

## Quality Assurance For English Language Teacher Production For The Universal Basic Education (UBE)

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### **Abstract**

*Education is accepted as a very powerful instrument of change. Language has been defined as the tool of tools in education. English language is here seen as being central to the Nigerian education process because other subjects in the curriculum utilize it. If this be the case, then the need to promote quality in the production of English teachers is paramount. This can be done by ensuring adequate production of the right caliber of people through seminars, workshops and conferences and teacher upgrading programmes. The focus of this paper is on the need for quality assurance in English teacher production through quality training and retraining. Ways of doing this were discussed and recommendations made.*

### **Introduction**

Education is a powerful instrument of change. In various parts of the world, education is seen as the most dynamic instrument for achieving national development. It is the same in Nigeria where education stands out as the most important tool for national development. This is highly rated in the National Policy on Education (FRN: 2004):1 which stated that the Federal Government has adopted education as the instrument 'par excellence' for achieving national development. Education is therefore seen as an avenue for preparing the young for the task of successful living in society. In describing education as an instrument for national development, the policy further includes "The formulation of ideas, their integration of national development and the interaction of persons and ideas" (P.6) as parts of aspects of education. In section 4, subsection C, the FRN (FGN 2004:7) includes that "every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal opportunities". It therefore came as no surprise when Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) scheme in September 1999 at Sokoto. The UBE was also a follow-up to the 1990 Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (EFA) by 2000.

The EFA project emphasized basic education that is able to equip learners with fundamental skills for living in the society. Nigeria was a signatory to this pact and the UBE launching was a positive response to the call for

education for all. Thus, UBE was welcomed by Nigeria and the outside world with open arms but then the UBE has its own implications. It heralded:

- A rapid increase in student population.
- The increased need for quality teachers in the right quantity in various fields.
- The need for rapid infrastructural development.
- The need for restructuring of the curriculum.

Of all these, the teacher is central to the success of the UBE scheme because He, or She is the implementer of the programme and his position cannot be compromised. Tahir (2005:1) argues that if the UBE is to furnish learners with the basic foundation to function properly and develop in the society, then it requires a core of highly qualified teachers who are equipped with desirable knowledge, skill, competencies and commitment, and are empowered to perform their multiple roles in the classroom, school and community in a truly professional manner. Tahir further maintains that teachers are the most critical factors in the educational system as the quality of the educational system in any country is reflected by the quality of men and women who serve as teachers. Adesokan (2000) agrees with the above position when in summary he says that the teacher is the spark and key man in the drive to progress in the educational enterprise. Therefore, the need to invest a lot in teacher production and to, in addition maintain continued professional development for teachers.

### **The Role of Language in Education**

Language has been defined as the “tool of tools” in education and even other human experiences. Dewey (1934) who made the assertion above went further to argue that language is a mechanical go-between that conveys thoughts, observations, and ideas that have prior and independent existence. Languages are like pipes. They conduct words, thoughts, ideas, experiences, feelings, etc to and from the ‘tanks’ in human existence. The Federal Government of Nigeria appreciates language as a means for promoting interaction and national cohesion. This is stated in FRN (2004:10) where it stipulates that every child apart from learning English must learn the language of the immediate environment as well as one of the three Nigerian languages: Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba. In lower basic education, English language is studied like any other core subject, but is as from upper primary three the medium of instruction as well as a core subject. The critical importance of English language in the Nigerian education process hinges on the fact that other subjects in the school curriculum utilize English language; and the extent to which someone can learn other subjects depends on the extent to which one can master the English language which is the language of education. At present, the society is

undergoing rapid transformation vis-à-vis the new millennium goals. These changes started since the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> war in 1945. With the dawn of the new millennium, the information age and globalization, it is imperative that the English teacher must be well re-positioned to cope with challenges in the technology-driven world. Since English language is the key to international currencies of technology and commerce, this development exerts a lot of pressure on the English language teacher in order to deliver the required goods appropriately. (Ene 2002). For the teacher to be able to do this, he must be knowledgeable in its content area and as well possess the pedagogic skills to help him impart the necessary knowledge to learners.

This leads to the crucial inquiry into the following:

- What types of teachers are needed to handle the English language lessons at different levels of the UBE?
- What competencies are required for effective teaching of English language?
- What measures are put in place to ensure quality assurance in the teaching of English language?
- What types of English language teachers are needed for a successful English language UBE programme?

English language has been seen above to be central to the Nigeria education system. It is the language of instruction; other subjects in the school curriculum utilize it. Hence the question; what type of teachers are needed to handle the English language for a successful UBE becomes pertinent. In answer to the question one may say competent teachers are the type needed. Competence refers to the ability to do something well. Therefore, to be professionally competent, a teacher needs to be well educated in his content area and in teaching pedagogy. This is what the director general of UNESCO, Matsura (2001:7) meant when he stated that;

*It is vital to harness the available human resources and new technological development for the benefit if basic education in order to serve the underserved, to reach the unreached and to improve the quality of teaching and learning.*

One cannot give what one has not got. For a person to educate others, the person must be well educated. The English language teacher must have acquired sound training that equips him in the content area. Knowledge of the subject matter is of paramount importance so that the teacher can exude confidence and be in a position to lead the learners. He must possess the requisite qualification.

Lack of adequate knowledge of subject matter creates problems of poor teaching and learning. This negatively affects productivity. The quality of education generally is measured by its productivity. A sound and professionally qualified English language teacher is able to influence his learners positively. He is their model especially for English language. If the teacher is not competent, very great damage is done. Many students already have a phobia for studying English language, if therefore the teacher is not academically sound the already low morale may sink even lower, and this will not augur well for the UBE programme. Of course, it will affect quality assurance. The government needs to put in place enough measures to train, retain and produce highly qualified English language teachers because the complexity of language learning demands that the teacher should have different methods at his disposal and a number of skills at his command. English is our lingua franca and the language of general communication which is used daily at work, school, and learning. Therefore, enough qualified English language teachers must be produced and made available to guarantee the quality of UBE products.

Apart from sound knowledge of subject matter, another very important prerequisite is the issue of training. There is no doubt that training has a positive effect on the teaching of the English language. To support this, Imo, P. C. 2001 reported and maintained that many liberal arts professors are unprepared professionally. They know little about adopting their instructions to individual differences and typically ignore sound principles.

Agwu (2002) further observed that graduate teachers of the English language showed greater efficiency than their untrained counterparts. There is no doubt that teaching to the untrained graduate is often viewed less seriously and from a narrow perspective. This is because such English teachers are not trained. They see English language lessons as beginning and ending with reading and the answering of questions. They put aside methods of teaching reading, reading techniques, reading comprehension, grammatical structures and syntax, details of spoken English, etc.

Therefore, knowledge of subject matter alone is not very important. Although Fafunwa (1967) stated that knowledge of the subject matter is the most important qualification a teacher should possess. But most recently Ciwar (2007) states emphatically that for the teacher to be registered and recognized in Nigeria, he must know the subject matter very well; be able to use professional practices and techniques, and be able to compete with other professionals worldwide. The nature of the English language and its international use demands that English language teachers involved in the UBE be able to cope with current practices of teaching, to lay a good foundation at the primary school level. This is to enable pupils master the language for future life long education. The foundation needs to be laid at the primary school level because it is the beginning of the pupils' basic education.

Apart from academic qualifications and training, the teacher must have a cheerful disposition towards his job before the learners and possess other competencies vital to the success of the system. As Maduwesi (2005:51) put it this way:

*The personality characteristics of teachers of middle childhood learners are expected to include activeness, empathy, sympathy, initiative, self-control, insight, vision, love of and concern for children, cheerfulness, fairness, sincerity, and firmness, as well as keen interest in assisting others to learn among others.*

These highlight the basic skills necessary for a teacher to be effective.

### **Quality Assurance in English language teacher Production**

In Nigeria, teacher production is structured to equip teachers for effective performance of their duties. The proper handling and successful execution of such duties will ensure the success of the UBE. The professional English language teacher production is the duty of the following institutions:

- a. Colleges of education.
- b. Faculties of Education of Universities.
- c. Institute of Education of Universities.
- d. National teachers' institutes.
- e. Schools of Education in Polytechnics.
- f. National institute for Nigerian Language, (NINLAN).
- g. National Mathematical Centers (NMC) (FRN 2004:40).

Although there are several of these above named institutions, producing English language teachers on full time and part time basis, there is the problem of inadequacy of teachers. The minimum qualification for entry into the English language teaching profession is the Nigerian Certificate in Education.(NCE) (NPE 2004:59) but there are today TCII teachers in the system.(NTI 2004).

The teacher-pupil ratio is put by NPE (2004:16) to be 1:35, but that is not the case in many schools. There is population explosion due to the UBE. More effort is needed to beef up pre-service English language teachers to contain with the number of schools for the UBE. The question of availability of enough qualified English language teachers in their chosen field is vital to the success of the UBE. Even now, shortages are experienced. According to Ene (2006) many private schools and rural public schools have resorted to engaging community or PTA teachers to augment the list of existing English language teachers. But this

class of teachers ends up doing more harm than good. This class of teachers is referred to as 'cheaters' by Ibe Bassey (2005) who lamented that it is only in the teaching profession that non-professionals are allowed to perform professional jobs. It must be noted that the use of non-professionals to teach the English language is contrary to the stipulation of the national policy on education which advocates that all teachers in the educational system be professionally trained and that teacher education programmes be structured to equip teachers for the effective performance of their duties. FRN (2004:39).

So if English language teachers are generally in short supply, and the shortage, is acute following the population explosion of pupils and many of those available lack requisite qualification for teaching the English language at the various primary school levels, then the UBE programme stands to be scuttled, except something is done.

Again, the quality of those produced leave a lot to be desired judging from their performance during teaching practice. More drastic measures needs to be put in place so that teacher production in Nigeria will approximate global standards. Another type of training is that provided through in-service programmes. The Federal/State governments have organized some programmes through the ministries or their agents to beef up the quality of practicing English language teachers. They include:

- Seminars, workshops, and conferences
- The Special Teachers Upgrading Programmes (STUP) by NTI
- The Millennium Development Goals in Education by NTI MDGE
- The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) by NTI in collaboration with the British Council.

The erstwhile Minister of Education Obiageli Ezekwesili had said that the professional teacher Products of the Nigerian Education system must be globally competitive Ciwar (2007). To achieve this, the registrar for the Teacher Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN) in his address on the inauguration of TRCN put it thus: "Teachers require constant refresher courses not only to take advantage of the constant changes in the society, but also because of other factors. Some of these include-poor quality initial teacher education and prolonged period during which CPD for teachers was not available. Such ugly situations depict an English language teaching force that lacks the full grasp of modern pedagogical concepts, themes, theories, principles and practice. All these have put Nigerian English language in grave danger". Therefore, the Federal Ministry of Education through agencies has commenced the organization of programmes to enhance the professional development of teachers. Such agencies are TRCN, NUT, ANCOSS, NTI, etc. Some of them

are for the acquisition of updating of general pedagogical skills while others are designed to capture subject areas.

### **The CPD for English Language Teachers.**

The Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for English language teachers is an in-service programme for English language teachers organized by the NTI in collaboration with British Council. This programme offers the most current pedagogical skills in language teaching. These range from classroom management techniques, supervision techniques and the English language e-teaching and learning techniques.

But the programme is at present suffering some defects:

- The programme has low patronage because it is not enjoying government sponsorship. Many English language teachers who gained admission into the programme could not avail themselves of its opportunities because they could not afford the school fees and procurement of laptop and computer sets inimical to the programme.
- The number of English language teachers receiving its training is very minimal. Therefore, the effect or impact is small.

It is important to note that the CPD is a very good programme that can be of great value to English language teachers in particular and to the educational system in general.

The English language teachers' role is dual in nature. They must teach the English language in such a way that the learners, who are learning the English language as a second language, overcome their difficulties. And secondly, they must teach it in such a way that they can use it to learn other subject.

### **Recommendation**

In the light of the above discussions, it became necessary to make some recommendations to promote and safe-guard the teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria. This will in turn ensure the quality and success of the UBE English language programme. The recommendations are;

1. Teachers generally and English Language teachers in particular should take a qualifying exam to qualify them to practice in the Nigerian educational system. The examination should cover subject matter and pedagogical skills.
2. The CPD for English language teachers should be made free and within the reach of many English language teachers.
3. The CPD should offer more opportunities to teacher at both primary and secondary school level.

4. Faculties of Education, departments of education and other institutions of higher learning should organize and review their language teacher education programmes so as to meet up with the UBE challenges.
5. English Language Teachers' Associations must liaise with language teachers in the Ministry of Education to organize programmes aimed at promoting quality teaching and learning of the English Language.

### Conclusion

The issue of quality assurance is basic to the success of the UBE. The place of the English language teacher in the UBE scheme cannot be over-emphasized. Since English language is Nigeria's second language and also the language of education, there is absolute need for concerted effort to be put in the production of English language teachers to operate the program. The CPD for language teachers should as well be encouraged and improved upon in order to achieve quality assurance. Quality English Language teacher production is paramount to the success of the UBE.

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