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Editorial

Nigeria is a blessed country. It is not an undue sentiment to quip that the large expanse of geographical space and sometimes very difficult to determine list of tribes, myriads of cultures with ever increasing indigenous languages constitute great blessings for Nigeria. So our diversities make us blessed.

As is normal, where there are diverse representations, there would also be diverse interests, and diversity of interests is a brewing ground for conflicts. So we may say that the marriage of conflicts we experience in Nigeria, ranging from opposing tribal and regional conflicts, political instability, up-surge of sometimes violent interest groups to very destructive terrorism and endless record of cases of violation of public order are 'normal' in a country as Nigeria.

Irrespective of the copiousness of Nigeria's social, political and security challenges, one factor – the use of English Language in Nigeria- has always been the guarding force keeping the bond of unity of Nigeria together. This factor underscores the relevance of a national association such as ours – The National Association of Teachers English in Colleges of Education and Polytechnics in Nigeria. We dare claim that the combined sections of colleges of education and the polytechnics produce – probably second to the primary section – the largest number of educated Nigerians who work to transform Nigeria from moribund or obsolete traditions to state of modern culture and technology.

In essence, it is not gain-saying to express the relevance of our journal – NATECEP Journal of English and Communication Studies – NJECS to our nation's educational system. This journal publishes researches by scholars on issues relating to teaching, learning and general use of English Language in Nigeria. We therefore encourage our readers to always publish research articles in NJECS.

The journal is published annually and consecutively this is the 12th volume. We regret any error in this volume and we affirm our commitment to improvements in subsequent editions.

Aaron Ndu Nwoke
 Editor-in-Chief
 08065633293–ndunwoke1@yahoo.com

A REVIEW OF CHALLENGES THAT TEACHERS FACE IN THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

By

Dr Sunny G. Eshiotse
Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi
eshiotes@yahoo.com

&

Abdullai O. Okwilagüe
Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi
abdulokwils@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper reviews some factors that constitute significant challenges to effective teaching and learning of English language. Below-average performance of candidates in virtually all subjects in Certificate Examinations conducted by the different accredited examining bodies is a token symptom of the deplorable level of literacy among students. These daunting constraints notwithstanding, the teacher of English is under great pressure to 'deliver'. While some of these factors are outside the teacher's control, there are those for which he must take responsibility. At the end, some measures are suggested to help make teaching and learning of English language more effective to improve public literacy and enhance nation building.

Key words: challenges, effective learning, large classes, content delivery

Introduction

There is no doubt that teaching and learning of English Language, like many other subjects, is facing considerable challenges, both from within the teaching corpus and influences which are external to the school system. Ironically, effectiveness of the teacher's input is measured by the failure rate of candidates at public examinations, leaving the poor teacher bereft of any shred of public sympathy.

Aina (2009) argues that the quality of any school system is a function of the quality of its teaching personnel. Logical as this may sound, there is, nevertheless, a 'ceteris paribus' to the statement: if everything is equal, the teacher will plow back some of this quality into the educational system where he is chief operator.

In this paper, the writers draw attention to some constraints that impose significant stress on present day teaching and learning of English language and suggest measures that may be

considered as solutions to enable the teacher make his modest contribution to national development.

Challenges to Teaching of English language

- Lack of quality out-of-school reinforcement

Close (1962), argues that for language learning to be effective, it is necessary for the principles learnt in school to be reinforced by learners' out-of-school experiences. Unfortunately, the teacher has no control over these out-of-school experiences; many homes lack capacity to provide the child with opportunity to apply or practise the concepts and principles learnt in school. The teacher now has to cope with teaching and managing students with diverse literacy experiences and entry behavior (Hart & Risley, 1995). This is because of the changing nature of the learner and the learning environment. Some students enter school with thousands of hours of exposure to books (and internet) and an appreciable wealth of oral language experiences, while other children begin school with very limited and impoverished knowledge of print and spoken language. High level of illiteracy, erosion of family cohesion (resulting in reduced or complete absence of supervision at the home level) and other socio-economic factors have ensured that school time is about the only opportunity learners have to be "steeped in English-speaking environment" (Close, 1962) to experience the language in action.

- Death or near-death of Literature as a school subject

The rapidly declining popularity of literature in English as a school subject has significantly increased pressure on the teacher of English in his assignment. It is difficult to understand why some subjects, inclusive of Literature in English, have fallen on bad times, even though Literature is a requirement for careers in Law and Mass Communication. These are courses that attract hundreds of thousands of Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination candidates every year in Nigeria. There is no gainsaying that Literature and the written text offer the best opportunity for learners of a given language to see the language in operation, to see it used in context.

Very subtle, hair-line variations in meaning and emphasis of expression are best shown across the three major genres of poetry, prose and drama/play, which no human teacher can bring out with equal effectiveness in the classroom (Williams, 2004; Eshiotse, 2014). It is believed that Literature, as a subject, is only an unlucky casualty of the undisguised aversion of today's learner for the written text, whether in hard or soft copy. It appears to be a generational phenomenon: if the book will not fit into the back pocket of a

student's jeans trousers, then it is obviously a burden (Eshiotse, 2014). The teacher of English, thus, has lost the complementary service of Literature in illustrating the principles and practice of linguistic and communicative competence.

- New Technologies and Learning

Information and Communication Technology has immeasurably impacted content and process of knowledge, especially in the 21st century. The 2011 National policy on Information Technology prepared the ground for integration of ICT in the Nigerian school system. Also, the reviewed National Policy on Education acknowledges the benefits of e-education. According to Gulati (2008), learning, using technologies, has become a global phenomenon; when ICT is used to foster a rich learning environment, meaningful experiences are created that contribute to a person's growth and development (El-Khawas, et al, 2003).

The existence of ICT has taken some aspects of learning out of the classroom, making face-to-face, chalkboard learning inadequate to prepare learners for today's work-place challenges. Whatsapp, Facebook, Twitter, instagram, YouTube and other trendy social networks have piled the greatest pressure on the teacher of English. Sometimes, the learner may be physically present in class, but he is actually in a 'chat-room', carrying on an exciting engagement with 'friends' across dispersed locations in the universe. Seizure of handsets and other dire punitive measures have not deterred these students. According to Fryer (2001), "our students have changed radically...today students are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach". The phenomenon has created a situation in which teachers, 'digital immigrants', teach students, many of whom are 'digital natives'!

Often, according to Azuik (2014), 'it is the students who are in the vanguard of technological curiosity...unfortunately, some of their teachers are not so computer-wise and prefer to wallow and grope in electronic anachronism...in this case, the blind cannot lead the sighted.' Explaining further, Raji-Oyelade (2014) identifies two kinds of teachers who must urgently do something to fit them into current trend of teaching and learning:

'Digital Refuseniks': these are 'those who, out of their own determinate indifference, fail to process, adopt or appropriate the facility and tools of the digital age' to enliven teaching and learning, and

'Digital Refugees':... 'those who are technologically impaired or incapacitated'.

Complicating this vexatious factor is the teacher's inability to accommodate the learners' new hyper-active orientation to learning within his (teacher's) inflexible and out-

dated principles and practice of teaching. Added to this is the fact that, most often, because of lack of training and re-training opportunities for the teacher of English language, his teaching repertoire hardly grows beyond the level with which he first came into teaching. In other words, the only training the teacher of English brings into his class is what he received while in college! He ends up with his "yellow notes" and out-moded methods to prepare learners for life in the 21st century! Research has shown that Pedagogical roles have been found for YouTube, Facebook and other like social networks which the teacher of English must be familiar with to retain his position as effective facilitator of learning.

- Existence of Open Education Resources (OERS)

Open Education Resources are carefully researched learning materials generously deposited online for interested users. Access to these materials which cover virtually the entire gamut of knowledge is open and at no cost to users, provided their use is acknowledged. The import of the availability of OERs is that there is now no need for the teacher to 're-invent the wheel' of learning content, as these materials are authoritative, current and only a 'click' away. Painfully, many teachers of English and Literature are unaware of the existence of OERs because of either lack of ICT competence, or unreasonable suspicion of technology.

Consequently, the teacher need not waste his time, resources and efforts to concoct what to teach; he only needs to get and plan how to use these available materials.

- Contributions of Globalization

True to Marshall McLuhan's 'prophecy', the world, indeed, has become a 'global village.' According to Redmond (2007) and Tabb (2008), globalization is a comprehensive term for the emergence of a global community in which events in one part of the world quickly come to have significance for people in other parts of the world.

There is now mounting pressure on the teacher to produce learners who can perform, with very minimal adjustment, on the global stage. This is because, along with technological advances, globalization has altered the face of labour market (Dimon and Selzer, 2014). Unfortunately, the rising expenditure that employers of labour incur on re-training of their recruits to make them serviceable is a sad commentary on the quality of products of Nigerian school system. While British English still dictates (or influences) standard of usage in Nigeria, globalization has brought in other competing varieties or Englishes (Azuike, 2014). Coupled with this is the issue of culture content of curriculum of English Language in Nigerian Schools. The selection of suitable content that should prepare students to be able to

function effectively in the global cultural community becomes an issue for the teacher of English.

- Organized Examination Misconduct

A direct consequence of Nigerian's unabashed glorification of paper certification is the existence of the monster of organized examination misconduct. Driven by Machiavelli's (in)famous maxim that the end justifies the means, Nigerians spare no effort or means to ensure that their children and wards pass at distinction levels, whether it is in routine internal or public examinations. This canker-worm permeates all levels of education. A colleague once reported of a woman who bought snacks for a teacher to help her little son come first in his KG One class!

Government has failed to control this malady, because it also stands indicted. Its ministries, departments and agencies, and the private sector continue to exclude candidates who hold certificates at pass levels other than 'good' honours degree or Upper Credit from recruitment exercises. Today, a good number of products of Nigerian education system cannot write "Original copy received by me" without assistance, even though they flaunt intimidating results!

Thus, the reality of massive examination misconduct continues to vitiate and subvert even the best efforts of the teacher of English, making it impossible to measure the effectiveness of his teaching style and delivery methods, since with or without his contributions, the student passes English at credit level.

- The Teacher

The teacher of English himself is a factor in the quality of learning his students manifest. Because of the challenge of retaining social relevance, he now appears to invest more in tangible material acquisition, at the expense of intellectual development. Driven by the desire to divest of the garment of perpetual poverty hitherto associated with teaching, he enlists in the rat race for acquisition of material possession. Much of learning at tertiary education level today is steeped in undisguised, unethical practices which have given birth to expressions such as 'blocking', 'sorting', 'co-operation fee' and other metaphors of corruption. At the end, the teacher is hardly a model of the skills, competences and fidelity he is supposed to embody.

Also, the fear of job loss has forced many a teacher of English to aid and abet examination misconduct in the very subject he teaches. Majorly, pressure arises from the sole

item in the teacher's unwritten performance contract that his students record 100% success (or close to it) in relevant public examinations. Thus, he is driven to acts that jar against the dictates of good conscience, just to keep his job, and possibly save his life, to the bargain! The malady is akin to the odious and reprehensible acts of men who succumb to depravity to the point of exercising no qualms over uncovering the nakedness of their own daughters!

- **Pidgin English**

The existence of Pidgin English as an open (and more popular?) alternative to standard English will continue to confound every effort made to teach the subject. What is more, to validate this new status, national news is now available in pidgin, much of popular contemporary music is composed in pidgin, plays are acted in pidgin, religious homilies are presented in pidgin, much of social intercourse is conducted in pidgin. Given this reality, the question now is: which is the evil that must be dealt with? Pidgin or Standard English?

- **Large Classes**

By no means a big constraint to effective teaching of English language is the reality of large classes in the Nigerian school system, especially at the tertiary level. Except on election campaign grounds, the very sight of a large crowd strangles pedagogical creativity. How can the teacher be effective when he has to teach students in their hundreds? Even when he knows that essay writing offers very reliable appraisal of students' diction, spelling, punctuation, creativity, sentence structure, etc, he would rather not use it because of hundreds of scripts that the exercise will generate! This is why many essay assignments end up ungraded!

Conclusion

Learning is a dynamic process; operators of the system, especially teachers, need to always stay connected to be effective and relevant. Some of the factors that negatively impact on teaching and learning of English language are outside the control of the teacher; but there are those he can manage in order to mitigate their collateral effects on the teaching of his subject in order to enhance national development.

Recommendations

The teaching of English language can be more result-oriented if:

- Governments should invest in training and re-training of teachers to update content and method mastery so that they can model the competences they teach.

- Not only government but also schools implement programmes aimed at raising the pride, self-esteem and dignity of teachers through training and re-training (Ossai, 2009)
- Teachers of English should, as a matter of priority, invest in further personal knowledge acquisition to help them retain relevance in the task of helping learners acquire relevant linguistic and communicative competency.
- Teachers of English should embrace ICT as an inevitability and integrate it in teaching.
- Government should play a leading role in promoting 'doing' competency over paper certification; this is the only device that can break the stranglehold of organized examination fraud over Nigeria's education system.
- Teachers of English should subscribe to the noble ideals and ethics of teaching, so that they can bequeath a worthy legacy to the next generation.
- The immediate solution to the challenge of large classes is equitable recruitment of more qualified teachers of English so as to bring the teacher-student ratio down to 1:30 (science) and 1:40 (non-science), according to NBTE recommendation, or something manageably effective.

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