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# THE ROLE OF THE LANGUAGE CURRICULUM IN TEACHER EDUCATION: A FOCUS ON THE NCE GENERAL ENGLISH

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## Abstract

*Whereas language curriculum is a set of learning objectives intended to cause desirable linguistic behaviour among a target group of learners, teachers education suits learning experience to the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains of the learners in order that their behaviour can be positively modified. The designer and producer of a language curriculum require adequate pedagogical exposure, so as to select appropriate learning experiences, just as the teacher trainer needs considerable communicative competence to effectively perform in the classroom. "Use of English" course of the Nigerian Colleges of Education is a language curriculum central to the Nigerian Certificate <sup>in Education</sup>. The focus of this paper, therefore, is the "Use of English" course in the NCE programme.*

## Conceptual Background

A language curriculum may be defined as a set of learning objectives meant to cause desirable linguistic behaviour among a target group of learners. It is a tool to be employed by someone who is as much a language specialist as he is a teacher. The implementor of any curriculum must be aware of the changing nature of the society, and capable of reflecting noticed changes in his implementation. According to Ihebuzor and Lawal (1990;1995) he should adapt the learning experience he selects to the nature of the society in which he operates because, as society changes, the individual learner that contacts the selected experiences changes. The learner's aspirations, hopes, and pretences should be well provided for in a language curriculum (Tyler, 1949).



As such a language curriculum does not need to be designed and produced for language specialists alone. For example, it may be meant for bankers, insurers, the political class, the military, and mechanics. There can also be a language curriculum for implementation on learners who would turn out to be teachers of disciplines other than language. A language curriculum may be meant for teachers-in-training, who will graduate to teach language specifically. The last two categories of curriculum consumers may also be deemed to be the targets of Teacher Education programme in which learners' behaviours are to be so carefully modified that they turn out to be competent enough to modify the behaviours of younger other learners (NCCE, 1991). Learner teachers have needs which should be identified and met, if their programme is to be worthwhile. A study of such needs would reveal that some are linguistic because the crux of the classroom practice which they are to assume soon as well as the training they are receiving, is communicative competence. Successful classroom encounter rests on the possession and actual utilization of effective language skills by the teacher and his learners. Thus the good Teacher Education Programme must contain the language competent.

A strong language curriculum for teachers should set up objectives that would help in meeting the communicative needs of teacher-learners beyond the classroom. In setting up such objectives, the teacher that would pursue them must be involved. Tyler (1949) recommends a central place for the implementor of any curriculum, so that he may have gained considerable insight into the objectives of the curriculum before attempting to implement it. Although Obanya (1980) opines that the contribution of the teacher to the curriculum he implements depends on the degree of centralization of curriculum. He agrees with Tyler (1949) by admitting that:

For the teacher to implement a centrally planned curriculum package successfully, he has to understand the objectives of such a package, and should be able to adapt the most appropriate methods,

materials, content and learning experiences needed for its successful implementation. He should, in addition, be capable of assessing the efficacy of everything in the package (p.27).

Most teachers specialize in specific subjects. A teacher of language who knows something about curriculum development would be able to help the growth not only of his subject area, but also the entire school system. His teaching would aid the overall development of the learner. In selecting learning experiences, he bears in mind the success of the educational system and the larger society.

The role of language curriculum in the preparation of teachers of other disciplines has been elucidated by Mills (1979). According to him, language laboratory analyses of learners' speeches could reveal problem areas and enhance classroom learning across disciplines. Playbacks of recorded speech could aid memories of learners, sensitize the teaching learning process, and save time:

**Recording the lessons, discussions, meeting, interviews of all kinds man-management techniques (such as issuing instructions or handling men under various circumstances) can be put to good use in training instructors, supervisors or foreman. The recordings can be used in technique or to eradicate faults (P. 173-174).**

Thus it can be seen that two concepts - 'teacher education programme' and 'language curriculum' are mutually related. Each prepares materials used by the other.

## Objectives and Functions of Language Curriculum

At this point, it may be pertinent to look more closely into the objectives and functions of language curriculum. They draw from the objectives of other disciplines, including teacher education. Emejulu (1991) considers language to be an important aspect of human intellect, and submits that its acquisition and development has implications for learning generally. One objective of language curriculum is entrenching a continuous and spiral programme for the articulation of instruction in skills of listening, speaking, writing and reading (Ihebuzor and Lawal 1995). Unoh (1985) considers these four skills of language as essentials of human learning and development, and recommends that they be vigorously pursued. The study of the skills can lead to a general understanding of the roles of language and language skills in various types of learning. According to Emejulu (1991) and Mills (1979), a careful implementation of language experiences in class can reveal unique problems among learners. There are factors other than low intelligence, inadequate facilities, and poor motivation that may account for non-learning at any educational stage. Low Language power can lead to bad teaching and deadened learning: it might prevent a language teacher from suiting language skills to situation, and it may not enable him take appropriate steps to correct a bad learning situation before it gets worse.

Another objective of language curriculum is developing and promoting students' knowledge of and insight into the nature of language. A teacher who is unaware of the process of language acquisition by the child is not likely to communicate learning experiences successfully to that child. Child language is a real issue that has to be properly addressed if there must be a <sup>meaningful</sup> classroom encounter.

Of this, Otes (1979) asserts:

**An adult who knows his language possesses an adequate set of rules which constitutes its grammar. A child who grows up in a community of adult speakers is faced with the task of constructing for himself a similar set of rules that will enable him both to**



understand and speak the language that surrounds him (p. 127).

Thus the process of language acquisition by the learner should interest teacher education. Chomsky (1979) has made a considerable attempt to demystify language acquisition by the child. He maintains that any child has been born with developed communication skills that enable him systematically learn and regularly use the language of his environment. The child and his surrounding adults are exposed to the most general form of the grammatical rules of the language they share. According to Chomsky (1979), the main principles of the structure of the language are so universally found that they are engrained in the genetic system of the speakers.

That mentalistic view of language, taken by Chomsky (1979), has been modified by behaviourists like Brown and Bellugi (1979) who assert that apart from his innate communicative skills, a child imitates his environment. It now appears generally agreed (Bruner, 1979) that internal and external <sup>pastors</sup> influence the development of language.

Similarly, a good language curriculum is out to foster an understanding of the inter-relationships between <sup>speech</sup> oral and writing, writing is learnt much later in life (usually through the school), and is considered by Hills and Dody (1988) to be the most difficult of language skills. The older the learner, the more his writing tasks. In life outside school, he relies more on the oral than the written form of communication. How the learner writes and speaks must matter to the language curriculum for the teachers in training.

Moreover, the language curriculum should provide insight into the inter-disciplinary potentialities of the language involved. Language use by teachers in training need to be functional across discipline. Olajide (1991) believes that learners use language in similar ways across disciplines, although emphasis varies. Exposing teachers in training to the application modes of language across disciplines can make functional.

Above all, the dynamic language curriculum seeks to encourage learners to initiate and execute independent enquires and studies. The

Nigerian society craves for technological, political and economic breakthrough which is only possible by encouraging education for creativity. Teachers of all disciplines should be able to encourage their learners to use language creativity.

If the foregoing objectives of language curriculum appear relevant to teacher education, an attempt, should be made to relate them to a specific teacher education programme in Nigeria.

#### The Example of General Studies Education (GSE) English curriculum in National Certificate in English Programme.

The General Studies Education English, a course that is compulsory for all students in their first two years, possibly well illustrates the problems that a good language curriculum may encounter, even in a carefully thought out teacher education programme. According to the National Policy in Education (FGN, 1981), the National Certificate in Education (henceforth NCE) is to be the least teaching qualification in Nigeria. And, to ensure uniform standard of practice among the awarding Colleges of Education, the Federal Government set up the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE, 1990).

One of the goals of NCE programme is to inculcate in teachers the ability to communicate effectively (NCCE 1990:1). In order to actualize this goal, the programme integrates a General Studies Education package which philosophy is to offer 'the potential for bridging the gaps in human knowledge, thereby enhancing the level of communication among men' (NCCE 1991:8). There is, therefore, a communication skills component made up of four courses coded GSE 101 - 104, and titled Language and Communication Skills 1, through 4.

The mainstay of the courses are English Language experiences grammar, reading, vocabulary, writing, listening, speech and study skills. The GSE curriculum appears spiral and continuous as recommended by Ihebuzor and Lawal (1995) and Tyler (1949). Olajide (1994) has described the curriculum as being relevantly ambitious.



By National Policy on Education (FON, 1981), NCE graduates should man the Junior Primary School. Such graduates must have possessed sufficient language skills to make them communicate effectively, not only with their colleagues on the field, but also their learners.

### Problems

However, there are many factors working against the complete success of GSE English curriculum. The problems are instructional socio-psychological, and sometimes political. The curriculum is expected to be implemented during the first two years of NCE programme which does not seem to offer the students enough opportunities to learn and use English under the guidance of teachers who are supposed to be experts.

Again, the number of hours officially allocated to GSE English on the timetables of most colleges are insufficient for a course that seems quite important a GSE course two hours that can be fixed anywhere in the week, and lasts only one semester. The situation leads to perfunctory treatment of certain topics, and utter neglects of others.

Then, GSE English curriculum does not accord a special place to library experiences. Perhaps the enthronement of GSE 108, a course designated library skills tempted the NCCE not to feature library experiences that would have helped the teachers-in-training to utilize language in locating, collating, storing and retrieving information in GSE 101 to 104. That learners may transfer GSE 108 experience to English and vice versa does not appear a strong excuse for the non-presence of the former in the latter. This is not to say that all the colleges have qualified librarians to provide the needed experiences to the teacher-learners.

There is also the issue of inadequate instructional facilities. Many teachers of GSE are untrained teachers and may be able to modify the linguistic behaviour of their learners successfully. They are unable to reflect the changing nature of the Nigerian society by the experiences they select. Also, there are aspects of the curriculum that could require special funding that the college may not be in a position to make available.

Moreover, the attitude of many students to GSE English does not seem to show the importance of the courses. Many do not attend lectures regularly, claiming not to be out to major in English. Even, those who major in English take GSE English courses for granted. The result is that most of them end up not being properly influenced by the courses. Their written and spoken communication remains poor, which they now transfer to the Junior Secondary and Primary Schools that they man. The policy that GSE courses should not prevent the students from graduating, provided 'they pass any three of the nine courses in the series' (NCCE 1090.8) does not seem to improve the situation.

Teacher and learner factors are compounded with the attitude of the government to education. Nigeria's educational philosophy (FGN 1981) seems elegant, but requires great funding to actualize. At times, government behaves as if education is not the capatone of national integration and development. Teachers' salaries do not cone forth regularly, resulting in strikes that last several months, with students' losing across board. In their examination of the attitude of the Nigerian government to language curriculum, Ihebuzor and Lawal (1995) observe that government had not demonstrated enough practical commitment. The foregoing problems also beset the curriculum of NCE major English for Primary Education

### Prospects

The issue of inadequate periods for GSE English could be addressed by every College of Education extending the curriculum to the third year. The additional experience would increase teacher-learners' communicative competence in English enhance their pre-qualification and post-qualification performance. English seems to have come to stay in Nigeria: it is the language of law, politics, commerce, religion, mass communication and education. Thus its development should be taken with all seriousness.

Government, college authorities, student bodies, and the larger society should join hands to invigorate language curriculum in Teacher Education Programme. They should individually and collectively provide the funds that the curriculum may require. Teacher training with improved

communication skills will be better able to train younger Nigerians to become relevant members of the society they graduate.

Also, the government, teachers and larger society could sponsor adjoining programmes to sensitize the teacher-in-training to English language curriculum, by which such teachers in training can cultivate healthier attitude to English and other subjects in NCE programme. English language teachers may also organize workshops, seminars and conferences for NCE graduate teachers to expose them to the latest language practices, thereby promoting their English language performances in all disciplines. Adolescent learners, such as found in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools in Nigeria, need teachers who understand their communicative inadequacies, and supply the feedback that is needed.

### Conclusion

Language curriculum plays a paramount role in Teacher Education. English is the official medium of communication in Nigeria. Because the teacher needs it to impart learning experiences to learners successfully, the development of English in NCE or any other Teacher Education programme should receive genuine attention. The implementors of, say, the GSE English curriculum should appreciate its various problems and harness all resources to make it have the desired washback effects. Language curriculum is a veritable tool for the implementation of the curriculum of other subjects in Teacher Education curriculum provides insight into the minds of learners, including those intending to be teachers.

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