
THE TEACHER AS FACTOR IN THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

The model of English usage acquired through the educational system has a great impact on the socio-political life of Nigeria since English language is the main medium of instruction in Nigeria schools. It is an aberration for one who claimed to have passed through all the three levels of educational institutions but cannot efficiently use English in communicating his intentions or desires. The incompetence and ineffectiveness exhibited by teachers of English in Nigeria is unarguably synonymous with the quality of their education. This discourse therefore, examines the teacher as a factor in the effective teaching and learning of English. It proffers recommendations toward a more pragmatic and pedagogical teaching of English, for a purposeful and result oriented system of education.

THE TEACHER AS A FACTOR IN THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

The hue and cry over the current poor academic performance in Nigeria could easily be traced to the deplorable state of the teaching and learning of English language in the country. English language is the main medium of instruction through which other subjects is taught from primary schools to all levels of tertiary institutions. According to Barrow and Sander (2003) "education of the highest quality requires teacher of highest quality." This is why a majority of educational policies focus on the role and quality of teachers as no education can rise above the quality of its teachers. The teacher is at the center of the delivery of quality education in any nation. It therefore, becomes imperative to look at the teacher of English as a factor in the effective teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian schools.

The concept of teaching and learning are entwined, inextricable, and reinforcing. They are achieved through a systematic process. Akinpelu (1981:190) comprehensively defines teaching as; "the deliberate effort by the mature experienced person to impart information, knowledge, skills, values and so on to an immature person through a process that is morally and pedagogically acceptable. He further, emphasized that the content has to be worthwhile, the procedure has to be educationally acceptable for an activity to be classified as teaching." Teaching involves setting up an activity to enable somebody learn something which can improve the person's knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Learning on the other hand, involves the organization and the restructuring of experience. It is the process which causes a change in the attitudes, interest, adjustments, skills, beliefs, cognitive structures, insights, mannerisms, gestures, etc. of an individual and it is only a good teacher who takes an eclectic position to bring to fruition each learning process in his classroom.

The need for effective teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian schools is quite inestimable because if the language of instruction is not right or what is taught does not correspond with what was perceived so works are not done properly in schools. Stern (1983) observes that; "the teaching of English language is an activity which is intended to bring about language learning." The teaching of English language is the sole responsibility of the teacher of English language to decide on the 'what and how' the curriculum can be effectively presented in order to elicit and sustain the learners' attention, motivation and effort to learn which is likely to bring about the intended learning in order to avoid the continuous arbitrariness in English words This is what Kyriacou (1991:95) calls "effective teaching." It is against this background that this paper looks into the teacher as a factor in the effective teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian schools.

THE TEACHER AS A FACTOR

In pinpointing the observable traits that make the teacher as a factor in the effective teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian schools a number of variables are difficult to isolate. Among these are:

THE TEACHERS' QUALIFICATIONS

The knowledge of the subject matter in the subject area and the professional teacher's education is very important. Akabogu (2004:56) observes that English language teaching and learning in Nigeria is beset with many problems which include lack of enough qualified teachers of English language especially at primary school level (public and private schools) where teachers are assigned to teach all the school subjects. Most of these teachers have no professional background in English language. In factors that influenced the students' achievement, Hammond (2000) affirms that; "it is the amount of experience of teachers."

The question is, can any teacher effectively teach a subject he/she does not have knowledge of? Hammond (2000:56) in a study conducted to determine the factors that are related to teacher quality and increased students' achievement found that verbal ability, context, knowledge, knowledge behaviours, flexibility, creativity and amount of teaching experience of teachers are quality factors that influenced students achievement among others. Teaching is an art that is geared towards shaping of the behaviour of the learner. Therefore, it is not just easy for one not well trained in the art of teaching to effect a relatively permanent change in the behaviour of learners.

LACK OF INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS/ TEACHING AID MATERIALS

There are various resources available for the effective teaching of English. It is only teachers who demonstrate the appropriate teaching skills that can effectively facilitate learning of English language through instructional methods and teacher made materials to make learning effective. Instructional method is a situation where the teacher employs strategies and materials such as lecturing, discussion, questioning, demonstration and other instructional behavior in order to bring about the desired learning in the students through the available instructional materials such as textbooks, pictures, objects, laboratory, equipment and other types of materials. Okafor (1984:57) sees this as being engage in "an active process of doing and undergoing". It is through this means that

effective learning can occur. For a learner to learn appropriately the instruction must be well modeled and delivers.

INCOMPETENCY

Teachers' competency and quality teaching are the greatest inputs in education. It is needed to ensure the desired quality and standard for the entire Nigerian educational system. A teacher can only teach what he knows. Only the highly competent teacher can give high quality instruction which in turn, will lead to effective teaching and learning of English language. According to Olaitan and Ali (1997), say "competency is the successful performance of task through the use of knowledge, skills, attitudes and judgment. It can also be referred to as the state of being functionally suitable in the performance of duty." As Hassan (2002:35) puts it; "teachers of English must be proficient in English Language in order to teach effectively in schools." The National Board or Professional Teaching Standard (NBPTS) (2002:10) defines quality teaching as the maintenance of high and rigorous standard for what accomplished teachers should know and be able to do. Five competency quality areas are outline as.

- Teachers who are committed to students and their learning.
- Teachers who know the subjects they teach and how to teach those subjects to the students.
- Teachers who are responsible for managing and monitoring students learning.
- Teachers who think systematically about their practice and use of time effectively.
- Also teachers that are members of learning communities

Clark (1995:3) affirms that; teachers can also degrade the quality of through error, laziness, cruelty or incompetence. The teacher of English must be competent and proficient in English language in order to teach the leaner effectively. Adajare (1995) also strongly advocates; "the conscious and methodical teaching of grammar to achieve communicative competence in learners of English since communicative competence is predicated upon grammatical competence."

The kind of incompetence deployed the teaching of spellings, grammar, phonology, lexis and aspects of English language in most Nigerian schools is nauseating. Omole (2008:35) observes that; "the knowledge of English exhibited by many primary and secondary school teachers is indeed appalling, be it in spelling, grammar or pronunciation." This is a great threat to the effective teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian school as it affects the effective acquisition of appropriate the attitude of such teachers of English is a great threat to the effective teaching and learning of English language in Nigerian schools as it affects the effective acquisition of appropriate language skills by the learners. (Good & Grouwa 1977; Akpan, 1996) affirm that; "subject matter competence is very crucial teaching effectiveness and students' performance."

LACK OF COMMITMENT IN TEACHING

Commitment and dedication in terms of total investment of time and effort is paramount to the effective teaching and learning of English language. Today many teachers of English language in Nigerian schools are lazy and have deployed nonchalant attitude towards their work. The social interactive attitude of some English teachers is disgusting. Some engage in code-mixing and code switching with their pupils or students.

Consequently, the acquisition the appropriate language skills become difficult. This situation has been complicated by the precarious situation under which the teacher operates. There are no effective measures put in place to ensure proper teaching and learning of English. Also the tide that has been associated with this profession has been eroded quite considerably, so there is large scale loss of interest and attraction. The teachers are now mere shadow of themselves having lost out in their professional competence and social regards.

NON-AVAILABILITY OF INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

Most schools do not have teacher-made materials. Teaching aids such as laboratory equipment, audio-visual, visual and other types of teaching aids that would enhance effective teaching and learning of English language are lacking in most schools. Joshua (2009:7) observes that; the state of inadequate physical facilities in most schools in the country is painful". It is appalling that the teacher-made materials which are supposed to promote active teaching and learning are lacking in most schools. This situation can be compared with the situation of a carpenter without tools in his workshop. It is only when the teacher employs various strategies, models and available materials such as lecturing discussion, questioning, demonstration and other instructional behaviors that facilitate learning that the desired teaching and learning will be achieved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Aside the few suggestions on the way forward the following recommendations can also help in the present deteriorating teaching standard of English in Nigeria.

- Federal and state ministries of education should come out with a mandatory template guiding the employment of teachers of English at all levels of our education to avoid it being trivialized or politicized. This is to ensure that the employers of teachers of English must get the resourceful persons to conduct special screening in the recruitment of teachers of English in order to get only the professionals into the system.
- Federal and state ministries of education must also ensure that teachers of English at all levels both in private and public schools are sent on regular training such as workshop, seminars, conferences, in-service training etc. this would keep them in touch with the current trends and methods of effective teaching of English language. Ekwutosi (2010:144) lends credence to this when she affirms that; "the quality training teachers received relating to their professional development determine their level of competence and performance in turn."
- All education stake holders in Nigeria must holistically overhaul the outdated instructional materials and provide the modern facilities and materials required for the effective teaching and learning of the main medium of instruction at all levels of our education. They should also desist from building of beautiful empty structures.
- Special regulatory body must be constituted by the federal and state ministries of education to check and stop the idea of a teacher of English employed to teach all aspects of English. This would encourage specialization and for the acquisition of linguistic communicative competence at all levels.

Above all, there need for the teacher of English language to be conscientious and hardworking in the effective teaching of oral, rules and all principles at all levels of education for the attainment communicative competence at all levels of Nigerian education. Akabuogu, (2011:58) lends credence to this when she affirms that; "the teacher needs to improve on their knowledge of speaking skills and the relationship between listening and speaking skills."

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, as teachers of English language, we cannot continue to wring our hands in anguish and pretend about the danger of improper teaching of English language as the main medium of instruction in Nigerian system of education. The fact is the quality of education given in a nation depends on the quality of its teachers. To know a language and to hold a degree in it is one thing; but to teach it effectively is another thing. Let every teacher of English language be pedagogically equipped. The abysmal performance in the only language of instruction in Nigerian schools is a threat to the future of her education and national development. If the Nigerian system of education must live to its expectations, English language at all levels in educational system must be well taught to facilitate the learners speaking, reading and writing skills.

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