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**INTERNATIONALIZATION OF ENGLISH EDUCATION:  
OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES FOR PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN  
AKWANGA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA, NASARAWA STATE,  
NIGERIA**

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**MARY G. EGAH**

*Department of General Studies (English Language),  
College of Education, Akwanga,  
Nasarawa State.*

**Abstract**

*This paper examined internationalization of English education in Nigeria, opportunities and challenges for primary schools in Akwanga Local Government Area, Nasarawa State. The paper adopts descriptive analytical design and employed both primary and secondary sources of data. The paper examined primary education in Nigeria, English language and education, internationalization of English, opportunities and challenges for primary schools and discovered that English language was accepted as language of instruction in Nigeria but treated as second language thereby given priority the language of the immediate environment. The paper recommends that teaching English language in primary schools should be conducted by generalist primary class teachers and school-focused system of continuing professional development should be developed to allow teachers adequate time to reflect on new information about teaching/learning to be able incorporate it into existing knowledge structures. The paper concludes that competence in the use of English language at the lower level of primary education is the golden keys that will open doors of various fields of study to Nigerian children.*

**Key words:** Internationalization, English Education, Primary Education

The English language has a complex status in today's world. For some people, it is acquired as a first language. For some, it may be learned at school and be essential for academic and professional success. For others, it may represent a subject that they are required to study in school but for which they have no immediate need. English means different things to people in different parts of the world. For some, it may arouse positive feelings as the language of pop culture, the media and social networking. For others, it may have associations with colonialism, elitism or social and economic inequality (Richards, 2015). The many years of contact between English and the many indigenous Nigerian languages has resulted in a nativised variety (Odofot, 2003) and with the increasing status of English in this period of globalization, English has become an important tool without which it is difficult to open the door of many opportunities that are available to us. In fact, to make the best of globalization, one has to be able to speak English.

English today has a unique status, as a consequence of the role it plays around the world and its function as an 'international' or 'world language'. It has been described as the world's *lingua franca*. Although some 380 million people are said to speak it as a first language in countries like Australia, Canada, the United States and Great Britain, a further 600 million people use it, alongside other languages, as a 'second language' in countries like Nigeria, India and the Philippines. Another one billion people studied it at any one time as a 'foreign language' in countries like China, South Korea, France, Germany, Russia and Spain (Richards, 2015).

Due to the spirited fight by other international languages and efforts made to preserve local languages, there are local languages that impede the mastery of English language (Ugwuanyi & Omeje, 2013). The most pressing issue in Nigeria's education system is to correct the falling standard of the language by teaching it adequately in schools to meet international standard. This is because low level English proficiency in Nigeria is depriving many access to knowledge in hard and digital forms, even as globalization poses challenges for the teaching of use of English. English proficiency is important in a knowledge based world because English is the major language of science and technology which drive development (Yen, 2008). Graddol (2000) opines that English is the language of trade and computer and is increasingly a necessity for job placements.

The task of this paper is to explore the internationalization of English education in Nigeria, opportunities and challenges for primary school teachers in Akwanga Local Government area of Nasarawa State, Nigeria. The aim is to produce students who can communicate effectively and compete favourably across the globe.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural state, large number of indigenous language exists and the number has been put differently by scholars. Hansford (1997) put it as 395, Banjo in Ayilara & Oyedeji (2000) gave 500 and Bamgbose (1992) 513

(Makinde, 2007). Language is a crucial factor in teaching and learning, it is the vehicle of communication per excellence and without it Homo sapiens will find it problematic to exist (Araromi, 2005). Communication can only be total when an individual is capable of sending a message across to another both verbal and through script symbols. These can be acquired effectively in the formal school setting.

Osagie in Makinde (2007) noted that language as a key vehicle of expression is crucial to all forms of transmission of knowledge and value and also socialization process. Beside the value of language as a medium of expression or effective transfer of accumulated knowledge, ideas, value and skill to the upcoming generation cannot be disputed. The place of language is therefore indispensable to associational or rote and equally in motor or psychomotor learning. The National Policy on Education (2004) section 1(10) states that,

every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment and in the interest of unity learn one of the three Nigerian language, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The language of instruction at the pre-primary and primary school shall be language of the immediate environment, while English and a major Nigerian language be taught as core-subjects and progressively be used a medium of instruction. This is a challenge to the internationalization of English among primary school pupils.

This challenge has continued to linger to the extent that primary school teachers find it hard to instruct pupils since they might not speak or understand the same language as it is usually difficult to find in a class students of same language but is possible to find in a class, seven if not ten with their different languages. For example in Akwanga L.G.A, there are Eggon, Rendre, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Tiv, Idoma etc in large population while the ethnic community speaks Mada and Hausa. Thus, the crux of this study is to investigate the internationalization of English education in Nigeria with particular reference to Akwanga L.G.A.

### **Research Questions**

This study is guided by the following research questions;

- i. Which is the language of instruction among primary schools in Akwanga L.G.A?
- ii. To what extent can internationalization of English Education affect its proficiency among primary schools?
- iii. What are the opportunities and challenges of internationalization of English education?

### **Methodology of the Study**

The study adopts the descriptive analytical design, data were generated through observation, documents and review of previous studies. The researcher therefore, relied in addition journals, textbooks, seminar papers, magazines, bulletin and newspapers etc.

## **Conceptual Issues**

### **The Concept of Internationalization of Education**

Internationalization is not a new nomenclature in education. The concept tends to address the increase in border crossing activities amidst national systems of education. Etymologically, it derived its meaning from Latin words 'inter' which means between and 'nationalization' meaning nation. Hence, the concept applies to on the one hand, a process of making something international (American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000). It is a process of exchange and mutual influence, where the actors involved are nations, on the other hand, it is an ideology or policy of some sort (Knight, 2003).

Scholars have not agreed on the meaning of internationalization because of the diversity and complexity of its rationales, activities, stakeholders, and providers at the national, sectoral, and institutional levels. In fact, other terms are used interchangeably with internationalization including transnational education, borderless education, offshore education, and cross-border education. Perhaps the most succinct and nuanced definition is that provided by Knight (2004; 2005) who sees internationalization as the "process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the goals, teaching/learning, functions or delivery of postsecondary education."

According to Vaghese (2008), internationalization of education is the imparting of knowledge, skills and values which have universal appeal and application. It implies that a curriculum becomes cross-national and intercultural in nature. According to Uche & Ahunanya (2013), there are different models of internationalization of education, namely, international student mobility, faculty exchange and development, research collaboration, foreign language study, building international perspectives, international networks, distance education, locally supported distance education, twinning programmes, articulation programmes, branch campuses, franchising agreements and international quality assurance systems.

### **Primary Education**

Primary or basic education is the first level of education which a child undergoes before he/she moves on to the other levels. It is the bottom-line education upon which every other education whether formal, informal or non-formal can be built. Without it, any educational structure erected will not have chances of success. The core objectives of primary education in Nigeria are the universalization of access and quality in the delivery. Other objectives include, inculcating in the school children permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively. To this end, the Federal Government of Nigeria recommends that: Basic education shall be 9 year

duration comprising, 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. It shall be free and compulsory.

The primary school in Nigeria is the foundation for formal school learning with the entry age of 6 for children. This level of education stands as the pillar of school-based teaching and learning which, according to Maduewesi & Eguabor (2005) taps and root into the millennium development goals (MDGs) of:

- i. eradicating extreme poverty and hunger;
- ii. achieving universal basic education;
- iii. promoting gender equality;
- iv. reducing child mortality;
- v. combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases; and
- vi. ensuring environmental sustainability.

These lofty goals have implication for inculcating in the citizen the right type of values and attitudes for his life-long survival and that of his society and these values are enshrined in language.

#### **Aims of Primary Education in Nigeria**

To achieve functional primary education in Nigeria, the aims of primary education are as follow:

- i. To inculcate permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively;
- ii. Lay a sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking;
- iii. Give citizenship education as a basis for effective participation in and contribute to the life of the society;
- iv. Mould the character and develop sound attitude and morals in the child;
- v. Develop in the child the ability to adapt to his changing environment;
- vi. Give the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him function effectively in the society within the limit of his capacity; and
- vii. Provide the child with basic tools for further educational advancement including preparation for trades and craft of the locality (NPE, 2004).

The million-dollar question therefore is, through which medium can the Nigerian child achieve these aims to make learning sequence simple, logical and practical? The obvious answer is through the language of instruction and communication.

#### **English Language and Education in Nigeria**

Talking of education is talking about teaching and learning (Ezegbogu, 2009) and as such, the soul of national development. Without it, a nation stagnates in cultural, scientific, social and economic terms; leading to poverty, diseases and generally sub-human living conditions (Omole, 2005). Language is a verbal or non-verbal means of communication, an indispensable instrument of education. In other words, education, whether in an informal or formal setting, can hardly take place or be achieved without

the instrumentality of language. Since education is essentially a function of communicating ideas and receiving feedback between the teacher and the students and since language is the medium of communication, both language and education are inseparably interdependent (Omole, 2005). Language, indeed, plays an integral role in education.

As Eno-Abasi (2003) rightly put it, we cannot promptly specify the number of languages spoken in Nigeria as a nation. The multiplicity of languages in Nigeria is so obvious and egregious that languages of people living within a 25 kilometre radius are massively different and incomprehensible to one another. The implication of this complex language situation is the absence of established effective communications between the ethnic groups, which becomes the basis not only for bigotry and hatred but for resorting to the use of English as a predominantly official language. Okonwo (1994) rightly captured it well when he said, "imagine a country where more than 400 ethnic groups project the interest of their individual groups at the expense of the nation! No wonder many calls to this nationalistic state of Nigeria has manifested in suggestions for confederation, redefined federation or restructured federation. This has influenced the essential character and the role of English in Nigeria. In view of Adegbite (2004), English should provide an expected co-coordinating role as a way of inter-ethnic and international communications. It is now not only a second language but also, the language of commerce, education, politics, law and administration of the entire country affairs, though in different usages and command. Knowledge of English is therefore an essential requirement for anyone to promote or live in any wider context of the community, no matter the variety of English. Kebby in Danladi (2013) observed, "No Nigerian language can perform scientific and technological needs ... because no-one is perfect." Others argue that since English is a neutral language, no ethnic group in Nigeria can claim ownership of it, so it will continue to belong equally to all Nigerians.

In Nigeria's domain, English performs a dual role. It is a language of instruction, as well as a course of study in universities. Such vital functions make it so significant that its quantity and quality (levels) of use have continued to serve as parameters towards evaluating intelligibility and effectiveness. Historically, an assimilation of culture emerged wherein English became the language of education as well as the Nigeria's official language. The pull toward English is motivated by the ideology of internationalization, reflecting the dual needs for an interethnic and the international language of superiority.

English language education has to do with teaching and learning of the English language which is meant to help the learner learn English effectively. The four language skills are to be developed properly through value based English education since the English language is viewed as a means for communication and creative expression and ability. Onyema (2006) noted that language education is intended to develop learners' competence in using receptive language (listening and reading) and expressive language (speaking and writing). Chindaya (2006) saw language learning as

the process of acquiring a set of skills just as one has to learn certain other skills. Language skills or better still, language behaviour is governed by a set of rules which have to be mastered and absorbed by the learners. As such, the place of English in language in the nation's educational system is very crucial.

### **Problems of English Education in Nigeria**

The problems of teaching English language as observed by Egah & Yargwa (2016) include;

**Lack of Qualified English Language Teachers:** It is a known fact that most of the schools right from pre-nursery to primary and to secondary schools lack teachers who are trained in the English language. The assumption that anyone who speaks English can teach it is a total fallacy. This particular assumption has really made some heads of schools to commit serious blunders by assigning teacher of other subjects to teach English. One cannot give what he/she has not. This attitude is corruption in itself and therefore the need for school owners to change the orientation towards the assumption that anybody can teach English.

**Inadequate Practice of English Language:** Learners of English languages do not often practice the use of the language regularly. Practice makes perfect. The secret of learning a new language is in using the language all the time. It is in doing this that errors and mistakes are made and corrected. Fodeh (1990) believed a good learner is actively involved in the learning process if he participates and communicates with others and practices the language of his own accord. This does not happen because learners are comfortable in expressing themselves in the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment. This type of value orientation is not good for the effective teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria.

**Lack of Reading Habits:-**The extensive reading culture no longer exists in schools. People no longer have time to inculcate the reading culture unto the younger ones just because of the many pursuits of life. For any student to go through and survive his/her academic life, more time is to be spent or devoted to reading which one of the four skills of any language is. Egege (2006) believed that a child who does not learn to read, sees the wrath of the educational system descend on his or her head. Any excellent performance and academic achievement depends much on the ability of the learners to read extensively.

**Negative Attitude towards the Use of English:** - It is appalling to see how negative some parents, peer groups and society react to the teaching of the English language despite the pride of place it occupies in the nation. Most people feel it is an alien language and one should not bother much about it hence, the code-switching most

speakers engage in. Most often, people prefer the native language even in a situation where it is not necessarily needed. Most people discourage people who want to major in English Language education claiming it is a very difficult subject. They prefer History, Christian Religious Knowledge, and Social Studies which are good on their own but should not replace the English language.

**Inadequate Learning Infrastructure and Facilities:-** In Nigerian schools, there is gross inadequate infrastructure and facilities. There are no computer sets, language laboratories, good English textbooks and novels, journals and magazines. Some of these facilities go a long way in helping the learners learn almost all aspects of English language-speaking: reading and writing skills inclusive. Library, is seriously nonexistent in most of the schools particularly the primary and secondary schools where it is most needed. Where the infrastructures and facilities are not available, learning becomes difficult for the learners.

**Examination Malpractice Problems:** The spate of examination malpractice in the society these days is very alarming. People no longer get bothered about the genuineness of certificates paraded all over the place. The system in Nigeria fails to apprehend those who perpetuate examination malpractice and it has become the order of the day eating up the foundation of the nation's education system. The effect is that students with or without little knowledge in the English language are admitted into higher institutions. This trend creates the problems of having a large number of students who cannot be taught the workings of the basic language principles. This also slows down the progress in the course of making use of the language at the general academic level.

### **Internationalization of English: Opportunities and Challenges for Primary Schools**

Before the rise of modern nation-states, the world was arguably even more integrated than now because nation-states set up invisible and visible boundaries to develop their internal solidarity (I-Chung, 2010). Modern nation-states created national societies, in which national languages, cultures, and identities are developed. Modern bureaucracy and institutions swept the world after the Second World War as newly independent nation-states emerged. This post-war period was characterized as the nationalization stage. The focus was the national society, so international interactions and communications were limited.

Internationalization often denotes the intensive and extensive international interactions and relationships based on the framework of the nation-state. As internationalization accelerates, the boundaries between nation-states gradually collapse and this leads to the emergence of so-called globalization. Language plays a very vital

role in this process and for any nation to participate actively in the internationalization process, that nation must be effectively conversant with the global language.

English now assumes the position of the global language (Ugwuanyi & Omeje, 2013). Globalization is the opening up of various part of the world to external influence. It is the breaking down of natural boundaries to influence commerce, technology, culture, finance and language. The concept has to do with interdependence and increasing interaction among people of diverse background and languages. English is now the world's most important language and it is estimated to be spoken by one in five of the world's population. It is the language of international commerce, popular culture and the internet and holds an unassailable position among the world's major languages not in terms of the number of speakers but in terms of domain of use and international spread. The roles and status of English are rising very fast and it will continue to rise because of its uses in the world. Power (2005) describes English language as a turbine engine of globalization.

Omole (2005) opined that the relationship between the English language, culture, and education in Nigeria has passed through six stages in metamorphosis. The first was the exploration stage, which marked the advent of British explorers into the area later known as Nigeria. The second was the stage of trade and commerce which signalled the spread of active Anglo-Nigerian cultural contact. That was the era of the 'coast English'. Then came the era of missionary activities (1842), ushering in western education and the incursion of European or British cultural tenets. That was the era of 'nonstandard English'.

This was followed by colonization characterized by full blown entrenchment if not imposition of British cultural values, education, and of course, the English language, complemented by sponsored overseas training for Nigerian students. The era culminated in the passage of the Educational Ordinance of 1926, which, according to Omolewa, "gave prominence to the need for a proper use of English and made certification pre-requisite for employment in most professions" (Omolewa 1979). That time, once you failed in English, you failed the entire examination.

After colonization, came independence which ironically, elevated the English language politically and educationally, making it not only the language of education but also the *sine qua non* of social mobility. It was the era that scholars started talking about 'Nigerian English'. The final stage is the stage when English has become so popular and so dominant that some nationalists are calling for its replacement with an indigenous language. In the same vein, African writers now manipulate the language in various ways to suit their artistic purposes, even though the standard of the language is falling lamentably in the realm of educational and occupational usage.

In actual sense, English language as a course of study is faced with many challenges in its teaching and learning. Some of these problems as observed by Ugwuanyi & Omeje (2013) include;

In Nigeria, English is a second language (L2) and has its own features or characteristics which make its learning and teaching very difficult. Second language is a technical representation of the functional position of that language rather than its position in sequential order of acquisition (Onuigbo & Eyisi, 2009).

The problems also include interference which comes as a result of language contact or Mother Tongue interference. This problem is obvious in phonology, vocabulary, syntax and semantics. This is one of the reasons why students who do not have English as the major course shy away from the use of English and when this is not tackled from the elementary school level, it will continue linger.

### **Conclusion**

Principled practices for the internationalization of education create opportunities for collaborative knowledge production, exposure to different contexts and worldviews, more complex and nuanced analyses, and improved capacity to respond to change and diversity. The child of today is the adult of tomorrow and should be instructed with both the language of the environment and English so as to be placed at an advantaged position among 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. Language holds the key to the success of the teaching and learning process at the primary school level and should therefore be properly developed in the child of today who will become the adult of tomorrow. Competence in the use of English language at the lower level of primary education is the golden keys that will open doors of various fields of study to Nigerian Children. It is needful therefore, that orthographies of the various languages the child is exposed to, be developed and teachers who will translate them in the classrooms be adequately trained and equipped for the job.

### **Recommendations**

English language teaching in primary schools should be conducted by generalist primary class teachers with appropriate training in primary English language teaching methods

Lifelong learning for teachers is at the heart of successful education systems thus, a school-focused system of continuing professional development should be developed. This allows teachers adequate time to reflect on new information about teaching learning and to incorporate it into existing knowledge structures, both by themselves and in collaboration with colleagues

A curriculum that allows teachers and children opportunities to engage in meaningful language use, which also provides opportunities for considerable recycling of target language in new contexts and which is age-appropriate should be developed. To promote children's language learning, considerable out-of-school exposure to English in the local environment should be available. This should include films and television programmes in English that are subtitled rather than dubbed into learners' L1.

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