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A Critical Review of the Involvement of Teachers and Students' Interest in Current English Language Curriculum in Nigerian Secondary Schools (pp. 414-424)

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Abstract

This paper evaluated the appropriateness of teaching English language in some selected secondary schools in both Urban (Ile-Ife) and Rural (Ibodi) areas respectively of former Oranmiyan and Atakunmosa Local Government Areas of Osun state, Nigeria. 150 Senior Secondary School students whose ages ranged from seventeen years six months to eighteen years three months were used for the study. Also investigated were the attitudes of the teachers to the philosophy and implementation of the new English Language curriculum. The interest of the students in the new English language curriculum was also assessed. An attitude scale and a questionnaire were used to test the relationship among the variables identified for the study. Data collected in the study were analysed using percentages and t-test to test the hypotheses generated for the study. Results showed that teachers in both urban and rural settings did not differ in their opinion that they were not involved in the planning of the new English language programme. It was discovered by the paper that there is need to involve the teachers in both rural and urban schools settings in the identification and planning of programme objectives. The non-availability of recommended instructional materials was equally discovered. The paper suggested the need for an urgent re-assessment of existing strategies for implementing the new English language programme.

Introduction

The English language is regarded as the backbone of all other subjects taught in secondary schools. This is because it is the medium of instruction in most secondary and institutions of higher learning in Nigeria. In fact the English language is one of the few core subjects recommended for secondary schools as stipulated in the National Policy of Education (2004). It is therefore, an essential pre-requisite for further education. At least a credit (C6) in English is a requirement even for science-based subjects.

Because of the emphasis placed on passing English language at the ordinary level in the Nigerian educational system, it is essential that the language is properly taught so that student can have effective mastery of the subject.

In order to acquire the status of an effective relevant curriculum, an English language curriculum must guarantee ease in comprehension, interpretation and application. Usually, curriculum innovation is accompanied by support materials such as individualized learning units, original sources, extension pamphlets and resource packs. The latter should be in addition to the conventional reading materials which the pupil is expected to cope with (such as textbooks, reference books, handouts, worksheets and blackboard notes).

English is taught in Nigeria as a second language (ESL). Afolayan (1984) emphasizes the fact that ESL “is a bilingual- cultural variety of English as it is generally known and used by its native speakers “. He then went on to remark that:

In view of current developments in the conceptualization of adequate English language educational programmes in terms of English for Academic purposes (EAP) and English for Special purposes (ESP)...English for Second Language (ESL) demands a new bilingual- bicultural ...orientation of not only the content but also the manner of transmission of all aspect of education in developing countries for maximum relevance, effectiveness and efficiency.

For effective communication one needs a high level of proficiency in the use of language. Our political and social circumstances make the use of English language imperative not only as a foreign language but as an official language.

English language is probably the only tool that cuts across ethnic and cultural boundaries in Nigeria. For effective political participation and social interaction, one must have sufficient mastery of the English language. Klein (1986) highlighted the fact that English language is essential for national understanding and cooperation. It is strategically important for educational advancement and for scientific and technological development.

However, observations and comments in Nigerian dailies and the chief examiners' reports show that the performance of secondary school students in English language is deteriorating (Banjo, 2002). The situation gets worse year by year. Several reasons have been advanced to explain this deterioration in the programme of English language among the secondary school students. Among the reasons are lack of effective home stimulation which is related to the socio-economic status of the parents, and lack of relevant facilities –books, library facilities and language laboratory. The other reasons are acute shortage of competent and qualified teachers, defects of the examination system, non-challant attitude of competent and qualified teachers, over-crowded curriculum and the growing influence of youth sub-culture. In a nutshell, the reasons advanced are economic, cultural, social and curricula in nature.

This study therefore sets out to

1. Compare the interest of students in rural and urban settings in terms of the English language curriculum.
2. Compare the attitudes of teachers in rural and urban settings in terms of the philosophy and implementation of the secondary school new English language curriculum.
3. Compare the methods and approaches used by teachers in rural and urban settings with those (the methods) recommended in the English language curriculum

Methodology

The subjects for the study consisted of 150 senior secondary school year 1 students drawn from four randomly selected secondary schools in both urban (Ile-Ife) and rural (Ibodi) areas. The ages of the students range from seventeen years six months to eighteen years three months. Two instruments were developed for the study; these are teachers and students questionnaire. The teachers attitudinal questionnaire which contains sixteen items grouped into four categories designed to solicit teachers responses on (1) Involvement

of teachers (2) practicality of objectives, related to the secondary school new English language curriculum. The students' interest questionnaire contained 30 items dealing with students' interest in the new English language curriculum.

Reliability of items in the questionnaire of the Teachers and students were established at 0.75 and 0.78 respectively using the Kinder Richardson Formula. The validity of the instruments was established by the assistance of four experienced English language teachers involved in the teaching of the senior secondary school new English language curriculum and a curriculum expert knowledgeable about the objectives of the study. Originally, the Teacher's Questionnaires contained 24 items. But after the comments and suggestions of experts involved in the validation, only 16 items finally survived the scrutiny of the experts. Also, there were 36 items in the original version of the students' questionnaire but was reduced to 25 after comments and suggestions of the experts involved in the validation process.

The Validated Teachers Questionnaire was administered to 25 teachers in urban and 25 teachers in rural schools. The students' instrument scale was also administered to 150 students (75 in urban and 75 in rural schools). Administrations of the instruments to the students were carried out in intact classroom settings. In both administrations colleagues in the respective schools assisted in collecting the subjects' responses.

Analysis and Presentation of Results

Hypothesis I

There is no significant difference in the mean scores between students in urban and rural settings on the interest scale.

The result of the statistical analysis yielded no significant difference at the 0.05 level of confidence between pupils in urban and rural setting on the interest scale as shown in table 1. The table shows a spurious correlation. The only thing the table tells us is that the students' interest in the new English language curriculum in both urban and rural settings is low. It would seem safer to assume with Bruner (1962), that any subject can be taught to anybody at any age in some form that is honest and interesting (1962, p. 124); that it is possible to device versions of any subject that will make it suitable for presentation to pupils at any age or stage of development, if for

other reasons it seems warranted. The same material can and should be presented again later in a different way so that gradually the conceptual progress we are after can be attended to and our educational goals achieved. This process of covering the same ground again and again at different levels of complexity, Bruner (1960, 1966) called it the spiral curriculum. It is a notion that is worth a great deal of careful attention in achieving the stated objectives in the new English language programme. Clearly, there are advantages here in having a team of teachers involved, but there is a great deal that the individual teacher can do with his/her own class. Films, audio-or video tapes, film strips and other such aids will obviously offer enormous advantages and arouse interest.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference between the involvement of teachers in both urban and rural settings in the planning of the English language programme.

Teachers' Involvement in Programme Planning

As to whether or not teachers have been involved in the planning of the new English language programme, teachers show that only four percent i.e. 1 of the teachers in urban area indicated that he has been involved. In contrast as shown in Table 2 and 3 ninety six percent i.e. 24 of the teachers indicated that they have not been involved. In the rural areas on the contrary thirty-six percent i.e. 9 of the teachers indicated that they have been involved in planning the English language programme. Sixty-four percent or 16 however indicated their non-involvement in such planning.

In summary, twenty percent of all the teachers in both urban and rural settings indicated their involvement in planning the new English language programme. Eighty percent of the teachers in both urban and rural settings have therefore not been involved in the planning of the English language programme. It is clear, from the findings on this particular item, that most of the teachers have not been involved in the planning of the programme. There is need to involve teachers because they are the people to implement the programme.

It must have been observed that a greater percentage or 36 of the teachers in the rural area claimed that they have been involved in the planning of the programme; while only four percent of those in town claimed similar

involvement. Further discussion with the teachers in an interview revealed, however, that the teachers in the rural setting did not understand what is meant by involvement in planning when they answered the question. This is because they later confessed that they have never been actually involved. In short it appears that none of the teachers interviewed had actually been involved in the planning in order to ensure successful implementation of the programme. Findings of this study therefore indicated a major omission by not involving teachers at the planning stage.

Objectives of the English Language Programme

Analysis of the responses on the objectives of the new English language programme shows that only four percent or 1 of the teachers in urban area indicated that they subscribe to the objectives of the English language. In contrast ninety-six percent or 4 of the teachers in urban area indicated that they do not believe in the philosophy or objectives of the English language programme.

In the rural area on the contrary only twenty percent or 5 indicated that the objectives are right and appropriate. This leads one to the involvement of teachers in an in-service training. If they are not involved in planning as it has been indicated by the teachers at least, there could have been an in-service training, which will commit them to the programme objectives.

In response to item 18 which deals with teachers' involvement in in-service training or workshop where the following terms are discussed or explained e.g. stock-exchange, one hundred percent or all the 25 teachers in the towns indicated that they have never been involved in in-service training or workshop where such terms like stock exchange are discussed.

In the rural areas one hundred percent or all the 25 teachers indicated that they have never been involved in in-service training where such terms are discussed. Results of this analysis as they relate to this particular item show that all the teachers in this study have had no form of in-service training since this new English language curriculum came into being. They share a belief in the objectives of the English language while eighty percent or 20 indicated that they do not believe in the objectives of the new English language programme.

In summary, twelve percent of all the teachers in both urban and rural settings indicated that they believe in the objectives of the new English language programme while eighty-eight percent indicated their lack of belief in the objectives of the programme. It is clear from the findings on this particular item that most of the teachers do not believe in the philosophy or objectives of the new English language programme. There seems to be a need for teachers to have a belief in the philosophy or objectives of the new English language programme. Since these teachers are the people to implement this programme it is crucial that they have a belief in the objectives of the subject they are going to implement. The findings on this aspect of the programme therefore uncover another fundamental defect in the programme, because teachers can only be expected to implement a programme whose objectives they believe.

There seems to be a continuous need for in-service training or workshop to prepare teachers or to bring the teachers in line with the new English language curriculum. Tables 2 and 3 which contain a summary of the results for this aspect of the hypothesis point to the urgent need for teachers to be involved at all levels and for in-service training.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant difference between teachers in urban and rural settings in their application of the methods and approaches recommended in the new English language curriculum for the senior secondary schools

Implementation of Recommended Approaches

On the issue of recommended approaches, the responses as summarized in Tables 4 & 5 indicated that only twenty-four percent or 5 of the teachers in urban area indicated that the recommended approach are practicable. In contrast eighty percent or 20 of the teachers in urban area indicated that the approaches are not practicable. Eighty-eight percent however, indicated that the approaches are not practicable. It seems clear from the results analysis of the responses to this particular item that most of the teachers probably do not practice or find recommended approaches practicable. This is because they are not within the teachers' social background or lack of physical infrastructural facilities.

Table 4 contains a summary of the analysis of the hypothesis on practicality in the application of the methods and approaches recommended in the new

English language programme. Since the critical value to it is less than the test statistics (df48) $P. .05$ the null hypothesis is rejected. This indicates that there is a significant difference in the mean scores of the subjects in their application of the recommended methods and approaches. These results indicate the need for practical feasibility in the recommended methods and approaches. The “t” value of ($P. 05$) is significant and confirms the critical need for teaching orientation in the application of the methods and approaches of the new English language curriculum.

Summary

The specific objective of the study was to evaluate the new English language curriculum using stake’s (1969) evaluation model. A difference was found between the prescribed curriculum and the observed curriculum. The purposes of this paper were to investigate the new English language curriculum in terms of the students’ interest, teachers’ involvement in programme planning and, the teachers’ belief and commitment to the philosophy or objectives of the new language programme. The teacher’s and the students’ questionnaires were used as instrument for the study. The questionnaires were administered individually to 75 senior secondary school year 1 pupils in Ile-Ife area and 75 senior secondary school pupils in Ibodi rural area. 25 teachers of the new English language senior secondary school curriculum in Ile-Ife responded to the questionnaire and 25 teachers of the new English language curriculum in Ibodi rural areas also responded to the teacher questionnaire. The pupils are the pioneering pupils of the new programme (SSS1).

The analysis of the collected data was carried out by using descriptive mean-score and t-test. It was found that:

1. There was no significant difference in the mean score on the interest scale ($t = 0.41$).
2. There was statistically significant difference $t = -15.25$ for Yes in urban and rural settings and $t = 15.24$ for No in the responses of urban and rural settings between the involvement of teachers in the planning of the English language programme.
3. There was no significant difference at 0.05 in the percentage of responses of teachers in urban and rural settings in their application

of the methods and approaches recommended in the new English language programme.

Recommendation

1. Curriculum planners should involve teachers at all stages of curriculum development or revision.
2. There is need for availability of recommended instructional materials e.g. audio-visual equipment and to ensure that teachers use this equipment accordingly in order to sustain and maximise students' interest.
3. There is also need for in-service training for teachers.

Conclusion

The findings of this study suggested that there is need for a total re-visiting of the new English language curriculum in those areas dealing with involvement of teachers in the planning stage and students' interest and application of the recommended methods and approaches in the new English language curriculum.

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Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviations on the interest scales of pupils' responses in urban and rural settings

Subject	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	t
Urban Teachers	25	27.49	9.36	0.41
Rural Teachers	25	24.36	11.74	

Table 2: Responses of Teachers in Urban and Rural Settings to Questions on Involvement of Teachers

Subjects	Mean	Standard Deviation	t
Urban Teachers (Yes)	0.7	0.8	-15.24*
Rural Teachers (Yes)	4.7	6.3	
Urban Teachers (No)	24.3	0.8	15.24*
Rural Teachers (No)	20.3	6.3	

(N=25), *P = 0.05

Table 3: Response of Teachers in Urban and Rural Settings on the Involvement of Teachers

Question	Urban Area				Rural Area				Total			
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
5	1	4	24	96	9	36	16	64	10	20	40	80
6	1	4	24	96	5	20	20	80	6	12	44	88
18	-	-	25	100	-	-	25	100	-	-	-	100

Table 4: Responses of Teachers in their application of the recommended methods and approaches in the new English language programme

Subjects	Mean	Standard Deviation	t
Urban Teachers (yes)	10	1	-34.64*
Rural Teachers)			
Urban Teachers (No)	20	1	34.64
Rural Teachers (No)	19	1	

(N=25); *P 0.05

Table 5: Responses of teachers in urban and rural settings in their application of the methods and approaches recommended in the new English language curriculum

Question	Urban Area				Rural Area				Total			
	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%	Yes	%	No	%
16	5	20	20	80	6	24	19	76	11	22	39	78