



AN EVALUATION OF MIDDLE BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM FOR ENGLISH STUDIES IN NIGERIA UNDER THE NINE-YEAR UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION CURRICULUM

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Abstract:

Great importance has been attached to curriculum design and pedagogy in syllabi in Nigeria, particularly in language teaching and learning. The paper makes an evaluation of English studies curriculum designed for primary four in Nigeria under the Nine-Year Universal Basic Education Curriculum (middle basic). The 69-page curriculum was designed organized by the four language skills –listening, speaking, reading and writing. Three Principles for language teaching-learning have been identified in the curriculum. They are: Linguistic Principles, Socio-affective Principles and Cognitive Principles. The study found that the curriculum recommends the use of two teaching methodologies: Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). However, the curriculum is dominated by the use of GTM which means written language has an upper hand over spoken language. The paper recommends for a paradigm shift from GTM and ALM which are traditional approaches to language teaching to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which promotes communicative competence for enhancing the quality of education.

Keywords: language teaching methodology, communicative language teaching, grammar translation method, audio-lingual method, language learning

1. Introduction

The use of curriculum in any formal education setting is essential to the attainment of positive learning outcome, since classroom activities are premised on what the

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curriculum is prescribed or pin down (Afforma, 2006; Awofola & Sopekan, 2013). Curriculum is usually designed for a specific group of learners in accordance with certain pedagogical method(s) that will facilitate the teacher to translate theories into practical realities (Alade, 2005 & Okundeye, 2003). Language teaching/learning has gained attention in recent years, which made the field of study to record broad array of teaching methodologies, ranging from traditionally inclined approaches of form-focused to a more viable and dynamic approach of communicative ability in different social context (Ellis, 2012; Cook, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In United States, Canada and Australia for instance, immigrants are wooed to embrace the use of English not only as a *metalect*, but for easy access to education (Aluede, 2006). In Nigeria, based on geolinguistic analysis, the country's language space is dominated by English and three major indigenous languages, and the educational policy recognizes their roles, and incorporated them into school curriculum on the basis of politolinguistic (NPE, 1977; 1981; 1998 & 2004). But the political neutrality of English in Nigeria and the concomitant linguistic diversity paved the way for the English to assume two roles in school curriculum: subject and language of instruction (Woolmam, 2001 & Imam, 2012). In the light of these, this paper makes a true and thorough assessment of English language curriculum designed for primary four in Nigeria under the *9-Year Universal Basic Education Curriculum* (middle basic education). The study features the historical background of teaching and learning the English in Nigeria from pre-independence to post-independence era. Also, the teaching methodologies and the principles used in the curriculum are discussed. The paper study takes a look at the extent of the feasibility of the methodologies in Nigerian cultural context.

2. Historical Background of English Language Teaching/Learning in Nigeria

Historically, when the slave trade was abolished, Nigeria became open to legitimate trade. Christian missionaries used the opportunity to come to Nigeria for religious propagation. They discovered that there was a need for their new converts, who had no western education, to read the Bible and related literature -hence the need to establish schools (Ajayi, 1965).

The missionaries, most of whom settled in Badagry and Calabar, established schools, inducing children and adult alike with motivational gifts for them to participate. The first school –Nursery of the Infant Church –was established in Badagry in 1843 by the Methodist Mission and Mr and Mrs De Craft were appointed as Headmasters (Imam, 2012; Fafunwa, 1974 in Oluniyi & Olajumoke, 2012). Later, schools were also opened in Lagos, Abeokuta, Ogbomosho and Calabar (Alade, 2011). Since the

cardinal objective of such schools was literacy in reading and writing in order to understand English bible, the teaching of English subject received greater attention in schools' curriculum. Later, English was taught in all schools with emphasis on reading, writing, grammar, composition and dictation. Teachers came from different backgrounds: Germans and Britons in the Western Nigeria, Scottish and Irish in the Eastern Nigeria and Englishmen at the later stage in the Northern Nigeria. In fact, it was a period when language teaching methods were dominated by rules of grammar, emphasis was placed on correctness so as to maintain the standard form of English (Growther, 1962; Adetugbo, 1978 & Awonusi, 1986). It was reported by Fafunwa, (1974) that around that time, people encouraged their children to learn English which had become the status symbol of Commerce, Civilization and Christianity.

The first major intervention by government was through the 1882 Education Ordinance. The Ordinance was essentially an educational policy on the issue of the establishment and maintenance of schools. The policy promoted English language when it declared that all teachings from the lowest class to the highest must be in English as a medium of instruction before government grant (Allocation) could be obtained. The period also coincided with the period when the demand –by the colonial regime – for interpreters and other workers to occupy junior and intermediate position in the colonial regime, railways and trading houses, was at a peak. All these factors facilitated in maintaining the high status of English and equating knowledge in English with not only social but political supremacy. The policy strengthened the straight-forward English culture and indirectly imposed the learning and the use of English on Nigerians through the school system.

In addition, since the 1882 policy came at a time when nationalist were gearing up for independence crusade, it appeared with so much criticism. For instance, editorials in the *Lagos Times Newspaper* of 26 July, 1882 and 9 August, 1882 vehemently criticized the assimilationist nature of the policy and complained that it would negatively affect the indigenous languages (vernacular). Consequently, the government reacted through another ordinance – the 1887 Education Ordinance –which allowed the teachings of vernacular in schools. It should, however, be noted that it did not change the role it had carved for English as the language of instruction in school system. By 1890, the government accepted the Inspection Report by Henry Carr which recommended the professional training and certification of teachers of English. Besides, the use of English was indirectly promoted again. It must be pointed out, however, that although missionary education had successfully taken off, it had no even distribution in the country. In 1913 for instance, out of the twenty secondary schools and teacher training colleges in Nigeria, only two were in the east, none in the north and all the rest

were in the west; missionary education did not easily take root in the heart of the Eastern Region because of resistance occasioned by traditional values and cultural beliefs. In the Northern Region, the missionary education recorded little success because of the alternative provided by Islamic education; it was looked upon with suspicions because it was introduced by Christian missionaries, hence it was in opposition with Islam. In 1920s, the schools had begun to mushroom, especially in the west and in the east where the churches had a controlled of most of the schools. But in the north the pace remained slow and the colonial administration decided to establish elementary schools (Sofenwa, 1992; Mgbo-Elve, 1981; Bamgbose, 1971 & Awonusi, 1990).

Moreover, as the nation approached the period of self-rule, feelings of nationalism arose. The dominance of English in school curriculum was challenged as nationalists insisted on the introduction of vernacular languages. The 1925 Phelps-Stokes Commission Report also consolidated the status of English in schools. The 1922 constitution and the 1945 Richards Constitution recommended the use of English not only in schools, but also in the society at large when it categorically stipulated that the language of administration would be English in the Western and Eastern Region and Hausa language in the Northern Region (Richards, 1945 & Ajeigbe, 1987). The constitutional provisions positively promoted the use of English in Western and Eastern Nigeria as the language of civilization, but negatively affected the use of English in the Northern Nigeria as Hausa was promoted as the language of cultural development. Consequently, a north – south dichotomy manifested: English was used to a large extent in the Eastern Region and in the Western Region while in the Northern Region, it was to a lesser extent (Imam, 2012). Thus, this period witnessed gradual decline of English although the subject still remained in the school curriculum, and is the language of instruction from mid-primary and also the country's official language (Richards, 1945; Egbe, 1979 & Growther, 1962).

Similarly, the 1951 Constitution did not alter the recommendations of the 1945 constitution. However, the 1954 Constitution (Article 114) recommended the use of English in the Western and Eastern Region and both English and Hausa in the Northern Region, but English to serve as a language of documentation (schizoglossia) (NPE, 1977 & Federal Ministry of Information, 1979). This was an attempt to correct the imbalance in the 1945 constitution although the Eastern and Western Regions had an early start and kept the lead in the use of English in the nation.

After the country's self-rule in 1960, the 1960 and the 1963 Constitution made little modification to the 1954 provision. Thus, English remained as official language in Nigeria, became widely spoken in the Nigerian environment and retained its status as a

language of instruction in schools. In fact, a compulsory pass in the subject was needed for certification at the end of the secondary education –a status it retains up to this moment (Jen-Mary, 2008; Oluniyi & Olajumoke, 2012).

2.1 English and Language Policies after Independence

What is usually referred to as language policies are part of the broad educational policies and constitutional provisions. The first major educational policy after independence was the 1977 National Policy on Education. This came long after the 1963 constitution which was suspended after the military coup in Nigeria in 1966. The policy in question was also prepared by the military. The 1977 policy has a philosophy on the basis of unity, common identity of the citizenry and accessibility to education at various levels (Woolman, 2001).

In addition, in cognizance to the pivotal role of language in learning process, and as a way of establishing and maintaining relationships, policy makers consider it crucial in nation building, hence each student be wooed to learn one of the three major native languages (Alade, 2011). In this connection, the Government recognizes Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo as major languages in Nigeria (Aluade, 2006). This position is certainly a radical departure from the past as it now encourages linguistic pluralism in schools. Therefore, it is not surprising when it recommended that at the level of pre-primary education, the language of instruction would principally be the native language or the language of the learner's immediate community (Article 11 (3)). At the primary school level, it recommended that the language of instruction be initially in the native language or the language of the learner's immediate environment (primary 1 – 3), and at developmental level (primary 4 – 6) will be progressively the English (Article 15 (4)). At the level of secondary, the policy did not specify the language of instruction overtly, but in practice, it remains English. Moreover, the policy indicated that at this level, English and one Nigerian language must be amongst six compulsory subjects to be studied in schools (NPE, 1977 & Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1979). Accordingly, the 1979 constitution took a position similar to the 1977 policy; it strengthened the linguistic pluralism. The revised National Policy on Education (1981) made little changes to the 1977 policy; it stipulated that the junior secondary school student shall study English and two indigenous languages, whereas the senior secondary school student shall study English and one indigenous language (Aluade, 2006 & Christopher, 2008). Moreover, the political Bureau's Report, 1987, the 1992 constitution emphasized same linguistic pluralism. But the National Policy on Education (1998), which provided the basis for the introduction of universal basic education, specified overtly that the language of instruction at the secondary schools should be English; the indigenous

languages should be taught as subject (UNESCO-IBE, 2010 & Woolman, 2001). The current National Policy on Education (2004) consolidates the dominant roles and functions of English as subject and language of instruction in the Nigerian schools from the upper basic to University (Imam, 2012 & Jen-Mary, 2008). Finally, despite its crucial role in the Nigeria's educational and political landscape, presumably in the future, English has to compete favourably with Nigerian languages that are rising in status.

3. Description of the Curriculum

Education is usually concerned with the dynamic nature of human society that is changing by condition (Woolman, 2001). Sequel to the declaration of 'Education For All' in 1990 in which Nigeria is a signatory, Nigeria reinvigorated its educational system by introducing universal basic education programme in response to the declaration (Opara, 2011). The programme is designed to give every Nigerian access to free and qualitative basic education which is contained in section 18 (3) (a) of the 1999 constitution Federal Republic of Nigeria under fundamental principles of state policy (Nigerian constitution, section 18).

The review focuses on middle basic education with specific reference to *Primary Four English Studies Curriculum* in Nigeria. The 69-page curriculum is organized with four language skills integrated in the content. Topics are arranged around the skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. These skills are arranged under the four themes.

Theme: 1 Reading and Writing, Theme: 2 Listening and Speaking, Theme: 3 Grammatical Accuracy and Theme: 4 Literatures. The curriculum reflects the sum of exposure which pupils must attain. The performance objectives, themes, contents, activities for teacher and pupils, teaching/learning materials and assessment guides are prescribed. The prescription of the curriculum showcases the required content to be taught in the class so as to achieve the objectives of which it is designed for. In addition, teachers were called upon to incorporate relevant sources and information from the immediate environment that would develop the content of the curriculum (UNESCO-IBE, 2010). Literacy and communication skills are the core issues in the development of the curriculum and, by extension, the infusion of current global issues such as: globalization, deregulation and information technology. Other noticeable issues in the content of the curriculum are: sexually transmitted diseases, peace education, drug abuse education, population and family life education, gender issues, millennium development goals, environmental education and national economic empowerment and development strategies.

4. Language Learning and Teaching Principles

There are number of teaching principles found in the curriculum, but the paper discusses the principles that are emphasized in the curriculum as prescribed by the instructions

4.1 Linguistic Principles

4.1.1 Principle of Communicative Competence

One of the most fundamental principles of primary 4 curriculum is to enhance pupils' communicative ability. This is because previous curriculums of primary 1 – 6 laid emphasis on literacy skills (reading and writing). With reference to the theme II of the curriculum, the activities are designed on the basis of communicative competence, particularly in psychomotor skills. For instance, Page 2, 7, 16, 19, 45 have spelled out various activities related to consonant and vowel drills, while Page 28, 30, 33, and 42 have prescribed activities that are purely supra-segmental: stress and intonation.

4.1.2 Principle of Native Language Effect

The principle of native language effect has been found in the curriculum. This is because English and native language serves as the languages of instruction in primary 4. Theme I of the curriculum is designed to provide the pupils adequate ability to read and write in the target language. The inclusion of this principle is done in order to accommodate the feelings and self-identity of the pupils. Such element of native language identity facilitates learning process in the Nigerian learning environment. The comparison being made between the English and the native language enhances pupils' ability to understand their native as well as the target language. Therefore, native language is viewed as facilitator in primary 4 in Nigeria

4.2. Socio-affective Principle

4.2.1 Language and Culture Connection

An attempt is made by the curriculum to explicate the connection between language and culture. As a result of the multicultural setting of the Nigerian society, the curriculum has clearly prescribed that the teacher should make use of textbooks and other materials relevant to the pupils' learning environment. Cultural contents are infused in the curriculum. For instance, the *habit of worship* is infused in reading comprehension passages to enable the pupils tolerate and understanding one another irrespective of religious affiliation. *Eating habit amongst Nigerians* is also infused in the curriculum to enable the pupils appreciate the cultural diversity and promote

understanding amongst Nigerians. Others include: *types of family, Needs of the family, Marriage and Relationship* etc. Language and culture connection can be seen in page 40, 55, 68 and 69 etc.

4.2.2 Principles of Willingness to Communicate

The curriculum has provided exercises that develop self-confidence. For instance, in page 63 a class debate exercise is provided where the pupils are expected to be divided into proposing and opposing sides. Each member of the class is expected to participate fully and actively in the process. Another instance is in page 5 of the curriculum where dialogue practice is provided based on the various forms of expressions such as expressing possibility, permission and obligation. In addition, oral composition has appeared in page 7 of the curriculum in order to enable the student practice self-expression based on true life story.

4.3 Cognitive Principles

4.3.1 The principle of Anticipation of Reward

Great importance is attached to the English language in Nigeria, pupils usually learn English with high expectation of securing a good job. This is because English is considered as *acrolect* and *burolect* in Nigeria –a language of Administration, Commerce, Law, Education, International relation and of high social prestige.

However, the curriculum is imbued by the structural view of language theory and behaviourist view of language learning due to the presence of Audio-lingual Method. But the Grammar Translation Method which dominated the curriculum is not governed by any theory (Brown, 2007). The prescription of the curriculum explains how language is taught by breaking it into sounds, words and sentence. And language is learned through habit formation and imitation.

5. Evaluation of Effectiveness of the Methodologies

The teaching methodologies emphasized in the curriculum are Grammar Translation Method and Audio-lingual Method. They are traditionally oriented (Ellis, 2012; 2007) because they focus solely on the language forms (discrete part). However, one of the cardinal objectives of the GTM is to develop learner's ability to read and write in the target language, whereas ALM is centred on achieving oral fluency (Yule, 1997; Chang, 2011; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

5.1. Effectiveness of Grammar Translation Method

GTM is useful and effective in language teachings because it provides a good learning environment for learning, especially at the early stage. Even though the method is not theoretically inclined, but it has principles and techniques that can facilitate language teaching/learning in an accurate manner (Ellis, 2012; Brown, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Language is rule-governed (Chomsky, 1957). In GTM, pupils are taught with accuracy and theme III of the curriculum has provided such exercises. This would ensure that language rules are learned in a most effective and efficient way by the pupils in primary 4. In this method, the identity of the pupils is recognized and their native language facilitates them to understand exercises such as Reading Comprehension which are used to facilitate pupils' quest to have a good mastery of vocabulary and, by extension, lexical relations -such as: synonyms, antonyms -that are usually identified within the passage. The methodology used in the curriculum has also provided an avenue where vocabularies are put into practice in order to give them good mental ability This method is also supported through use of *Composition* so as to enable the pupils acquire the basic skills of writing -that is considered as one of the fundamental principles of primary 4 curriculum -such as short story, account of an event etc. It should, however, be noted that writing is essential and in evitable in learning, language test are usually designed in a written (Cook, 2007, Brown, 2007, Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

5.2 Effectiveness of Audio-lingual Method

Primary 4 is the beginning of middle basic education in Nigeria. At this level, English is introduced in addition to the native language as languages of instruction in the classroom. Therefore, there is the need for the pupils to learn how to speak in English. ALM is imbued by strong theoretical base of structural view of language and behaviourist theory of language acquisition/learning (Brown, 2007; Cook, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 2007). Despite its emphasis on oral skill, it teaches language skills in its inherent sequence of listening, speaking, reading and writing (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). This method of second language teaching transforms the learner to behave like a native speaker by forming new set of habit through responding to stimulus, imitation and reinforcement (Yule, 1997).

The theme II of the curriculum focuses on both segmental and supra-segmental phonology. Poor pronunciation, incorrect stress and intonation will make the language unintelligible (Roach, 2000; Gimson, 1980 & Jones, 1967). Therefore, the drills on consonants and vowels provided in the curriculum are designed to make the pupils

articulate sounds correctly and pronounce words accurately. In addition, primary 4 pupils are expected to be exposed to various transformations of grammatical structures e.g. active sentence to passive, affirmative to interrogative through *transformational drill*. Also, the method tends to motivate the pupils through the use of *dialogue* because it enables them to practice speech in a real communicative situation and various grammatical structures and vocabularies. Despite these claims by the curriculum, the method tends to be less, if not at all ineffective in primary 4 in Nigeria considering the fact that it restricts the pupils to a static practice of language use.

6. The Feasibility of the Methodologies in Cultural Context

Nigeria is a multicultural society with an estimated number of over 521 linguistic groups (Patrick, Sui, Didam & Gyang, 2013).). This diversity engenders a lot of cultural sensitivity amongst Nigerians in their socio-political and economic realities. Despite the strong quest for globalization, Nigerians are culturally attached in their social milieu. This necessitated the infusions of cultural content in the curriculum such as population and family education, drugs abuse, sex education, gender issues.

6.1 Feasibility of GTM

The use of GTM in the curriculum is, to some extent, feasible in the Nigerian learning environment, particularly in primary 4 where the languages of instruction are English and native language (code switching) as prescribed by the educational policy (NPE, 2004). The curriculum has specified that literacy and communication skills are the fundamental principles of the primary 4 curriculum, and the literacy skill is the emphasis of GTM (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Therefore, the methodology (GTM) addresses one of the core principles of the curriculum. It has been established that English was look upon with suspicions in some part of Nigeria (Bamgbose, 1971). This necessitated the use of schizoglossia and subsequent code-switching in primary schools (NPE, 1977; 1981; 1998 & 2004). The choice of teaching method is determined by situation and learner's belief (Horwitz, 1987; 1988). The adoption of GTM in the primary 4 is in accordance with the learners' belief. Some researchers have acknowledged the relevance of first language in the second language learning, particularly in grammar and vocabulary. (Eubank, 2004; Wakabayashi, 2002 & Ellis, 2012). Based on personal experience as a primary school teacher in Bauchi state of Nigeria, pupils develop interest to a large extend when GTM is used by the teacher and the learning outcome is also positive. Besides, Nigerian learning environment have

appreciated the role of GTM in second language teaching in primary schools (Ahmed & Odiwo, 1999 & NTI, 2007).

6.2 Feasibility of ALM

The ALM used in the curriculum is not feasible in second language teaching in Nigeria, it has been discovered that pupils are unable to use the English in speech even in primary 6 (Attah, 1999). Based on the critical analysis of English Studies Curriculum for primary 4, it has been discovered that there is total dependence on textbooks, little attention to the skill of oral, the activities are teacher-cantered and teaching and learning are mechanically oriented. The methodology has turned most pupils to behave like parrot, using English in a static manner. Pupils only imitate what the teacher does, and there is no attempt to use the language in a dynamic way. Moreover, the interest of the pupils is not talking into consideration and no provision for their initiations in the class; they are restricted to the teacher's directives. Their participation in learning process is less and the atmosphere of learning is artificial e.g. dialogue. Since the methodologies used in the curriculum have failed to ameliorate the situation, particularly in spoken language, the paper recommends for a change of focus from a static theoretical teaching to a dynamic application of language use for skill development.

7. Conclusion and Recommendation

The teaching and learning the English in Nigeria has undergone different stages of development, ranging from missionary, colonial and to the present era. The curriculum reviewed has showcased two methodologies (GTM & ALM). GTM is found to be little bit effective in primary 4 in Nigeria because of the pupils' belief, the feelings of self-identity and the literacy skill found in the method which is one of the fundamental principles of the curriculum. On the other hand, ALM is found to be ineffective because it has failed to meet the target of the curriculum. Therefore, the study recommends for a paradigm shift.

The curriculum should adopt the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) where the goals, objectives, methodology and material will be on the basis of communicative competence as opposed to the total dependence on textbooks. The curriculum planners should make use of newspapers and magazines to enrich the teaching materials, not to substitute the textbooks. Newspaper is a suitable material that can be used to teach the reading comprehension, letter writing, vocabulary, structures, oral and literacy skills. This approach provides activities that are learner-cantered such

as freedom, self-instruction and the actual use of the language in different social context. The current language learning method ‘*whole language*’ should be adopted so as to facilitate the learning. This is in addition to the Content-based Instruction, Task-based Language Teaching, Multiple intelligence and Cooperative Learning. Language is not only about the linguistic structures, but also the social context in which the language is used (Halliday, 1973 in Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Education for all is the Responsibility of all.

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