



QUALITY ENGLISH LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR ACQUIRING ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCY

SALAMI, HAMMED

GENERAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT, F.C.E. (TECH) BICHI

ABSTRACT

Language plays an important role in all areas of human endeavour. Everything we do as humans cannot be done without language. More so, the attention that a language receives in a country is dependent upon the role and status accorded it. This paper then examines the place of quality English language education in acquiring entrepreneurial competency. The paper contends that quality education that guarantees entrepreneurial competency is unattainable without a conscious and deliberate attempt to ensuring quality English language education for products of our school system. The paper highlights the concepts of quality education, quality English language education, and entrepreneurial competency. Challenges of acquiring quality English language education and the various strategies that can be used to overcome those challenges are also discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Language plays a vital role in all areas of human endeavour. Man uses language in virtually all situations he finds himself – at work, social gathering, religious centres, during sleep, when thinking etc. Apart from its use in different situations by individual users, languages are also accorded some roles in the day-to-day running and conduct of affairs in society, hence the classification of languages into native languages, second languages and foreign languages Alisah in Ajiboye (ed) (2005). It is the role a language is accorded in a country that most often influences the language planning and policy the country will put in place to ensure it functions effectively in the discharge of the role. The English language though a second language in Nigeria, has remained Nigeria's official language through which virtually all affairs of the country – education, politics, law, communication, etc – are conducted since independence. For

this reason, the English language has been made compulsory to be studied as a subject at all levels of Nigerian education system and passing it made a prerequisite for moving from one level of education to another (NPE 2004). Also, the language is also made the language of instruction in Nigerian schools without which acquiring formal education is impossible. Despite all the attention so far given to promoting the use of the language for spoken and written communication, very little has been achieved in the areas of use of good English and also in its use in promoting entrepreneurial instinct in Nigerians. These then serve as the quest of this paper.

Concept of Quality Education

The term quality is used in various senses. Tijjani (2007) defines it as the degree of excellence of something both in input and output. He states further that quality education refers to the degree of excellence both in educational input and output. Oguntimehin in Tijjani 2007 defines quality as the concept which emphasizes the worth or appropriateness of the resources available to education. From the definitions above, quality in education should be viewed in terms of the relevance, validity and appropriateness of the education given, that is input on the one hand, and functionalism, excellence and efficiency on the achievement of educational goals and priorities – output on the other. This accounts for the reason why quality in an institution or enterprise has always been viewed in two perspectives. These are

- i. Quality assurance – the procedures and steps taken by an institution to make sure that it provides products or services of a high quality.
- ii. Quality control – the procedures used to check and assess the quality of the products or service – evaluation.

Quality in education is determined by the extent to which the education programme put in place goes in achieving the overall objectives of the education system. Its success guarantees quality while its failure spells a fall in standard of the system .

English Language Education

Aduwa – Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2009) view language education as a branch of applied linguistics that includes the teaching and learning of a language. The authors establish that though it can be used to include improving a learner’s native language, it is more commonly used with regard to second language acquisition. From the foregoing, English language education therefore may be said to include the teaching and learning of the English language more especially in a second language contexts like Nigeria. If English language education were to be all about teaching and learning the language in second language contexts as portrayed above, it implies that the quality of the input, that is teaching/learning be ascertained in order to have a

worthy output-attaining linguistic and communicative competence out of it. Quality English language education is guaranteed when English language education, like most fields of activity, satisfies the needs of its clientele learners, parents, employers, society in general in state education; those who are purchasing English language courses in the private sector Ogiegbaen and Iyamu (2006). Ensuring quality English language education requires aiming for high standards and to set criteria by which the quality of teaching/learning will be adjudged. In summary, quality teaching and learning of the English language will require: a good lesson, a good teacher, a successful course, an efficient school, and a fulfilling educational experience Heywoth (2009).

Objectives of English Language Education

The objectives of English language education programme and by extension any language education programme in Nigeria as contained in NCCE Minimum Standard include the following:

- (a) To help students develop a confident and competent knowledge of spoken and written English.
- (b) To equip successful students to teach English effectively at the primary and junior secondary school levels – applicable to NCE holders only as SSS level is handled by Degree holders.
- (c) To enable students to develop interest in creative works through exposure to works of competent writers.
- (d) To prepare students for further studies in the subject.

Entrepreneurial Competency

Entrepreneurship is concerned with attitude modification to create and develop an enterprising mind. Ubenyi (2007) defines entrepreneurship as individual's ability to seize opportunities and to turn idea into action, ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives and be creative, innovative and ready to take risks. Competency according to Robenson (2001) is, however, the ability to do something to a level that is acceptable to an individual. Therefore, entrepreneurial competency according to Kiggundy (2002) is an individual's behavioural, managerial and technical capacity to successfully manage a new business. It is the sum of the entrepreneur's requisite attributes for successful and sustainable entrepreneurship. The attributes include attitude, values, belief, knowledge, skills, abilities, personality, wisdom, expertise, mindset and behavioural tendencies. Mershal and Sriram 2008 identify four critical areas of entrepreneurship competency. These are financial

management, capacity management, supply chain management, and quality management. Of these, capacity management and quality management deserve to be given priority attention if the quality of Nigerian education will be enhanced at all levels. Doing this is only practicable with quality English language education to be taught to students as a subject and to be used in the course of instruction in schools.

Challenges of Acquiring Quality English Language Education

There are many obstacles identified to have been militating against the acquisition of quality English Language education in Nigeria. Although poor use of English becomes more noticeable among products of our various institutions after graduation from institutions of higher learning – colleges, polytechnics and universities, the problem according to Aduwa – Ogiegbaen and Iyanmu (2006) ‘may have its roots at the secondary school level’. This is because it is at the secondary level that the students are expected to be given adequate foundation in the use of English good enough to prepare them for further education. Some of

the major problems facing the teaching and learning of English in schools include the following:

- Lack of Personnel: - It is a known fact that specialists in English language are very rare to get. This has forced most of our schools into either employing NCE holders in English with limited knowledge of the language to teach across all classes – JSS I – SS III. In few schools with graduate teachers of English, the teachers’ workload sometimes may be more than they can cope with or they are lacking completely in professional skills for teaching English. Worse still is the fact that the teaching of the language in Nigerian schools – primary and secondary are, as noted by Salami (2008), ‘handled more by non-specialists than specialists’. All these have produced, and will continue to produce poor output and decay in our use of English for communication. This eventually results in poor preparation of students for future acquisition of knowledge and skills.

- Poor Instructional Resources/Media: - A study conducted by Ogiegbaen and Iyanmu (2006) revealed the dominance of textbooks, dictionaries, chalkboard, workbook (in few cases) and posters in the teaching of English language in secondary schools in Nigeria. Modern media such as audio and video tapes, language laboratories, programmed texts, flash cards, computers, magazines and newspapers are either simply unavailable or are rarely used for teaching English. This situation is equally true of most of Nigerian institutions of higher learning. The implication of this trend is that teachers and language educators are not altering their instructional practices in line with new and emerging instructional technologies. This eventually deprives

student access to benefitting from the use of these new media and also make teachers to still remain ‘the chief performers and dispensers of knowledge in the classroom’ Ogiegbaen and Iyanmu (2006).

- Poor instructional Techniques: - The teaching of English in Nigerian secondary schools is characterized with prevalent use of traditional lecture method in English alternated with occasional use of the debate and group methods of teaching. This has affected greatly the output of the language teaching and learning.
- Limited Exposure in the Language use: - Students exposure in the use of English for communication is very low. It is not an overstatement that graduates of our institutions of higher learning that have never for any reason read one literary work of art – novel, drama or even poetry – are countless. As this continues to prevail, it will be narrowing down the scope of the student’s knowledge and use of the language not only in day-to-day communication but also in their on-the-job professional interaction.
- Poor Learning Environment: - The nature of the learning environment has a lot to do with the success of the instructional process. As observed by Ogiegbaen and Iyanmu (2006) schools and institutions in Nigeria are characterized by environmental deficiencies such as poor location, dilapidated buildings, overcrowded classrooms, lack of electricity and inadequate staff room and offices. All these will result in nothing but ineffectiveness in the teaching and learning of English. This consequently affects the quality of Nigerian graduates in both the areas of language use and skills acquisition.
- Grossly inadequate time allocated the teaching of the subject is another problem.

Strategies for Enhancing the Acquisition of quality English Language Education for Entrepreneurial Competency Development

Ensuring quality in language education programme entails having a clear and coherent ideas of what are the right things that we are doing, and procedures for checking that we are doing things right . This involves reviewing the present state of the teaching and learning of English for quality assurance and examining the quality of the feedback from the process. The following World Bank study report quoted from Aduwa – Ogiegbaen and Iyanmu 2006 to have been reported in ‘The Guardian’ of 19th February, 2001 summarizes the ‘state of the art’:- Nigerian University graduates are poorly trained and unproductive on the job. Graduate skills have steadily deteriorated over the past decade (P.1). The report equally indicated the poor performance of Nigerian graduates to be particularly evident in two areas: poor mastery of the

English language and lack of requisite technical skill. The author contends that the lack of requisite technical skill might not be unconnected with poor mastery of the English language since instruction is given using the language, textbooks written in the language, on-the-job interaction is most often English – based. Another inadequacy in the feedback process is evident in the great disparity in the results obtained in the subject in WAEC and NECO, SSCE compared to student real proficiency in the use of the language for communication. If this ugly trend will be reversed, the following decisive steps need to be taken

Employment of More Qualified Teachers: -

- (1) Qualified Teachers needed across all levels of the education system should be provided and in sufficient number. This is important since no education system can rise above the quality of its teachers (NPE, 2004).
- (2) Workshop and Conferences: Conferences and training workshops to update the English teachers' knowledge in the use of modern instructional resources and materials as well as new instructional technologies in language teaching should be organized.
- (3) Improved Teaching Technologies: - Teachers in schools and institutions in Nigeria should improve on their English language teaching techniques. They must in the language of Galliher et al (1995) assume the role of resource brokers. This implies that they should become familiar with a variety of instructional delivery methods and stop relying on one 'best way'. In this connection, Cleve (1992) and Oluike (1979) quoted in Aduwa – Ogiegbaen and Iyanmu (2006) were said to have advocated the use of methods such as guided controlled and free writing techniques in essay writing in addition to the use of lecture method. Whichever technique or techniques a teacher has chosen, their appropriateness should be determined by their conformity with quality language teaching principle proposed by European Commission 2000 in A Guide for the Evaluation and Design of Quality Language learning and teaching Programmes and Materials as cited in Heyworth (2009). These are relevance, transparency, reliability, attractiveness, flexibility, generativeness, participation, efficiency and socialization.
- (4) Teaching/Learning of Literature – in – English Literature – in – English should be introduced to pupils right from primary schools and should be made compulsory to be studied and passed by students at both Junior Secondary and Senior Secondary levels. This will afford students a wide range of opportunities to see the English language in use.

It will also make the teaching and learning of English more concrete and practice oriented as the application and use of rules, vocabulary and other aspects of the language will be

demonstrated in texts. Literature makes language learning, easier, more meaningful and more permanent.

- (5) Review of Time Allocation: - The time allocated to the teaching of the language is too short for achieving any positive result. In that light, it is suggested that the 40 minutes period per day in secondary school be doubled to afford students more interaction with their teacher and the language. Also, the one-hour period of General English should be doubled too.
- (6) Curriculum Review: - The curriculum of English language education should be reviewed to cover all aspects of competence in the language required to function well in the society after graduation. An expansion of General Studies English beyond the scope of the courses and classes taught will be a necessity in this direction. Finally, curriculum of English courses such as Business English, Technical and Engineering English, English for Science Students etc. should be designed and build into the requisite courses to be passed in their various departments before graduation. This will surely reduce the problem of the use of the language for specific purposes and enhance their skill acquisition opportunity.
- (7) Examinations and Assessment: - There is no doubt that all public examinations on the English language are considerably lacking in credibility and reliability. Or how do we explain that a candidate who had a credit pass in English could not construct simple and error free sentences in English? Majority of students in institutions of higher learning are just celebrating credit in English without average competence in the language to show for it. As a result, it is suggested that students' progress in the language should be measured through their performance in the language than programmed written tests. With this in place, perhaps the students will enjoy a more objective assessment and make them intensify their effort at learning and passing the language as a requirement for further education.
- (8) A more conducive environment favourable for language learning should be provided.

CONCLUSION

The success or failure of the education system depends largely on the quality of the teachers implementing the curriculum. The quality of the language use in the teaching process determines whether a teacher is teaching or 'cheating'. If students will need to be well taught

before acquiring all entrepreneurial competencies needed to be enterprising after graduation, all the strategies recommended should be taken into cognizance.

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