

Teaching and Learning of English Language Programme in Public Primary Schools in Nigeria: Problems and Ways Forward

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Abstract: English language is one of the core subject offered from the basic education to higher education in Nigeria. The programme is important to the success of students in schools and out of school lives. It is unfortunate that English language programme is plagued with many problems. This article discussed the problems faced by teaching and learning of English language programme in primary schools in Nigeria. Secondary data were used to support the points raised in the article. The secondary data were sourced from print material and online publication by recognized institutions and authors. Inadequate funding of English programmes, insufficient professional English language teachers, inadequate instructional resources, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor capacity development programmes for English language teachers are problems of teaching and learning of English language programmes in Nigerian public primary schools. In order to solve these problems, the paper suggested: adequate funding of English programmes at primary schools, provision of adequate instructional resources, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities and constant training and retraining of teachers of English language in English language programmes.

Keywords: Teaching, Learning, Primary School, English Language Programmes

1.0 Introduction

The Nigerian educational system is made up of basic education, senior secondary school education and higher education. Basic Education is the education given to children aged 0-15 years. It encompasses 0 - 4 Early Child Care and Development Education and 10 years of formal schooling. Early Child Care and Development Education however is segmented into ages 0-4 years, situated in daycare or creches, fully in the hands of the private sector and social development services, while ages 5-6 are within the formal education sector. Basic Education, is provided by the Government, free and compulsory, universal and qualitative. It comprises: 1-year of Pre-Primary, 3 years of lower Primary school and 3 years upper primary school. The primary school education is one of the component of basic education. The National policy on education (2014) defines primary Education as the education given to children aged 6 — 12 years. Osiesi, (2020), observes that primary education, globally, is the basis of formal education. It is the thread that connects other higher levels of learning, developing in young minds the very skills, experiences and knowledge for a tougher and higher pursuit in academics. Through primary education, the art and act of reading and writing acquisitions are necessary skills, attitudes and basic information needed for appropriate adjustment into the society and the world in general is imbibed. This level of education is paramount to the core advancement of many economies, a reason for its inclusion into the Millennium Development Goals of the universal primary education. Various problems ranging from insecurity, illiteracy, religion, violence, ignorance and political servitude in Nigeria for example, can be curbed or eradicated by the aid of primary

education. This has caused most governments (Nigeria included) to make primary education free and declare it universal and compulsory (Kubiat, 2018).

The functions of primary education across Nigeria are: To help learners master the art of reading, writing and performing basic Arithmetic; develop and be of good conduct and behaviour, acquire vital skills and appreciate the worth of manual labour (Osiesi, 2020).

National policy on education (2014), outlines the following as objectives of primary school education in Nigeria: Inculcate permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively, lay a sound basis for scientific, critical and reflective thinking, promote patriotism, fairness, understanding and national unity, instill social, moral norms and values in the child, develop in the child the ability to adapt to the changing environment, and provide opportunities for the child to develop life manipulative skills that will enable the child function effectively in the society within the limits of the child's capability. In pursuance of these objectives: Primary education shall be compulsory, free, universal and qualitative. While the curriculum for primary education displays the importance of Language (indigenous and foreign) education in primary 1-3 and 4 to 6 among other subjects offered in the Nigerian primary schools (NPE, 2014). English language programme is vital for total development of a child.

2.0 Concept of English Language Programme

English language programme is an art programme where grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing are studied for various purposes. English language is the language of education use in Nigerian schools. Thus, the importance of the English language programmes in Nigeria primary schools. The programme is compulsory at all levels of education in Nigeria from Basic schools to tertiary institutions where it is offered as a major subject. English language is an important course in Nigerian educational system.

The objectives of English language programme in Nigeria includes:

1. Building up English language skills and acquisition of communicative competence in secondary schools;
2. Enriching ESL learners' performance through newspapers;
3. Turning the textbook into genuine curriculum materials and not as a sacrosanct text to be used for English language curriculum;
4. Creating an enabling environment within the school premises for the promotion of language learning, the provision of libraries and promotion of activities in and outside the school in order to reinforce the normal efforts of teachers;
5. Taking a more holistic view of a language as an audio-oral–syntactico-lexical complex and so paying greater attention to the teaching and examination of English language in use as opposed to the restricted code English language extracted from the larger corpus for examination purposes only. (Obanya ,2002)

English language programme is a compulsory programme from the basic education to the higher education. Students must meet the programme in every phase of the educational system. Juliana (2017) opines that English is the language of education in Nigeria. It is the language of instruction from upper primary education, through secondary and tertiary education in Nigeria. The state of English as a Second Language in Nigeria coupled with the numerous roles it plays, compels every Nigerian citizen to learn and to speak it. This paper therefore submits that if English language is the medium through which the concepts in education are expressed and acquired, then, it is a primary instrument for human development in Nigeria. English language has not only engineered human development through education, it has also conferred on Nigerians other significant privileges both on the home front and the global scene.

3.0 Challenges facing the Teaching and Learning of English Language Programme in Public Primary Schools in Nigeria

There are many problems facing teaching and learning of English programme in Nigerian primary schools education and these challenges include: inadequate funding of English programmes, insufficient professional English teachers, inadequate instructional resources, inadequate infrastructural facilities, poor capacity development of English teachers in English language programmes and poor students attitudes toward English programmes.

3.1 Inadequate Funding of English Language Programmes

Inadequate funding is one major problem facing the administration of English Programmes at the primary school education in Nigeria. Adequate fund is very important for the administration of English language programmes at the primary schools across the country. It is unfortunate that the annual allocation for the English language programmes at the primary school education is not enough. John (2017) notes that the issue of funding by the government and other relevant authorities has been a major challenge to English language education. The budgetary allocation to the education sector has been grossly inadequate as compared to funding from both developed and some developing countries. In Nigeria, education sector has not received top-most priority in budgetary allocation as it deserves over the years. The inadequate funding of English language education is responsible for shortage of professional teachers, and inadequate supervision and poor performance in English programmes at all levels of education in Nigeria. Ogunode (2020) observes in his study that even at the secondary school level, challenges facing the administration of English Language Programme in Senior Secondary Schools in Abaji Area Council of FCT, Nigeria. The result collected from the study led to the following conclusion that inadequate fund, shortage of professional English teachers, inadequate English language instructional materials, inadequate English laboratory, poor capacity development of English language teachers and poor motivation of English language teachers are the challenges affecting the effective administration of English language Programme in Abaji secondary school.

3.2 Insufficient Professional English Language Teachers

Another challenge preventing effective administration of English programme in the Nigerian primary schools' education is the problem of insufficient professional English language teachers. Many basic schools in the country do not have adequate English teachers and this development is affecting the administration of the programme. The small number of English language teachers is what is responsible for the overcrowding of English classes. This also affects the teachers and students performance. Oluwayemisi (2015) observes that English Language teaching and learning is faced with myriads of challenges ranging from overpopulation to inadequate human power, government inconsistent policies, lacks of essential teaching facilities, students' laissez – faire attitude, mother tongue interference and many others. The highlighted problems are not only common scenarios of the government owned schools but also exist in private institutions, although with little variance. Lack of adequate language specialists as well as interlingual problem are some common features of schools in Nigeria and most parts of Africa.

3.3 Inadequate Instructional Resources

Instructional resources are educational resources used by teachers to deliver lessons and make the presentation simple and for easy comprehension by pupils. Instructional resources in English language includes charts, pictures, English letters, textbooks. Effective teaching and learning of English language require adequate use of instructional resources. It is unfortunate that these English instructional materials are not enough in most Nigerian basic schools and this affects the administration of English programmes in the various educational institutions in the country. Sunday (2007) opines that when we talk of enrichment materials and activities, we mean initiatives either recommended or provided or improvised to support and facilitate robust academic activities in order to achieve desirable educational goals or objectives even beyond school. Such enrichment materials or activities include supplementary textbooks and other instructional materials such as tape-recorder, video tape, camera, pictures, charts, diagrams, discussions, debates, excursions, radio, resource persons, newspapers, magazines, maps, globes,

projectors, films etc. Oluwayemisi (2015) notes that in Nigeria, the teaching and learning of English is majorly done through the use of textbooks, dictionaries, chalkboards, workbooks and posters. Most schools lack modern technological devices like audio and video tapes, language laboratories, textbooks, flash cards, internet facilities, newspapers etc. Thus as a nation, there is need to confront this issue so as to empower the teaching and learning of English. Ajayi (2002:229) adds to the variables of the poor performance in English among the secondary school students, the seeming absence of enrichment materials in the schools nowadays. Same can be said of primary schools in Nigeria.

3.4 Inadequate Infrastructural Facilities

Inadequate infrastructural facilities consist fundamental challenge facing the administration of English programmes in primary schools across the country. Infrastructural facilities refer to those capital infrastructures that aid delivering of teaching, researching and other academic services in the educational institutions. Infrastructural facilities include classrooms, offices, school halls, sport ground, light, water, good roads, ICT facilities etc. Many primary schools in the country do not have enough classes, English language labs, table, chairs and exam halls. Femi (2012) points out that lack of meaningful library and laboratory, qualified teachers, home environmental factors and family backgrounds as well as little participation of parents in the education of their children as the main causes of poor performance in English in Nigeria. Ajayi (2002:229) observes that, at present, many schools do not have libraries, and those who have could not afford the high cost of novels and even where novels are available, they are too few to go round the ever-increasing pupils enrolment due to population explosion in schools. Sadly, some of the most fascinating teaching materials such as the story books have largely been ignored in the teaching and learning in primary schools.

3.5 Poor Capacity Development Programmes for English Language Teachers

Poor human capital development of English teachers is another factors preventing effective administration of English language programmes in primary School education in Nigeria. Many English teachers teaching presently in the Nigerian basic schools are not constantly trained in the modern methods of teaching English language and this affects their performance in their classes as well as the low percentage pass in English language across the country. Tshabalala and Ncube, (2013) are of the view that shortage of well trained teachers, large classes, poorly motivated teachers, ... poorly coordinated supervisory activities, interference of the school system by the civil service, incessant transfers of teachers and principals, automatic promotions of pupils, the negative role of public examinations on the teaching, learning process and inequality in education opportunities all hamper the smooth acquisition of English knowledge. Adekunle (1970) attributes this unabated problem to “the absence of a well-defined objective, the dearth of trained language teachers, ... the use of strangely unrealistic syllabuses and testing devises”. His findings are based essentially on examination-oriented English language curriculum, which has communicative abilities or potentialities as undertones in order to make students functional beyond the academic purposes.

4.0 Ways Forward

In order to solve these problems, the paper suggested: adequate funding of English language programme at primary schools, provision of adequate instructional materials, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, constant training and retraining of teachers of English language in English language Programmes and motivation of students in English Language Programmes

4.1 Adequate Funding of English language Programme at Primary Schools

The government should increase the funding of education especially the funding of English programme at the primary schools. The UNESCO declaration of twenty-six percent (26%) budgetary allocation to the education sector and invariably to English language education, should be given accelerated implementation by the government. The government should also increase the wages and salaries of English language teachers, this becomes necessary because of the tasking and demanding nature of teaching of English.

4.2 Employment of Professional Teachers

The government should employ more professional teachers and deploy them to all the primary schools across the country. Highly qualified and competent English teachers should be employed and deployed to primary schools and the current euphemism of “man knows man” should be discouraged in recruitment and appointment of teachers.

4.3 Provision of Adequate Instructional Resources

The government should provide adequate instructional resources especially language Laboratory fully equipped with internet facilities to teach English to pupils in all primary schools across the country.

4.4 Provision of Adequate Infrastructural Facilities

The government should provide more infrastructural facilities in all the primary schools to allow for effective administration of pupils, teachers in English programmes.

4.5 Constant Training and Retraining of English language teachers in English language Programmes

Teacher training institutions should put up programmes and incentives to encourage many students to read and study English language. Regular capacity-building workshops and professional development programmes for English teachers should be organized. There should be regular language professional development seminars for teachers of English language. They should watch English programmes regularly especially, when they are work free, by listening to English speeches. If possible pupils should be allowed to use internet for learning English.

5.0 Conclusion

The article discussed the challenges facing the teaching and learning of English programme in Public primary schools in Nigeria. The paper identifies; inadequate funding of English programmes, inadequate professional English language teachers, inadequate instructional resources, inadequate infrastructural facilities and poor capacity development programme of English language teachers. In order to solve these problems, the paper suggested: adequate funding of English programme at primary schools, provision of adequate instructional resources, provision of adequate infrastructural facilities and constant training and retraining programme of English language teachers.

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