

## Towards Effective Implementation of the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) Curriculum in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

One defect that is easily noticed among some students of university, polytechnic or college of education in Nigeria in contemporary time is their inability to communicate effectively in both spoken and written English even though they are taught English for Academic Purposes (EAP) either in form of "Use of English" or "General English" depending on the institution before they graduate. Linguistic scholars have considered the defect as one of the major factors responsible for poor academic performance among some students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In recognition of this fact, this paper primarily reviewed the state of affairs with regard to the implementation of the EAP curriculum in tertiary institutions and pointed out some of the anomalies. The paper, however, highlighted some measures considered to be adequate and appropriate for the effective implementation of the EAP curriculum in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

### 1. Introduction

In order to meet up the changing needs of man and society, the curriculum designers at all levels of education have continued to review curricular and introduce innovations. At the tertiary level of the education system in Nigeria, one of such innovations is the inclusion of General Studies in the curricular. According to (NCCE, 1991), the innovation is aimed at enabling students to appreciate the interrelationship among disciplines in an integrated world, which is fast becoming one big village, and therefore, offer the potential for bridging the gaps in human knowledge, thereby preparing the students to meet the challenges of the changing world adequately.

General Studies is multi-faceted, cutting across various disciplines. One of the branches is the English for Academic Purposes (EAP). EAP is an English programme referred to as either "Use of English" or "General English" in universities, polytechnics, and education college in Nigeria. The courses are made compulsory for all freshmen in tertiary institutions irrespective of one's area of specialization, and it is expected that one must show evidence of passing the courses before graduation. The inclusion of the EAP in the General Studies curriculum aims to equip the students with the language skills required to cope with the demands of their studies in their various departments and institutions (Adindu, 1998). The inclusion became absolutely necessary because it was discovered, for instance, "that the freshman entered the university too poorly equipped to use and understand English adequately for purposes of university work. He read the textbook laboriously, his handling of basic English structures was faulty, and his use of vocabulary imprecise" (Boardi, 1981, p. vii).

From all indications, the English language has been found to be indispensable in our education process. For one thing, it is the language of instruction; also, the textbooks used at all levels of education, to a large extent, are written in English. Above all, all educational activities such as teaching, seminars, conferences, workshops, researches, symposia, debates, laboratory experiments, and so on are conducted in English. It is in recognition of this fact that Iheakaram (2001, p. 18) argues that "the high or low rate of success or failure in our examination system can be attributed to the high or low level of proficiency of our students and teachers in the language of instruction and assessment." It is obvious that no matter how high one's intellectual ability might be, if the person lacks competence in language, the person might spend much of his life fumbling in a kind of twilight world in which ideas,

facts, and feelings are perceived only dimly and often in distorted shapes; the reason being that it is through language that man discovers his world and himself.

Today, in our tertiary institutions, "Use of English" or "General English" is not only taught but made compulsory. The situation is such that no student graduates in any tertiary institution without showing evidence of having passed "Use of English" or "General English" and other General Studies courses. In fact, the grades the students make in General Studies courses are reflected in their Cumulative Grade Point Average (CGPA). Ironically, however, the level of proficiency in English of students and graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions is a source of concern to many. For instance, Ihejirika (2002, p. 10) observes that:

An average contemporary Nigerian undergraduate is tremendously handicapped with regard to expressive language skills – speaking and writing. Their poor performances in both internal and external examinations are eloquent testimonies to the fact that they are poor in the use of the English language.

Banjo (1981) also observes that there is general dissatisfaction with the level of proficiency in English among the products, not only of secondary schools but also of the universities. Still, on poor performance in the use of English, Jowitt (1991) states:

This June, all universities will produce, as usual, thousands of graduates who assume that the nation is theirs merely by the fact of obtaining university education... University lecturers have had one litany of complaint: namely the poor quality of writing of their graduates (p. 25).

With this kind of development, the question that readily comes to one's mind is why have students and graduates of Nigerian tertiary institutions consistently exhibited low proficiency in English even though they are taught "Use of English" or "General English"? Many reasons could be adduced. But specifically, the way and manner EAP curriculum is implemented cannot be entirely exonerated. Therefore, the thrust of this paper is to review the state of affairs with regard to the implementation of the EAP curriculum in tertiary institutions in Nigeria and further make suggestions on how best to implement the curriculum.

## **2. A Review of the State of Affairs with Regard to The Implementation of The EAP Curriculum in Tertiary Institutions**

The writer has been privileged to teach the EAP courses in at least three different tertiary institutions. Given his experience, his impression is that the way and manner the courses are taught leaves much to be desired. It is, therefore, not surprising that a good number of students go through the courses without the courses going through them.

In the first place, it is pertinent to point out that many students who transit from secondary school to tertiary level of education are ill-equipped to pursue higher education. At the primary and secondary school levels, they were poorly taught. If it is not as a result of paucity of qualified manpower, lack of basic infrastructure, and teaching and learning resources, it may be because the teachers are not regularly paid. Consequently, strike becomes the order of the day. The result is that the students pass through primary and secondary school levels of education without being properly educated. When such students eventually find themselves in tertiary institutions (they must, because of the obvious reason: corrupt practices at all levels) little or no learning takes place because of poor background. And this is usually manifested mostly in their low proficiency in the use of English.

The current admissions policy in tertiary institutions has not in any way helped matters. Before now, the policy was such that before any candidate was admitted for any course in a tertiary institution, the candidate must show evidence of having passed the English language at credit level. Today, admissions policy has been so liberalized that one could be admitted to pursue a course in a university with an ordinary pass in the English language. In colleges of education and polytechnics, the story is worse because the situation is such that one could be admitted for some courses without a pass in the English language. Commenting on the abnormality, Esimaje (2002, p. 34) observes that: "Many students carry English deficiency into Pre-ND programme and in many cases remain with it even into the HND programme." No wonder it is not unusual these days to see a final year NCE, ND, HND, or even degree student still writing the GCE English language examination. For this category of students, they find themselves in tertiary institutions without basic knowledge of English. Thus, even when they are made to offer the EAP courses, it would have little or no impact on them.

The admission explosion coupled with a paucity of English language teachers in tertiary institutions is another factor that has rendered the implementation of the EAP curriculum ineffective. This is so because according to Emenanjo (1996):

Explosion in class is preventing teachers from effectively communicating with their students. The harm is worst in the sciences which require experiments and practical and in languages which require continuous practice in speech and writing for the language skills to be properly acquired (p. 15).

For the fact that too many freshmen are admitted each session, the EAP classes are usually overcrowded. In some cases, five hundred or more students receive instruction in one class, which is contrary to the NCCE recommendation that not more than one hundred and fifty students be taught the General Studies courses at a time.

The situation is worse in some institutions where large lecture halls hardly exist to accommodate the teeming population. Consequently, some students are compelled to receive lectures while standing or outside the lecture halls. The lecturers who are faced with this kind of uncondusive classroom environment hardly put in their best. They cannot reach their students individually and would be reluctant to give assignments. Even when assignments are given, they are hardly marked because of the large number of students. At the end of the day, no feedback is given to the students with regard to their performance, thereby negating the view of Ellis (1992) that it is vital that students should receive some kind of feedback on their work because it is very difficult to improve upon a skill whether it be language or sporting unless one has some ideas as to what constitutes excellence, what are the boundaries as it were to the skill.

In some institutions, no adequate arrangement is made to take care of large classes. For instance, NCCE recommended that a public address system should be provided for General Studies Departments for effective teaching of large classes but this is never the case. Again, the number of English language lecturers employed by some institutions most of the time is grossly inadequate. As a result, instead of splitting the classes into small groups that are easy to handle and manage, what we have are large classes that are unwieldy. In a situation of this nature, effective teaching and learning would definitely remain a mirage.

Another factor that is seriously militating against effective teaching and learning of the EAP courses is the lack of adequate language resource materials and facilities. On the aspect of books, what is currently in practice is that departments or individual lecturers, on selfish grounds, compile their teaching materials either in form of handouts or books which do not really address the needs of the students. For stance, Ajayi (1991) assessed the adequacy of the reading skills component of ***The Use of English: A Text*** used at the Obafemi Awolowo University, and his findings among other things were:

- i. The area of vocabulary development, a major factor in reading in an ESL environment, is missing.
- ii. The text does not treat syntax.
- iii. Most of the practice exercises in the text are not relevant to law, science, and technology.
- iv. The text does not make provisions for a skill that will equip students to read and interpret examinations.
- v. The text does not teach the students the skills of reading and interpreting references, bibliographies, indexes, and tables of contents as contained in reports, books, journals, and articles.
- vi. While the text emphasizes the need to teach the structure and organization of books, it does not suggest practical ways of achieving this (p. 293).

At colleges of education and polytechnics, experience has shown that similar books are in use and that explains why much is not achieved in teaching and learning of the EAP courses.

In the area of library facilities, most tertiary institutions, especially new-generation institutions, have nothing to offer. A visit to such libraries shows that they are virtually empty and could best be described as reading rooms. The situation is worse in polytechnics and universities of technology where languages are not taught as a discipline. In such institutions, their libraries do not make adequate provisions for language resources.

It is obvious that language (especially spoken language) cannot be effectively taught without the use of a language laboratory. It is in recognition of this fact that Baldah (1990, p.74) asserts that: "Television, films, videotape, the radio, and language laboratory go a long way in helping motivation, giving language in varied and interesting situations..."

Unfortunately, however, the language laboratory is non-existent in some institutions, especially polytechnics and universities of technology, where languages are not taught as a discipline but EAP courses are taught as service courses. The implication, therefore, is that EAP courses are taught in these institutions without the required emphasis on speaking skills. The negative effect of this anomaly is better imagined than described.

Given the above circumstances that characterize the implementation of the EAP curriculum in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, the students seem to exhibit apathy towards learning the courses. For instance, in a study carried out at the Federal Polytechnic, Damaturu, Esimaje (2002) discovers that in spite of the obvious importance of English in technological education, the majority of the students do not show any appreciable interest in learning the subject and this apathy has had a tremendous effect on their overall performances in their chosen fields of study. Chike-Okoli (2002) also observes that some students believe that "Use of English" is not important to what they are in the university to do and so treat the course with levity. Such students, according to her, do not bother themselves attending lectures where they would stand by the window or completely stand outside the classroom to listen to lectures.

Still, on the apathy on the part of the students, Olajide (1998) states that the attitude of many students to "GSE English" does not seem to show the importance of the course. According to him, many students do not attend lectures regularly because they feel they are not majoring in English and those who major in English take the course for granted, thus, most of them end up not being properly influenced by the courses as reflected in their spoken and written communications.

The apathy on the part of the students is also heightened by the evaluation method adopted by some institutions. Some institutions are conscious of the number of students who offer the courses and therefore set the examination questions in such a way that it would be easy to grade. Today, what is in vogue in some institutions is multiple-choice questions (MCQ) for large classes. This style of evaluation de-emphasizes effective writing, which is the hallmark of second language learning. No wonder it is becoming increasingly difficult for an average Nigerian graduate to construct a simple correct sentence in English. Again, because of a large number of students offering the courses without corresponding large lecture halls, the sitting arrangements in the examination halls are such that one can easily copy from one's neighbour. In a situation of this nature, the students have the impression that it is a waste of time attending lectures since they know that come what may, they must pass.

Given the importance of the EAP, it is ironic that the courses are not allocated adequate credit units by the institutions that offer them. For now, what is in practice in universities, for instance, is that each of the courses is allocated only two credit units, which translates into two-lecture hours per week, and the courses are meant to be offered for only two semesters. This situation leads to perfunctory treatment of certain topics and utter neglect of others.

Mention should also be made of the nonchalant attitude of the authorities in some institutions towards the teaching and learning of the EAP courses. To many, especially in polytechnics and universities of technology the courses should be scraped as, according to them, it has no impact on the students in the final analysis. In fact, in some institutions, the lecturers who teach the courses are erroneously seen to be earning salaries for doing nothing. In such institutions, the department that mounts the courses is not usually given the necessary attention, especially with regard to funding for the provision of resource materials and facilities for effective teaching and learning.

Against the foregoing discussions, it is crystal clear that the implementation of the EAP curriculum in tertiary institutions in Nigeria has been everything but effective. The consequence of this anomaly is obviously one of the factors plaguing Nigeria's education system: the inability to communicate effectively in the language of instruction and the consequent poor academic performance of some Nigerian students.

### **3. Suggestions for Effective Implementation of The EAP Curriculum**

Based on our discussions so far, it is obvious that some credible measures are inevitable if the EAP curriculum must be effectively implemented in our tertiary institutions.

In the first place, the admissions guidelines into tertiary institutions should be revisited. Given the fact that the basis of success in higher education is the ability to communicate effectively in the target language, a credit pass in the English language at an ordinary level should be made a pre-condition for admission to tertiary institution irrespective of the course one is meant to pursue or institution.

The problem of large classes could be adequately taken care of by employing enough English language lecturers in the General Studies Departments. By so doing, the large classes would be split into smaller groups which would be easy to handle and manage as recommended by the NCCE. It is hoped that when this is achieved, the lecturers would be in a position to relate to the students individually; determine their individual problems, and know the way to handle them.

The institutions' authorities should eschew sentiment and ensure that the EAP takes its pride of place. The General Studies Departments should be encouraged by making an adequate budgetary allocation to them. The authorities should see the need to provide large lecture halls to accommodate a large number of students that offer the courses, especially for examination purposes.

Provision of public address systems as recommended by the NCCE should be made a priority. Also, language laboratory has been seen to be indispensable as far as the teaching and learning of languages is concerned. The establishment of a language laboratory in every higher institution, including polytechnics and universities of technology should be made compulsory. The NCCE, NBTE, and NUC should make it a pre-condition for accreditation of courses in any tertiary institution.

The efforts of a teacher come to naught where their teaching is not supplemented with relevant and adequate textbooks. The lecturers in the EAP programmes should do away with selfishness and ensure that they develop textbooks that are good enough to meet the needs of the students. It should be borne in mind that as the students embark on different areas of specialization, their needs vary. Therefore, authors of books on the EAP should be conscious of this fact. For instance, for a text meant for science and technology students, Ajayi (1991) suggests that exercises should be taken from scientific and technical texts because according to him, such texts are likely to appeal to the interest of the students in the science-based faculties and therefore motivate and encourage them to practice such drill exercises.

In addition, the textbooks should make enough provision for reading and reading exercises. Research findings have shown that the best way to learn a language is by reading materials written in that language. Also, reading of literary texts should be integrated and made compulsory in the EAP curriculum because according to Alo (1997):

Reading literary text such as fiction, short stories and poems not only develops one's imagination but also one's vocabulary. a significant benefit that is derived from reading widely is that one acquires new vocabulary items, idioms, and figures of speech that are met in context (p. 10).

Efforts should be made to enhance the standard of education in Nigeria by, among other things, de-emphasizing the MCQ examination pattern, especially as it concerns EAP courses. EAP examinations should be designed to give enough room for the practice of the four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Given the fact that the EAP is expected to play a very important role in transforming the students and equipping them with the necessary communicative skills that would enable them to meet the demands of their studies and challenges they are likely to face after leaving school, the two credit units allocated to the courses and the two semesters the courses are offered in the university are grossly inadequate. It is hereby suggested that the courses should be allocated at least three credit units each. In addition, the courses should be offered for at least four semesters and six semesters for universities on one hand and colleges of education and polytechnics on the other hand respectively.

#### **4. Conclusion**

In this paper, we have strived to review the implementation of the EAP curriculum in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The result of the review points to the fact that the implementation of the EAP curriculum is everything but effective. This anomaly is predicated on not only overcrowded classes as a result of admission explosion and lack of adequate language teaching and learning resources such as libraries, adequate textbooks, language laboratories but also apathy on the part of the students, administration of multiple-choice questions (MCQ) English examination as against subjective questions and the inability of the authorities of the institutions to fund the General Studies Units that teach the EAP courses adequately to provide the needed teaching and learning resources for effective implementation of the EAP programmes. It is strongly believed that the prevailing poor trend in the implementation of the EAP curriculum in tertiary institutions in Nigeria could be successfully turned around for good if enough English language instructors are engaged to take care of the ever-increasing number of freshmen admitted into tertiary institutions; adequate budgetary allocation made for General Studies Units in tertiary institutions to procure the necessary language teaching and learning resources; deemphasizing MCQ English examinations and increasing the credit load allocated to EAP courses. This measure, no doubt, is one of the surest ways of addressing the seeming poor academic performance of some students in tertiary institutions and the attendant fall in the standard of education obtainable in tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

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