, role-playing, field-trip, excursion and dramatization. All these methods will help to involve the learners in active and meaningful participation in the lessons.

An eclectic approach is another good method for re-engineering of English language learning by students. Eclectic approach has integrative feature that applies a specific method or technique to suit specific objectives of any lesson. These will identify the needs of a learner, the item(s) to be learned and the environment in which the learning takes place. The teacher who adopts the eclectic method does not stick to a single method because it cannot solve all language teaching problems, but must acquaint himself with alternative integrating choices to suite the background, environment and needs of the learners. For example, in the teaching and application of tenses functionally, “Method A” says the structures should be taught through conscious study of the syntactic rule of the language, but “Method B” states that learning of the structures should be done through drills, dialogue, situational and communicative practice. In eclectic method both methods should be combined for effective understanding and usage of the language by the learners.

### **Re-Engineering of English Language Teaching**

English language, although a second language in the Nigeria situation, is also the first language when talking about formal education needs, so it requires re-evaluation and re-assessment in terms of approaches and methods of teaching, because of its relevance and importance to the social, economic and political situations in Nigeria. English language teaching has been influenced by the discipline of linguistics not only in contents but also in method of language teaching. In recent times the nature of psycholinguistics has yielded insights into the way in which language is learned by both native and non-native speakers according to Williams (1990). Moreover, in actual fact, language teaching has benefited much from the discipline of sociolinguistics, because of its influence in the societies which facilitate or impede language learning. The varieties of situation in which messages are conveyed, have been integrated into

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teaching purposes in the classroom. The modern inventions and the changing nature of the society engineer changes in language teaching and learning.

As a new vocabulary emanates from these scientific and technological inventions and innovations, so does the societal changing nature brings improvements in teaching and learning because of the new approaches to language usages in the society. Therefore, classroom interaction should not be limited to the structural pattern of drills and speech practice but to a wide range of varieties of new vocabulary or dominant vocabulary which only existed in the dictionaries without the learner's knowledge of their usage. Language teaching now should take into consideration the nature of the society, language interest of the society according to the professional growth, class, age and time, relevance to the socio-economic and political teaching of the language. These account for the major essence of language which is for communication in order to serve the social interaction and educational needs of the people. Presently, the objective of communicative language teaching should extend beyond grammatical competence to socio-cultural and inter-personal purposes. Such social usage should include; appropriateness of usage, conventional usage and interactional usage.

In response to English language re-engineering concept, Ezeude (2007) postulated that many current issues in language teaching are not particularly new, but keep on changing and improving in approaches and methods. Also modern language teaching methods which makes use of computers and other ICTs have brought some innovations in language teaching. These have re-engineered English language teaching because of sophistication in computer aided programmes in language teaching. The actual method necessary for re-engineering of language teaching this time is direct method. Direct method according to Ezeude is from the direct listening, speaking, reading and writing of the target language. This entails that language should be presented to the learners as a whole not in bits and pieces. This method further stresses importance in phonology and the teaching of grammar using inductive method.

Furthermore, William (1990) expressed that lesson begins with dialogues or brief anecdotes spoken by the teacher in the conventional style of the target language. Oral activities are prompted and assisted by the use of actions, gestures, and miming, with the aid of pictures, diagrams and illustrations. Aboderin (1996:85) postulated that an average Nigerian generally has problems with spoken English because of the differences in the phonological systems of English and Nigerian languages. Since English is an intonal language while Nigerian languages are tonal, the Nigerian speakers of the language have problems in the suprasegmental features such as stress, rhythm and intonation. This can be corrected if the teachers of English language are competent in oral English and would teach the students using the direct method effectively.

Rivers (1998) observed that:

The direct method provided an exciting and interesting way of learning the foreign language and it proved to be successful in releasing students from the inhibitions all too often associated with speaking of foreign language,

particularly at the early stage which is a period of incompetence and inconsistency to the learners (96).

From the explication, direct method is recommended for re-engineering of English language teaching and learning in Nigeria because of its use as second language.

Ekah (1998:61) stated that using integration approach where literature is incorporated in English language teaching serves as a major element in effective use of words and expressions, improvement and acquisition of new vocabulary, techniques of description, narration, and comparison of words. Moreover, it is proper to state that syntactic structures of sentences, words combination and stylistic use of language in form of variations according to field of discourse are better learned from prose, drama and poetry literature textbooks. Therefore, pupils and students should be exposed to the study of literature as a means to grammatical variation, and competence in primary and secondary schools before getting into the tertiary institutions. When English language is geared towards communicative competence, learners should be exposed to literature genres in order to enable them to learn how to read and speak effectively, because of the varieties of ways that the literary authors write their sentences in their literary works.

### **How to Make English Language Learning Interesting to the Pupils and Students**

In the teaching and learning of English language at the primary and secondary school levels, the teachers should incorporate the use of instructional materials and learning aids for the benefit of students and pupils. Lessons that are properly planned and taught must have instructional materials that can summarise the elaborate sentences and explanations into graphic forms. Such drawings should reflect the important points of every lesson taught by the teacher. This is where the use of flip chart, strip chart, cardboard drawings, real objects, plants, leaves and other things like food items and insects can be introduced, according to the particular lesson of the period to the pupils and students. The use of real objects, things and pictures appropriately can help to kindle the interest of pupils in the lesson.

Uguru (2007:103) stated that a carefully planned approach to the study of English language will help us to develop our indigenous technology and enhance the transfer of Western technology and yield rapid national development. In the light of this assertion the use of good instructional materials and better teaching approaches using captions, word indicators, word cards, flash cards, picture cards, sentence method and reading, drills, puzzle cards matching words, sentences with pictures, making drawing from words, phrases and sentences will attract pupils and students attention. The resultant effect is that it will encourage the learners to read aloud or silently. As time goes on the learners are exposed to intensive and extensive reading of English language text books comprehension and summaries, then reading of literature books extensively. In this way, the learners will inculcate reading habits which can help them to communicate effectively.

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Umeh and Odu (1989) postulated that the way English grammar is taught today has contributed to the fall in standard of education and as such they advocate for the re-introduction of traditional grammar in the teaching of English in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, where parts of speech, direct and indirect speech, active and passive voice, comparison of adjectives and adverbs, phrases and clauses are taught as components of the target language before sentences formation.

When English language is properly taught using appropriate methods for effective understanding of the language, the users and learners can engage in what Yule (1996:132) called discourse analysis. In Yule's observation language users and learners are able to understand and interpret what other users or speakers of the language say, because they can make sense of what they say, so they are able to discuss the meaning of their expressions. As in the context of English language teaching and learning in Nigeria, when the teachers are able to use the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing properly during lessons teaching, the pupils and students can engage in proper discourse of what the teachers teach them. If they are able to encode and decode the language meaningfully, learning of the language has taken place but where they fail to decode appropriately, it means they do not understand and cannot communicate effectively.

As it is advocated now, teachers should de-emphasise on rote learning of the rules of the language to practical participatory and demonstrative learning approach, where pupils and students are exposed to using the language through speaking and reading of books directly. Reading enables the learners to come directly in contact with the words. Odo (2007) observed that without words as vehicle, no cumulative growth of intelligence could occur. Language must be used accurately and appropriately too by the learners through listening, speaking, reading and writing. This assertion can only be fulfilled if English language teachers teach the pupils how to listen, read, speak and write effectively, by exposing these learners to constant and regular reading and speaking lessons, using appropriate methods and practical participation in class work.

## **Re-Engineering English Language for Employment and Self Productivity**

English language can be useful to the learners for employment and self productivity, if the teachers can follow the new approaches and methods for the teaching of the language, which have been discussed in this paper. On the other hand, English language if properly studies by the learners through intensive study of the language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing at all levels of education from primary, secondary and tertiary levels can generate self employment and productivity. Proper acquisition of the language will bring out the cognitive aspect of education, which is that of the learners practicing what have been studied in the classroom by writing books on language and literature for schools and colleges. If the learners decide to take up writing as a career as the Europeans and some Africans do, they would remain evergreen in education system in Nigeria while at the same time providing self employment for the writers and better productivity for the nation.

In essence those who undergo formal education in Nigeria usually use English language, and as such, text books in all subjects are written in English language. Therefore those who are proficient in the language in all professions and subject areas do write textbooks in their various fields of endeavour. This is why we have so many Nigerian authors writing books in their various fields. For this noble goal to continue, teachers of English language from primary to university levels should ensure that they bring innovations that can stand the test of time, according to modern trends to facilitate the teaching and learning processes in a much better way. The practical methods should correspond with the interest and needs of the learners, so that the learners can become creative writers in prose, poetry and drama when they are out of school and can use the skills acquired for self employment. It is only those who have received specialized education in language skills and writing that can produce high quality texts like Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Buchi Emecheta, Zulu Sofola and many other Nigerian writers.

Moreover, primary, secondary and tertiary institutions are always in need of English language teachers and lecturers, since they are in short supply. Therefore, it is only the good and highly qualified graduates of English language that are needed, so the teachers and lecturers should be very serious in teaching the would-be teachers in their institutions in order to churn out efficient and effective professionals and specialists in this field to serve the nation. Even our mass media like radio, television, newspapers and magazines, require English language specialists to anchor their programmes and edit their newspapers and magazines for public consumption. Again the reporters, correspondence and feature writers all use English language effectively because they are proficient in the language. This shows that they were properly taught at their various educational institutions. As a result of the importance of English to Nigeria educational system and the economy of the country, it enhances the productivity of the individuals, corporate organizations and government employment in the country.

## **Conclusion**

Re-engineering of English language teaching in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria, is a way of re-evaluation of the approaches and methods of teaching English language in order to achieve maximum benefits for the learners. It is a well known fact that pupils and students often fail external examinations in English language because of inability to understand what has been taught. Perhaps the methods used were ineffective or the learners were unable to cope with the demands of the subject. The various approaches and methods that the teachers of the subject should use, so as to help the learners to study and make use of the skills acquired in language learning effectively are incorporated in this paper. What is necessary now is for the teachers to change their rote and rules learning of the language to functional and participatory approach where the learners should be involved directly in the speaking, reading and writing in language classes regularly. Literary texts should also be used to aid effective communication through reading, analysis and interpretation.

## **Recommendations**

- (i) For effective teaching and learning to take place government should provide appropriate learning environment and facilities necessary for the pupils and students to study properly.
- (ii) The teachers should bring new innovations in terms of using appropriate instructional materials as learning aids for the students and pupils to understand the lessons effectively.
- (iii) In order to teach the four basic skills of language exhaustively, both the teachers and learners must possess the recommended English language textbooks and literature textbooks, so as to make use of them effectively during lessons.
- (iv) English language classes and lessons should only be taught by well qualified English language professionals, not just by anybody that can read and write so that the students and pupils would benefit immensely.
- (v) Government should provide ICT systems to all primary and secondary schools to facilitate teaching and learning of the language in a better way, since it is the key to all other subjects at all levels of formal education in Nigeria presently
- (vi) Students and pupils should be exposed to constant and frequent usage of the language in schools so as to improve their pronunciation skills and speaking properly through dramatic and debating clubs and press clubs.

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