

Challenges in the Teaching of Use of English in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions in a Globalising World

Ugwuanyi, Elizabeth Nneka
Department of Languages
College of Administrative Studies and Social Sciences, Kaduna Polytechnic, Kaduna
Email: enneka61@gmail.com

Associate Professor Joachim C. Omeje
Department of Education Foundations, University of Nigeria Nsukka
*Email: joachimomeje@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

Teaching English as a foundation course in our tertiary institutions can be cumbersome and tasking. The use of English is a main course taught in almost all tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The use of English refers to the conventional English language programme taught to new entrants in tertiary institutions. The approach is general and not geared to any specific group of students despite the diversity in their academic pursuit and language needs. However, the course faces many challenges. This paper therefore aims to examine these challenges by looking at English and the concept of global language, challenges of globalization, problems faced in teaching the use of English and proffers solutions to these challenges.

Key words: Use English, Challenges, Teaching and Globalising

Introduction

With the increasing status of English in this period of globalization, English has become an important tool without which it is impossible to open the door of many opportunities that are available to us. The lubricants and characteristics of globalization technology and the domineering position of the English language in the new world order. To participate in the global world, nations, institutions, groups and individuals have to prove that they qualify. And the competence in the English language, and other criteria like requisite training and Information and communication technology (ICT) literacy, are somewhat linked to English proficiency. It is important to be proficient in it in order to meet up with the demands it requires to achieve one's aims in life. English is an international language. It is widely used in all the countries of the world. In fact, to make the best of globalization, one has to be able to speak English.

English is thus becoming the world's lingua franca, despite spirited fight by other international languages and efforts being made to preserve local languages, and there are local languages that impede the mastery of English language. The most pressing issue in our education system is to correct the falling standard of the language by teaching it adequately in schools. This is because low – level English proficiency in Nigeria is depriving us access to knowledge in hard and digital forms, even as globalization poses challenges for the teaching of use of English. English proficiency is important in a knowledge – based world because English is the major language of science and technology, which drive development (Yen, 2008). Graddol (2000) opines that English is the language of trade and computer and is increasingly a necessity for job placements.

For some nations, English is their first and native language while some have it as their second and official language. In Nigeria, for example, it serves as a second and official language. And as an official language it is used as language of commerce, law, mass media, administration, medium of instruction in schools etc. The use of English programme has been established in our tertiary institutions so as to improve the status of the language in the country.

English and the Concept of the Global Language

English now assumes the position of the global language. Globalization is the opening up of various part of the world to external influence. It is the breaking down of natural boundaries to influence commerce, technology, culture, finance and language. The concept has to do with interdependence and increasing interaction among people of diverse background and languages. Globalization exposes one to new ideas and products and new ways of doing things in the international scene. Globalization may also mean the transformation of the relationship among states and institutions, the universalization of certain practices, the global restructuring of the recent decade since the dissolution of the Soviet Union or indeed the structure of the liberal capitalist relations (Adetugbo, 2006). He further asserts that while one might be justified in claiming that the term “globalization” started with the establishment of the League of Nations and subsequently the United Nation Organization, the word was late in coming to the English language.

English is now the world's most important language and it is estimated to be spoken by one in five of the world's population. It is the language of international commerce, popular culture, and the internet and holds an unassailable position among the world's major languages not in terms of the number of speakers but in terms of domain of use and international spread.

English is spoken not only as a first language in the United Kingdoms, the United State of America, Australia and New Zealand, Canada, but also by over one million people in Trinidad and Tobago, over three million in the Irish Republic, over two million in Jamaica etc (Crystal, 1997; Adetugbo, 2000:4).

Though English is seen as a global language, the fact remains that some factors are responsible for this growth and spread of English. It is enumerated in the National Teachers' Institute English language that some of the factors responsible for the growth of English include: Economic motivation, political motivation, the slave trade and Science and Technology (NTI, 2000:12).

English language is a global language because of its function all over the world. No wonder Leiper (1998) sees English as:

a language that most people will acknowledge is sweeping the planet's physical, economic, cultural and cyber space... It's a language the young in the developing world, the formal world, and the world yearning for democracy feel compelled to learn. Unlike any other in history, English is an increasingly classless language. Perhaps, it is because it is the language of digital world. In any case English encompasses more than just a convenient means of communication among the global denizens. It is an ideological movement – even by accident.

The roles and status of English are rising very fast and it will continue to rise because of its uses in the world. Power (2005) describes English language as a turbine engine of globalization. English will enable the nation to contribute its own quota to the globalization process. Leliot (2000) describes globalization as an international network entrepreneurship, which is based on access to instant global communication network where people can have access to information and movement anywhere in the world.

The position of English language as the leading world by and that of Science and Technology is indisputable. Crystal (1997:106) states that, "most of the scientific, technological and academic information in the world is expressed in English and over 80% of all information stored in electronic retrieval system is in English". This is an evidence of the importance of English language in the current worldwide globalization process. It explains why English language is now tagged the lingua franca of the world.

It should be noted that concern for improved performances in English language is a worldwide issue even in the developed nations – like United Kingdom and the United States of America. In both countries, maintenance of standards in education, particularly English entitled 'a language for life' is generally routine. In the USA, the National Commission on Excellence in Education was established in 1981 to assess students' achievement at different levels and in all areas of the curriculum. Students who perform below standards are mandated to receive remediation (Baumann, Hoffman, Duffy – Hester and Moonro, 2000).

Similarly, in the European Union (EU), English is the working language. Even in Central Europe, the dominance of English is reinforced as more countries there clamour to join EU (Kelly, 2004). In this instance therefore, Nigeria cannot afford to be left behind and must improve the teaching and learning of use of English. Efforts must be made to train Nigerians in modern information on the internet.

The Challenges of Globalization

Globalization has penetrated even the remote parts of the world. Tierney (2004:9) defines it as 'a social process where the nation - state as a unit of economic, political, and cultural analysis becomes less important, or even irrelevant, and in its place are borderless worldwide social relations'. He notes that new market bypass national boundaries, technology frees data and information from being tied to geography or time and globalization engenders intermingling of cultures and "deterritorialisation becomes an effect and a stimulus of globalization" (Tierney, 2004:10).

In the union between English and globalization, globalization promotes the learning of English, and English proficiency increases the features of globalization e.g. Labour mobility. Yen (2008) observes that the effect of globalization such as access to better jobs, has become the driving force for the increased and intensified learning of English, a situation engendering educational inequality – those who can afford the kind of language skills demanded look beyond the public education system for the English language teaching that is likely to meet desired level of proficiency (Tierney, 2004; Bruton, 2009).

English is important in the growth and spread of business worldwide. Qualified workforce plus English – proficiency are favoured over those without English by some companies. Nigeria seems to be low on both English – proficiency and in attracting multinational corporations to the country interactions and operations in a networked world are knowledge – based and are facilitated by ICT and communication in English. Additionally, language is important to the acquisition of ICT skills since the technology is denominated in the English

language. Communication on the internet is mainly in English, making English – proficiency relevant in accessing information and data personal development and advancement and for normal living. Thus, lack of language of communication disempowers the less privileged (Charles, 2006).

The English proficiency that can enable one to participate in a globalized world is learnt basically in formal settings and by implication, formal education provides the setting for the learning of English, which in many cases is also the medium for gaining knowledge for the enhancement of the quality of life. According to Lazero and Medalla (2004), “English in this era of globalization will increase the capacity of people to communicate and exchange ideas and goods across borders. The English language skill has become a necessity for establishing linkages with the rest of the world in international trade, economic development and even in the use of new technology”. With much attention paid to the teaching of English, Nigeria needs to get on top of language learning inadequacies in the education system and also look into expanding English programme to cater adequately for socio – cultural interaction across borders with and beyond Nigeria for language learners to become language users able to cope with the speed of development of events in the world.

Problems in Teaching the Use of English

In actual sense, English language as a course of study is faced with many challenges in its teaching and learning. Some of these problems are:

Problems Inherent in English Language Itself

This is a major challenge in the teaching and learning of English generally. In Nigeria, English is a second language (L2) and has its own features or characteristics which make its learning and teaching very difficult. Second language is a technical representation of the functional position of that language rather than its position in sequential order of acquisition (Onuigbo & Eyisi, 2009).

The problems include interference which comes as a result of language contact or Mother Tongue interference. This problem is obvious in phonology, vocabulary, syntax and semantics. This is one of the reasons why students who do not have English as the major course shy away from the use of English.

Lack of Experts in the Course

The use of English is becoming an aspect of English language and as such qualified teachers should be allowed to handle it. The issue of non – graduates of English teaching the use of English is a great problem. Experts should be trained in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to handle the course. There should be a reorganization of the course and the teachers. The learner’s need for the English language should be the ultimate. The learners should be taught to the extent that they should be familiar with the registers of different fields and disciplines. The learners are not adequately trained and equipped to meet their job challenges and this has caused a lot of problem in many organizations as some professionals cry over lack of communicative competence among our graduates.

Also some lecturers are not competent enough to handle the use of English. They need to be taught certain topics before they can go to teach students. Moreover, some are neither ready to invest in the purchase of books and journals nor in conference attendance. Rather, to cover up the deficiencies, they encourage fraudulent activities among students in the hope of presenting excellent performances where none exists.

Lack of Electronic Teachings

The problem of electronic teaching is one of the major challenges that the use of English in Nigerian tertiary institutions face. With the advent of computer, much emphasis is on the use of computer in educational institutions. With the importance of computer in teaching, the use of English is not left out, since the use of English has been learner – centred, it can lead to effective teaching and learning because teachers will be in a position to recognize and pay attention to differences in learners. Also students stand the chance of receiving accurate information, access information and obtain immediate feedback. The teacher can also monitor the student’s progress. The use of computer though a teaching – learning facility is still a dream. Computers are still out of reach of the many students in the use of English course.

Lack of textbooks

Lack of textbooks has compounded the problem of teaching and learning of use of English in all tertiary institutions. Where the textbooks are available they are out dated. Most students depend on lecture notes only because of lack of relevant textbooks. Many of them find it difficult to take lecture notes. Their lecture notes are full of spelling and grammatical errors which are indicative of the poor language background of the students (Ayodele, 2004).

Problem of Large Classes

The use of English is generally overpopulated. It is common to have a class of about two to three hundred students. Some of whom may never get a sitting space inside the classroom throughout the course duration and let alone paying adequate attention to the lecturer. In such a situation, it is a near impossibility to attend individually to students while teaching or afterwards. Yet language teaching requires drills through both oral and written exercises. The situation does not allow the teacher the opportunity to attend to the students

individually. Also when written work is given, it is always a difficult task to mark all and call each student to explain where they went wrong.

Lack of Facilities

Many of our tertiary institutions lack large halls that can accommodate the large number of students. In places where it exists, functional effective public address systems are lacking. Teaching them becomes an onerous and rather frustrating task to the lecturer, who shouts himself hoarse on the bid to communicate. The result is that he will be limited to the action zone of the class. Meanwhile students at the bad region may get bored straining their ears. It is equally a futile exercise dictating or writing on the chalk board where there are no projectors or screens. Besides all these, it is a myth to hear of students of the use of English ever being exposed to language laboratories.

Time Factor

The non – communicative competence of our undergraduates necessitates the declaration of state of emergency in that regard. Sadly, the use of English is a mere one year course in most tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) has been more realistic about this in that its curriculum provides for the use of English and communication skills all through the duration of National Diploma and Higher Diploma programmes.

However, in teaching the course, there are many loop – holes in the students’ response which take a long time to fill up. Therefore, the two hour credit load allotted per semester is grossly inadequate, yet NBTE’s rigidity in enforcing compliance with the curriculum almost makes it impossible to create extra time. With all these problems, one can unequivocally conclude that lectures are neither student nor lecturer – friendly.

Recommendations

The classroom is not adequate for learning English even though it is the only point most Nigerian students have access to learning the language. The students should be encouraged to indulge in analyzing the English spoken in their environment in order to benefit from good models and avoid the mistakes in poor and also explore areas available outside the classrooms for studying English.

The students should be able to overcome prevalent unsavoury English usages within Nigeria. The teacher has to sieve through materials as well as be able to determine sources of errors in learners’ production.

The students should be empowered to be responsible for their own learning and also the teachers should be empowered also to be able to reflect on practice, discover what learners need to be able to develop, try out innovative approaches to do things.

In addition, knowing the effects of electronic teaching especially the use of computer in the teaching – learning process, it is suggested that adequate facilities, computer inclusive be supplied to all tertiary institutions. This will help the teaching of all the use of English courses.

Communicative language teaching which emphasizes participatory learning. Language is learnt through using it rather than merely practicing linguistic items. Intercultural communication to prepare learners to communicate in a new world characterized by people of diverse cultural backgrounds interacting at this time.

The teachers and the students should make use of web resources. Several teacher and learner resources abound on the internet which can make tremendous impact in use of English if exploited. There is need for computer literacy and establishment of a lively website for Nigerian teachers. An ongoing radio programme for teachers is a good initiative that can help teachers improve professional especially if care is taken not to speak above the heads. Teachers should be encouraged to use computers and internet in ways conducive to our unique environment. It will expose and link them to materials and resources available on the web.

There should be rigorous teacher education where only the best graduates of secondary education are admitted into teacher education programme. Pre – service and in service training are imperative for successful teaching and should not be trivialised.

ICT use is important for both teacher and learner. Teacher is unable to provide all repertoires and nuances of native and other varieties of English required for effective language learning in a globalised world. ICT/ digital media will provide the learner more opportunities for greater experience with the language and corpus for more learning and analysis and for vocabulary development in general and special English, and for the teacher, access to language teaching resources and aids as well as an avenue for continuing professional development. Unless teachers improve on teaching materials, it will be difficult for learners to get adequate preparation for the world.

Greater learner autonomy is to be encouraged to encourage self – learning and independent learning for wider knowledge and for life learning. Life – long learning has become a way of life in an ever changing information – driven world. Developing learning strategies and style through learner autonomy will ensure that the learner continues to explore language learning on own even after schooling. Learners autonomy has the potential to help learners experience language items as a necessary aspect of living with a language and using them to accomplish real life goals.

Expansion of resources for learning to meet the demands of living in a globalised world, linguistic repertoire of learners has to be expanded. This therefore calls for expansion of written and oral materials and texts made available for learning.

International interaction and exposure should be encouraged among teachers. The teachers should attend international conferences, subscribe to international journals or belong to internal bodies.

Conclusion

There is no doubt that teachers need to do a lot for themselves in any effort to improve the teaching of the use of English in Nigeria. Equally, individual efforts will yield little where the system has a tendency to frustrate honest effort. It is imperative that the government makes its aims, objectives, goals and policies in line with world trends. In addition, teachers should be motivated to appreciate the extra effort they are being asked to make. The environment should be friendly and words should be backed up with actions that have taken all factors into consideration.

We know that globalization is an integrating process and English is a tool to accessing knowledge and job placements worldwide, and as such it will be a disadvantage if other countries learning English as a foreign language should overtake Nigeria in the world situation when English is not just a second language, an official language but also the unifying language and a language of integration as a result of the multi – lingual nature of the country.

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