

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION IN A MULTILINGUAL NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR UBE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Alice E. Udosen

Department of Curriculum Studies

University of Uyo, Uyo

Nigeria

Email: alidosen@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Man has been identified as the highest creature of God imbued with language. As God's image, he can only be happy if he can solve his political, social, economic and ethical problems. In a monolingual society, the transaction of his business poses no problem to man as everybody would make use of the one available language for that purpose. This is not so in Nigeria where available 514 indigenous languages have continued to play a second fiddle and English, although a foreign Language, has taken the number one position even within the country. This obvious communication reality calls for proper teaching of the English language especially at the foundation level. This paper examines the communicative needs of the learners in the English language in a multilingual Nigeria of the 21st century and identifies inadequate manpower development, poor method of teaching, lack of learning materials/ text books, teachers' lack of commitment to duty and students' lack of interest in learning as impediments to effective UBE English language curriculum development. It concludes with the way forward on the parts of government, school administrators, teachers, parents and students.

Keywords: English language and communication; multilingual Nigeria, UBE curriculum development.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a unique gift from God. It not only sets man apart from other creatures but also imbues him with the authority over them. With language, man not only controls himself but also his environment and thus brings him nearest to his creator in a special way. Language is more than an instrument for the conveying of ideas. It is an instrument for working on the feelings of others and a vehicle for self expression and self-assessment. Language affects the opportunities and possibilities of acquiring knowledge, being in the world, exploring the world and enjoying the world. That may explain why every community tries hard to safeguard her language. Their efforts are justified by Ikitde's (1986) assertion that "language is universally recognized as a powerful index of culture and identify...." As repository of culture, societies are set apart from each other because of language. Even in the era of wars and conquests, the imposition of the victor's language on the vanquished was the most humiliating way of showing authority over the ruled. And because attempt to suppress a peoples language is tantamount to total annihilation, the suppressed often fight to regain their self-image which language bestows in them.

This cultural identify which language bequeaths to man has resulted in increasing conflicts especially in multicultural societies like Nigeria. For instance, since Nigeria asserted her independence from her colonial lords some four decades now, it has not been possible for her to come out in practical terms with an indigenous national language that can unify the various

ethnic groups. Even the first motion moved in 1961 by Mallam A.Y. Balla cited by (Iwara, 2003) has not helped matters. That motion urged the Federal Government to introduce the teaching of Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo (major Nigeria languages) and other minority languages into schools so that in the long run one of them (the major languages) will be adopted as Nigeria's official language. Since then, there have been reactions and counter reactions on what most people view as imposition of another group's languages on the minority groups. The type of language loyalty exhibited by the different language communities has conspired to render the indigenous languages impotent in this modern world.

The so called major languages have not thrived significantly beyond their geographical boundaries because of the obvious lack of teachers to teach them in schools. In the same vein, the acclaimed minority languages have not made any appreciable impact even within their domains because of the speakers' negative attitude to their language among other things (Udosen, 2002). All this has prepared the ground for English, an imperialist language to thrive and take the number one position among the 394 to 400 Nigerian languages (Elugbe, 1990) and more recently Lewis (1999) has given a new number as 514. Thus, English has assumed the privileged position as a national, official, language of education, government as well as an international language in Nigeria. How do we empower the learners with this all important language? This is where curriculum development fits in. This paper sets out to examine:

- (1) Language and communication in a multilingual Nigeria.
- (2) The role of English language in the UBE programme
- (3) A situation analysis of the current UBE English language curriculum development and finally, the paper concludes with some recommendations.

LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION IN A MULTILINGUAL NIGERIA

Language according to the New Webster's dictionary (1994), is described as the organized system of speech used by human beings as a means of communication among themselves (p.554). The organized system of speech accounts for why languages are different because each speech community has certain agreed upon symbols for conveying meaning among them. A new person to the community would have to learn those agreed upon signals in order to interact meaningfully with them. A baby born into the community acquires the language naturally and eventually uses it freely to express his desires. In all this, what stands out is that language performs communicative role in any society.

Man has been categorized as a social being. He relates with others and cannot be happy without such interactions. What actually enhances man's social nature is language. Locke 1963 cited in Ekah (1998: 3) puts it this way

God having designed man as a social creature made him not only with an inclination and under a necessity to have fellowship with those of his kind but furnishes him also with language which was to be the great instrument and common ties of society.

This quotation testifies to two facts: (1) that language is a gift from God; and (2) that language is a powerful instrument that binds people together in any society and differentiates them into groups. The popular sapir-whorf hypothesis whether in the strong form, that language determines thought; or in its weak form, that language influences

thought (Eka, 2000) attests to the usefulness of language to man. It confirms that language enables man conceptualize, depict and even portray the complexities and nature of his environment. And the richer the environment, the splendid the language which serves as a major instrument for its exploration. This brings us to the issue of communicative role of language in a multilingual Nigeria. Ndimele (1999) has shown that language is capable of performing different communicative functions. Language can perform the following roles thus making it possible for man to lead satisfying life.

- Informational role: when information is freely given and promoted in any society or corporate system, understanding is made easy and natural coexistence becomes possible.
- Language can be used to express emotions, happiness, bitterness, indifference, anger or even situations; love or hate can be expressed using language. When thus used it is said to perform expressive role.
- Language can also be used to open up a channel of communication and establish contact with others. An example is 'Hello' over telephone; or do you follow me? This is often referred to as physis role or contact function of language.
- Language can be used to direct the activities of other people or influence their behaviour. In that case the language is performing a directive role.
- When language is used to seek compliance or control over the forces of nature as in the case of prayers or incantations depending on one's belief, the language in such instance is said to assume ideational role
- Language serves a per formative role when an utterance leads to sudden changes in the real world. For instance, the condemnation of a criminal in a law court.

The fact that language can serve man in these various capacities indicate that man can adequately fulfil his desires with language and therefore find joy and satisfaction in life.

As God's highest creature, man's problems, be it social, ethical, political, educational or economic, are important concerns. And none of these problems can adequately be addressed without the instrument of language. However, in a multilingual state like Nigeria where the indigenous languages have refused to grow towards national and international statues, the English language becomes more relevant in communicating these feelings and activities. It is the English language for now that the child needs to solve all his problems. He has to read textbooks, browse the internet and receive instruction in school through this language. Indeed, education for the development of the total man emphasized by the *National Policy on Education (NPE)* is achievable through the English language. It becomes imperative that its curriculum be adequately developed. Before delving into that, let us cast a cursory glance at the UBE curriculum.

The role of English language in the UBE curriculum

The Universal Basic Education (UBE) according to NPE (2004) is of nine year duration comprising six years of primary education and 3 years junior secondary education. It includes adult and non- formal education programmes at primary and junior secondary education levels for the adult and out-of- school youths (sec 7:15).

The goal of basic education among others includes: developing in the entire citizenry a strong consciousness for education and a strong commitment to it vigorous promotion:

- Reducing drastically the incidents of drop-out from the formal school system(through improved relevance, quality and efficiency);and

- Ensuring the acquisition of appropriate level of literacy, numeracy, manipulative, communicative and life skills as well as the ethical, moral and civic values needed for laying a solid foundation for life - long learning (FRN, 2000).

In all this, English language plays a very important role. In the first three years of primary school, it is taught as a subject and from primary four it becomes the language of instruction throughout the UBE and all levels of education. In the core curriculum of each level, it occupies the number one position. The aim of teaching English language according to the curriculum prescription is for the learners to acquire literacy skills and ability to communicate effectively (NPE 2004). Most of the children come from homes where English is just a school language. Yet all of them need to learn the language well enough to achieve the goals stipulated for them to avoid dropping-out. At this foundation level therefore, English language plays vital roles in their life. For instance, they have to learn English for concept development in all subjects in the school curriculum;

- Personality as well as intellectual development;
- Formation of positive attitudes to education;
- Effective exploration of the environment; and
- A healthy socialization process.

The UBE learners would derive satisfaction and personal fulfilment if they are helped to use English in ways described above. Then the foundation would have been laid for subsequent skills that would enable them lead useful life within the society and for higher education (NPE, 2004).

There are two categories of UBE products: those that would have the mental and economic abilities to pursue further education; and those that would not. Those who cannot further their education are to function in their communities, survive and contribute to their development. They have to take to vocation of their choice to support themselves and even their future dependants. Among the survival skills they need most are communication skills to transact their businesses profitably. For those who can pursue higher education, their success also depends on their communicative proficiency in English as the language of education and learning in the various disciplines. Thus, either way, the UBE English language curriculum occupies central position in the lives of these young Nigerians. Failure to lay a solid foundation at this stage always lead to future failures and consequent indulgence in many anti-social behaviours such as examination malpractice that is currently rocking the nation's education system. Effective communication in English as a second language in Nigeria presupposes effective curriculum development in the language. But is the UBE curriculum effectively developed? This question becomes necessary especially when it has been established that the school is the main centre for learning English among most Nigerians (Iwara, 2003). It has been shown that early literacy programmes in public schools are inadequate in terms of exposure and the kinds of activities involved (Adelore, 2010; 2012) making it difficult for learners to acquire solid foundation for language learning later in life. Evidence also abound that the performance of most school children in WAEC and NECO examination in recent times has been consistently below average (Ihejirika, 2012).

Impediments to UBE English language curriculum development

The role English language plays in the present and future lives of UBE learners demands that its curriculum be adequately and effectively developed. That way, the UBE products will

experience personal joy and fulfilment in the modern world of technology where they happen to belong. Effective curriculum development which enhances effective curriculum implementation would normally address the following areas:

- (i) Man power development.
- (ii) Method of teaching.
- (iii) Materials/textbooks.
- (iv) Teachers' and students' interest in teaching and learning.

A situation analysis of these areas would help us know whether we are really preparing the UBE learners adequately for their future happy lives.

Manpower Development

Manpower development refers to the teachers who transact the curriculum. Since the teacher is very important factor in any education system/level (NPE, 2004), we may want to ask: How qualified are the UBE language teachers? Are the qualified ones enough in number to man the schools? Studies have consistently shown that qualified teachers of English language are in short supply (Mohammed, 1995; Obimbu, 1996; Udosen, 2004). A tour of the schools in our locality would present an awful Picture. In many schools with a population of over five hundred students, one often finds only one teacher of English teaching in such a school. In such cases, what the school administrator does is to assign the language teacher to senior section and neglect the junior section. Where they show concern, the tendency is to deploy any teacher to teach the junior. As reported by Udosen (2005), teachers who specialized in government, Ibibio or Marketing are deployed to teach these beginners. This calibre of teachers cannot effectively implement the integrative English studies curriculum presented for JSS level. That again means that the students would lose the vital channel through which their ethical values are shaped for good (Oyebola, 2004).

At the primary school level where the teachers are generalists, most of them have outlived their usefulness due to lack of exposure to seminars, workshops and conferences. As a result, they are not aware of “new programmes and knowledge and novel instructional objectives and methods” (Nwagwu, 2003) needed to teach English language to learners in a beneficial manner. The present situation where teacher training institutions have been phased out, the National Teachers Institute (NTI) is now producing teachers through Distance learning for the Universal Basic Education (UBE). How proficient are these teachers? Mkpa (2004) describes them as being professionally inferior to the product of the UPE programmes. And Nwagwu (2003) concludes that “tyrannical and ineffective or uninspiring teachers add to the misery, and this aberrations manifest in crisis of class room organization and management” (p9). Ekpo (2010) blames teacher ineffectiveness on the teacher education programme that has failed to adequately equip the teachers with the relevant skills to make them function well in the 21st classrooms. Thus, the problem of Insufficient manpower development hinders effective English language curriculum development of UBE programme.

Methods of Teaching

Another thing that impacts on curriculum development is method of teaching. Methods of teaching language are as important as the curriculum content and as such determine to a great extent how children learn. Curriculum development aims at introducing new approaches and methods to improve teaching and learning. However, a tour of the education system from

primary to secondary will reveal one thing; that the method of teaching most subjects including English is somewhat like what Nnadozie and Nwogbo(2004:94) tagged the ‘‘ traditional method of instruction’’. In this type of method, the teacher does all the talking and almost everything while the learners remain passive listening to him. The authors put it this way:

Traditional methods of instruction are in vogue. By this one is referring to a situation where the teacher uses a lesson plan to direct the students through a given sequence of material. An attempt is made to transmit the material to the students by means of lectures and other verbal explanations and demonstrations. The students are forced to cover essentially the same lessons and the textbook is employed as the basic instrument of instruction.... The students are required to listen to the teacher, and must study the materials which the teacher thinks are necessary....This is also the process in the entire education sector beginning from pre-school to tertiary education system (Nnadozie and Nwogbo, 2004; 94)

The picture painted by this quotation is that of classrooms that are mechanical and sterile, devoid of opportunities and activities for learners to express themselves and practice the language required of them in the real world. The teachers’ preoccupation is how to cover the syllabus for examination purposes. Therefore, activities that would have stimulated the learners and enriched their experiences are carefully avoided or skipped (Adelore, 2012; Okebukola, 2002; Udosen, 2005). And yet, these children need to manipulate things in order to learn especially in learning a language that is not their own. The present ways of teaching in the schools encourages rote learning and is partly responsible for drop-out incidences which the programme intended to forestall.

Materials/Textbooks

Textbooks and teaching/learning aids are essential for effective curriculum development. But these days a lot of teachers complain that students do not have even the recommended texts talk less of supplementary texts that could be used to reinforce classroom learning. Part of the problem with textbooks is that the prescribed texts are oftentimes not available in the market and so make it difficult for students to acquire them. At other times, the texts cost so much that most parents cannot afford them for their words. Another dimension to the problem is that most parents have been made to believe that Government has supplied textbooks to the schools and that the texts are there for their wards. It is difficult to convince this crop of parents otherwise. One can imagine what happens during a reading comprehension lesson in a class of about 50 students with only 5 of them owning the text. Assuming three children share a text. That means that the teacher concentrates on fifteen children out of the fifty. This author has witnessed such a scene during teaching practice supervision. What happens to the rest of the children who are in the majority without textbooks? Yet as Ekpo (1994) shows, the content of knowledge embodied in the curriculum is conveyed to the learners through communication channels such as textbooks and other devices.

Another problem with textbooks has to do with their readability index. The texts, apart from the *Nationwide English pupils book one* that is manageable, the *Macmillan primary English course* for primaries two to six is quite above their level. The paragraphs with long sentences are really cumbersome and intimidating to these pupils with their scanty experience in the

language. In most schools where they have the supply, the teachers pack them one place. They will always tell you that the pupils cannot read them.

Instructional materials are necessary for effective curriculum development. This is especially so in the case of English, where it's teaching and learning are better facilitated with the use of materials. The use of materials helps to reduce the abstractness of the language to something meaningful and relevant to the pupil's life. As Wiltch and Schuller (1973) show, creative teachers use a variety of inter-related resources to assure the quality of instruction. The use of picture, charts, realia, audio and other related materials improve learning opportunities for L2 learners of English. But sad to say that, most teachers never give thought to this. To them, it is the duty of government to provide materials and where they are not provided, no effort is made to improvise them.

Teachers' and students' lack of interest in teaching and learning

Most teachers nowadays lack interest in their job and this is evident in non-commitment to their work. Without commitment, no work can succeed. It is commitment that propels a teacher to expend himself/herself to prepare lessons, find out the task requirements of the topic on his pupils/students and the corresponding learning activities and materials he/she needs to create and improvise to facilitate learning. Today, most teachers run from shops to the school and back to their shops. No attention is paid to the learners' well-being. Whether they learn or not, it is not their concern so far as they scribble something in the name of lesson notes and go to class to just fulfil all righteousness. As major stakeholders in curriculum development, lack of commitment by teachers is a serious impediment to the realizations of the UBE goals. Most schools now are overcrowded making it difficult for meaningful activities that promote learning to be performed.

Another area where their lack of commitment is clearly evident is in the curriculum itself. Most of them have taught for many years and when you ask: what is the goal of language education in the curriculum? they do not know. And as some of them often confess, they have never set their eyes on the curriculum. The truth is that this document is not available in the schools, but what efforts have the teachers made to get them? Curricular goals or objectives direct both teachers' and students' activities, they determine the type of methods and materials for instruction. Where the teachers do not know the why of the curriculum entrusted to them, one wonders how effective they can be in achieving its goals.

Students' lack of interest in learning has assumed alarming proportion in recent times. Some of them feel that the only purpose for studying English is to pass examination. They fail to understand that the subject is important for communication, business transactions, interaction with people from other parts of the country or world as well as prestige and responsibility in the society. While we condemn this poor attitude to learning, we also want to remind ourselves that children learn better through what they see the adults do. When children watch their teachers and parents struggle to help them pass examination by dubious means, what motivation do they gain to have to study? They relax and wait for their turn to pass without stress. Unless there is a change of attitude by all concerned, curriculum development efforts will continue to be a mirage

CONCLUSION

The paper examined the concept of language as a gift from God and relates it to the communicative challenges the child will face in the 21st century especially in a multilingual nation like Nigeria. While not discouraging the study of indigenous languages for the preservation of the people's culture, the paper has shown that the English language is the most relevant tool that Nigerian children need for solving their economic, social, economic political, educational and ethical problems in this 21st century world if they are to attain personal fulfilment.

An analysis of the curriculum development process of the UBE programme reveals that at the moment, we are not empowering the learners with the communicative abilities they need for functional survival in today's society. A number of problems are identified such as: lack of manpower development; inappropriate methods of teaching; lack of teaching/learning materials and textbooks; lack of teachers' as well as students' interest in teaching and learning respectively.

That these problems persist and are assuming worsening dimensions in the UBE schools indicate that we are not preparing the products for functional survival in the 21st century. The way forward is recommended below regarding what government, administrators, teachers, parents and students should do.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Government

The government should realize that functional education is the right of every Nigerian child. For this to be realized, the teachers should be well trained and professionally qualified to teach especially at the foundation level. The use of NTI, TCCII teachers at this level of education is worsening the already bad standard of education. The qualified English language teachers that the various universities are graduating each year should be employed to inject new blood into the system. The old ones in the system need exposure through in-service training and retraining. The government at various tiers should rigorously pursue the implementation of section II of the NPE that has to do with educational services. The teachers, whether at the urban or rural areas, really need both the "Teachers' Resources Centres" and the Educational Resources Centres (NPE, 2004) to facilitate their work. The anti-corruption fight of government, if it is genuine, should be directed towards the inspectorate division of the ministries of education. That way, they would sit up and do their work of visiting schools with a view to rendering assistance to the teachers and not going there to intimidate the teachers and collect parcels. Mentoring should be incorporated into the school system to help groom the teachers for the task of teaching our children well. Funds meant for the education sector should be released as at when due for effective curriculum development.

Schools Administrators and Teachers

Money meant for the procurement of teaching materials should be properly and prudently utilized for that purpose by the school administrators. They should show concern for the learning condition of students in their schools and not only being preoccupied with levying students unjustly. They should live above board so that they would be able to maintain

discipline among the teachers to perform their duties creditably. They should show interest in what the teachers are doing by supervising and assisting them.

Teachers should take their jobs seriously. They should remember that the future of the nation depends on the youths and that the quality of their education determines the quality of the nation's development. Teachers should engage the children in activities that could enhance effective language learning such as excursions, dramatizations, story-telling, debates, dialogues, pantomimes, mimicry, news times, etc. These activities help to develop and consolidate oral language skills which serve as foundation for literacy skills later on. They should make effort to know the curriculum goals and improvise materials where necessary to achieve these goals.

Parents and Students

Parents play important role in the lives of their children. They should show concern by providing required school materials. They should visit schools to know what is happening to their wards. They should participate effectively in PTA meetings to find out the problems that affect their wards' learning in the schools. Parents should imbibe hard work and inculcate same in their children. The home should provide support for the school learning. Students should see their education as a determinant of their future and should be serious with their studies. They should shun examination malpractices and remember that there is no short cut to life. If they cheat to pass, how will they defend the certificates in work situations? Hard work is the sure way out.

If all stakeholders in education discharge their duties with the fear of God much good would have been accomplished and the UBE products would have been adequately prepared to face the future with confidence.

REFERENCES

- Adelore, O.O.(2010).Towards effective teaching of reading in lower primary school classes.*Journal of Educational Management*,4(1):141-152
- Adelore,O. O. (2012). Reading practices in lower primary schools in Oyo state. In Emejulu, O. and Isiugo-Abanihe, I.(eds). *Cross Disciplinary Perspectives in Literacy and Language Studies*.Owerri: Afrika-Link Books,pp30-45.
- Ekah, M. H.E (1998).*Studies in Language and literature*.Uyo: Afahoaide and Bros. Printing &Publishing Company.
- Eka, D. (2000). *Issues in Nigerian English Usage*.Uyo: Scholars Press Nig. Ltd
- Ekpo, O. E. (1991). *Introduction to Curriculum*.Uyo: Printex printing press limited.
- Ekpo, C. M. (2010). The portrait of my teacher: an inestimable resource, the 25th inaugural lecture of the university of uyo delivered on Thursday, 25th February,2010.
- Elugbe, B. (1990). National Language and National Development. In Emenanjo, E. N. (ed). *Multilingualism, Minority Languages and language policy inNigeria*.Agbor: central Books Ltd.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2000). Implementation Guidelines for UBE programme. Abuja: FME.
- Ihejirika, R. C. (2012). Issues and Prospect in communicating in English language in Nigeria.InEmejulu, O. and Isiugo-Abanihe, I.(eds). *Cross Disciplinary Perspectives in Literacy and Language Studies*.Owerri: Afrika-Link Books,pp222-235
- Iwara, A. U. (2003). Language and the National question. In O. M. Ndimele (ed) *In the Linguistic Paradise*. Aba: National Institute for Nigerian Languages pp 15-33.

- Lewis, M. Paul (ed), 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, Sixteenth Edition Dallas, Tex: SIL International. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>
- Mkpa, M. A. (2004). Challenges of implementing the school curriculum in Nigeria. A key note address presented at the 17th annual conference of CON, held at University of Uyo from 14th-17th September.
- Mohammed, A. (1995). Communicative Acquisition in a Learning Environment. The problem with SSS English. In A. Bamgbose, et al (Eds) *New English*. Ibadan: Mosuro.
- Nnadozie, J. C. & Nwogbo, V. N. (2004) Educating the Nigerian child for a better tomorrow. *Nigeria Journal of Curriculum studies*.
- Nwagwu, N. A. (2003). *Crisis in the Nigerian Education System*. Benin City: WCCI, Nigerian Chapter.
- Obimbu, F. U. (1995). Educational neglect of the child in Nigeria: the primary school case in Imo State *Journal of Language Education*, 3, 955-103.
- Okebukola, F. O. (2002) 'Children's emergent reading: From theory to practice'. Paper presented at the 9th conference of RAN, Zaria, 8-11.
- Oyebola, Oyeniya (2004). Promoting societal values through an effective teaching of literature at the junior secondary level, *Nigerian Journal of curriculum studies* 11, 2: 98 -103.
- The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language (1994). International Edition.
- Udosen, A. E. (2005). Challenges of implementing the English studies curriculum in Akwa Ibom State. *Nigerian Journal of curriculum studies* 12(2):12-18
- Udosen, A. E. (2002). Towards the enhancement of literacy in the Ibibio language at the primary school level. *Literacy and reading in Nigeria* (2), 283-290.
- Wiltich, W. A. & Schuler, C. E. (1973). *Instructional technology: Its nature and uses*. New York: Harper & Row Publishing Company.