

English Language Teaching/ Learning at The Secondary School: A Challenge of Transition from The Primary School

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Abstract:

The problem of teaching and learning in Secondary School is a function of the carried-over shortcomings from primary school. A strong foundation is the bedrock of a fortified framework. This paper highlights the areas of the shortcomings and ways to ameliorate them. It also suggests some methods for teaching and learning of English Language at the Secondary School level.

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Introduction

This study employs the methodological framework as follows:

- (1) Evaluation of the National policy and curriculum on language.
- (2) Review of English syllabus for primary and secondary schools.
- (3) Teaching and learning English in primary and secondary schools.
- (4) General guidelines and solutions.
- (5) Conclusion.

Evaluation of the National Policy and Curriculum on Language

The place accorded the English Language in the National policy is worthy of note. it states that: "Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage, English." Section 3:15 (4)

Functionally, the English Language is the medium of instruction from primary four upward. But it is a notable subject from the first class. Obiakor and Malu (2020) affirm that the English Language is the language of instruction from upper primary school, through secondary school and tertiary education in Nigeria. Malu and Obiakor (2018) stress that this vital role compels everyone in Nigeria to learn and speak the language.

Likewise, the National curriculum was evolved to enhance the viability and fruition of the National Policy. It is aimed at inculcating permanent literacy, numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively. (Section 3:14 (a)). The realization of this enviable objective depends on several important factors such as teachers' competence, learning facilities, class size, and allocation of sufficient time for language teaching. Nwankwo, Omebe, and Anikeze (2019) state that teaching is an interaction between a superior and mature person and a less mature one geared towards improving the knowledge of the latter. Obiakor and Malu (2020) view teaching as a set of actions directed to engender learning. It involves a facilitator, a set goal and a situation. It is an interactive process that involves classroom talk between teachers and pupils. Learning, according to Gagliano, et al (2014) spans from cradle to grave through the interaction between man and his environment. It could be the resultant effect of habituation, classical conditioning, operant conditioning or even from play.

Review of English Language Syllabus for Primary and Secondary Schools

The English Language syllabus for the primary school outlines contents, activities and methods for teaching based on four language skills viz: (i) Listening, (ii) Speaking, (iii) Reading and (iv) Writing. A perusal of the content materials evinced that it is set for the overall development of the child's accurate speaking skills, ability to listen and understand the speech of others, as well as the development of oral and writing creativity. The different skills are variously structured as follows:

- (a) The listening and speaking skills are directed towards role-playing, role relationships, structural patterns in oral usage, e.t.c. Adejimola and Ojuolape (2013) assert that pupils'/students' listening abilities can be strengthened through their involvement in such activities as storytelling, drills in conversations, dictations, and so on. Students should be trained in notetaking, word translation, generation of ideas expressed and development of the ability to recall information. Good pronunciation ability can be developed through enriching interactive classroom activities such as repetition and modelling. Oyinloye (1999) clarifies speaking as the production of meaningful utterances geared towards the expression of ideas, thoughts and emotions which entails correct pronunciation, appropriate grammar

and contextual social variation. Filade et al (2019) posit that model speaking by the teacher is seen as a good means of integrating the correct speaking skill in an average classroom setting. (b) Reading skill is inculcated through training in reading comprehension passages, recognition of letters, reading simple stories, e.t.c. Reading, according to Leedy (2014) entails gleaning the thoughts of the writer as coded in the written text.

(c) The writing skill is practised through forming letters of the alphabet, ability to spell words, construct sentences, use of punctuation marks, formal and informal writing, e.t.c. Olowoyeye (2022) sees effective writing, not as acquired talent, but as an art that is taught or culturally transmitted in a formal educational setting. The skills in writing must be practised and experienced

The appropriateness of these content materials is not in question. But the integration, utilization and realization of them is the Crux of the matter.

The Junior Secondary school curriculum embodies content materials on (1) Vocabulary development, (2) Comprehension: listening and reading, (3) Structures (4) Spoken English (5) Writing, and (6) Literature.

The criteria for the selection of these content materials are to inculcate in the student not only linguistic and communicative competence but also the ability to appreciate, with a critical sense, literary materials in English. This answers for the inclusion of literature.

The curriculum expressly states the objectives as :

"to promote a systematic development of both the language skills and the literary knowledge that are considered essential for effective use of English in oral and written communication as well as learning other subjects in the curriculum."

The curriculum is geared toward building on the basic foundation laid down at the primary school level. But problems are bound to arise when the syllabus is not well implemented at the primary school level. This could be a result of factors like time constraints, unstable or irregular school calendars, frequent teachers' strikes, lack of teachers, and so on.

Teaching and Learning English in the Primary and Secondary Schools

It is axiomatic that in any learning situation, the teacher is the pace-setter. Likewise, the learner's factor cannot be overlooked. The planners of the curriculum had anticipated some possible or eventual problems in its implementation.

Quoting the curriculum commentary: "The syllabus designers are aware of some of the difficulties that are likely to be encountered in the implementation... the problem of class size which makes it impossible for teachers to pay sufficient attention to individual pupils as recommended in every unit... the problem of providing the pupils with ample reading materials..." (Section 8: 10, 20, J.S.S. Curriculum, N.E.R.C., 1983). Indeed, an average public primary school classroom is overpopulated, thereby making individualization impossible. The proposal of N.E.R.C. to produce materials, recorded cassette tapes and players, textbooks, etc. are yet to be fully implemented.

The problem of teaching and learning English in primary school is, to some extent, the teacher himself. This is because of

1. The poor training received by the teacher.
2. The teacher's incompetency or lack of mastery of the subject.
3. The poor class management due to class size and heterogeneity.
4. Lack of individualized teaching technique.
5. Poor and confusing methodology, over-usage of rote memorization and regurgitation.
6. Poor incentives and delayed payment of salaries.

7. Lack of study grants and in-service training

The students learning in primary school is also impaired because of such factors like:

1. Students' differences in background.
2. The interference of the mother- tongue.
3. The negative influence of the environment.
4. Lack of sufficient practice, drills and exercises due to class size.
5. Inability to possess appropriate and helpful textbooks.

In summation, Williams (1981) listed the various variables influencing the methodology of the English Language in Nigeria to include

1. Multi-lingual problem;
2. the negative influence of the mother tongue;
3. the problem with textbooks and
4. the teachers' factor.

Those factors, hamper the acquisition of basic skills at the When these primary school. shortcomings and under-learning problems are thus carried over to the secondary school, the issue is much more compounded.

Teaching and Learning English in the Secondary School

The problem of transition from primary to secondary school is quite a vital factor affecting teaching and learning English in secondary school.

It has been discovered that students admitted "raw" into secondary school are introduced directly to the syllabus. There is a dire need of assessing and analyzing these "greenhorns". This will assist in discovering their carried-over shortcoming.

Remedial teaching becomes highly imperative. This will enhance the provision of necessary background experience where they are deficient.

Likewise, their experiences could be enriched by practical exercises, drills, excursions to essential learning situations e.g. the zoo, museums, Oral industries and conversations, debates, and impromptu speeches should be introduced and practised. When the pupils have been adequately coached, the integration of the syllabus becomes meaningful and viable.

It has been discovered that, despite remedial teaching, teaching and learning in secondary school are still defective. Students are found to have problems acquiring the skills outlined in the syllabus. In reiteration, the syllabus outlined content materials on (1) vocabulary development, (2) Comprehension, (3) Structures (4) Spoken English (5) Writing and (6) Literature

Secondary school students have problems, especially with Spoken English. They have difficulties in the production of such sounds and words alien to their mother tongue. These include phonemes like /0/, /3:/, /a/, /v/, /f/ e.t.c.

For example: /0/ as in through /0/ is mispronounced true /tru:/; girl /geil/, as/gail/; cut /kot/;; very /veri/, as fery /feri/; e.t.c.

They also have problems with stress and intonation.

Students also have been observed to have problems with English Structures. These include word order, sequence, agreement of subject and verb and tense construction. They are also discovered to be deficient in the appropriate usage and functions of punctuation such as commas, question marks, apostrophes, and so on.

General Guidelines and Solutions

The teaching and learning of English in secondary school could be ameliorated if some basic guidelines and suggested solutions are followed.

Tim (1981) suggested some strategies. These include (1) provision of necessary background experience (2) diagnosing students' problems with reading in English (3) Usage of appropriate materials and methodology, (4) Planning for the varying levels of achievement of the students; (5) developing students' interest and motivation for English; and (6) accepting the child as he/she is.

These strategies are enviable but not exhaustive. The teaching and learning could also be further improved if other steps could be taken. These include:

1. At the expense of individualized teaching, teachers could group students according to their problems and ability.
2. Teachers could pair up the students during drills or oral production practices
3. Students should be encouraged to develop a word bank and refer to the dictionary for the meanings of new words they come across.
4. Teachers should be painstaking and conscientious in marking and correcting students' errors.
5. Teachers should endeavour to use the teaching syllabus or curriculum rather than the Examination syllabus.
6. Teachers should give a clear and comprehensive explanation of the grammatical rules taught through copious examples.
7. The teacher should teach towards the acquisition of linguistic competence through role-playing, oral discourse, debates, impromptu speeches, and so on.
8. The teachers should endeavour to consult and combine the use of many textbooks and select appropriate materials.

Conclusion

It is highly imperative and urgent that the problem of teaching and learning English in secondary school be nipped in the bud at the early stage. This will forestall further compounding and general deficiency in linguistic and communicative competence. The solution must be addressed at the grassroots. Teachers in primary school should brace up in their teaching of the English Language.

Aliyu (1980) discovered that many primary school teachers have poor language behaviour, confusing and conflicting methodology, and switch to their mother tongue indiscriminately. The present drive to have a National Certificate in Education as the basic qualification of teachers in primary school is hoped to produce a higher standard.

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