

## **ENHANCING TEACHING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE POLYTECHNIC**

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### ***Introduction***

English developed the elite through education and provided a tool for the cohesion of an educational elite from different indigenous language groups, making for increased mobility of skills within the nation across tribal boundaries. Nevertheless, the polytechnic is conceived as an essential catalyst in the process of preparing students for the task of nation building through technological, managerial and entrepreneurial development which will lead to the production of middle-level manpower.

The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) curriculum for all National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND) programs specified explicitly that:

To provide a broad based education designed to sharpen students' communication skills, their realization of the need for cross-fertilization of ideas and inter-relatedness of various disciplines...

Going by this above submission, it is mandatory for all students to offer at least a single course of English language, Literature or both in a semester. However, students of Business Administration, Banking and Finance, Science Laboratory Technology, Computer Science, Statistics and Home Management Technology do offer only one course of English language in an academic session – worthy of note is that this said course is a combination of what should have been taught at two semesters now merged into a single one. Moreover, students of Mass communication are more loaded with courses of English language, at National Diploma Level a student offer at least two courses of English language in a semester, for example in his/her first semester, MAC 111 (English for Mass communication I) and GNS 101 (Use of English I) is mandatory.

After over a century of the presence of English language in Nigeria, learners of the language are still enveloped in English forms that stretch across a wide continuum for near standard British to peculiar Nigerian Constructions. One of the difficulties facing both the learner and teacher in Nigeria is the dilemma of knowing what is regarded as the target model of English. Among the general populace, attitudes towards the varieties are impossible to predict. According to Munzali (1986 : 47):

...while grammatical errors are objected to, phonological inclination in the direction of mother tongue is looked on as the natural consequence of speaking a foreign language. Thus, many highly placed Nigerians – politicians, lecturers and technocrats for instance speak English with marked mother tongue accent and are not thereby felt to be in any way deficient or inferior to others whose accents approximate to a native model.

### ***English Language Teaching***

According to Joseph (2002:356), Nigerian teachers of English like their other counterparts in other courses, face an uphill task. They are required to scale several hurdles before they stand a chance of executing their job decently. They need to be properly groomed, monitored and assisted to grow in confidence while performing their duties. The teacher of English language must cultivate and maintain certain human traits considered necessary for their success.

Nevertheless, on the need of teaching aid – many of the non-textual facilities for English language teaching have almost disappeared from the school environment – while in some schools provision for that has never been made. These teaching aids include authentic and functioning audio-visuals like print resources (Newspaper and Magazine), language laboratories or radio tape recorder/receiver and simple in expressive public address system. In the words of Aiyu (2002;356), ‘These different facilities will assist in promoting students’ learning of English ‘. Many of them serve as sources of model for all form of language production and playback. In many instances their availability reduces the role of the reader to that of a facilitator, while in their absence the teacher is encouraged to monopolise classroom talk.

### ***The Concept of Literature and its teaching***

Classroom experiences in previous years have shown that literature has been shoddily handled by most literature teachers. In some cases, there were no teachers to handle the subject while in others, little or no attention was paid to its importance. More often the objective of the teacher was to train the student to have at least a ‘pass’ at the end of his course. More pathetically, both the teacher and the student complained of ‘too many books’ to be read by them. This leads into poor performances on both sides; the concept of literature goes beyond more definitions of the word. Besides its various meanings, literary writers and experts see “literature” from different perspectives as highlighted below: Wellek and Warren (1970:278) define literature as ‘great books which whatever their subjects, are notable for literary form or aesthetic worth in

combination with general intellectual distinction”, while Ogen (1997:125) sees literature as imitation: as a form of expressing one’s feelings and as containing explicit didactic elements. Ukoyen (1980:48) while trying to find a conceptual meaning to the word ‘literature’ opines that literature is an imaginative and artistic recreation of experience, a work of art whose principal appeal lies in its aesthetic excellence and emotional catharsis.

A major problem associated with the teaching of literature is poor planning of the course and presentation in the class. This was discovered to have affected the attitude of students towards literature. For example an NDI student taking GNS101 (Use of English): the course is a combination of four language topics with various subtopics and only one topic on literature. Hence, there is no reason why both literature in English and English shouldn’t be given equal share of course content.

Another problem is that of method. It is a consensus of opinion that there is no specific method of teaching Literature in English in the classroom, up till today, this is why the teacher is using whatever method at his disposal, more often, teachers resolve to use ‘take your book and read’ approach.

### ***Language and Literature***

The knowledge of literature forms the foundation upon which the users’ proficiency in English language is built. The function of literature as one which provides entertainment for the reader and enhances his general uses of language since the process of communication goes on all the time, literature, helps the reader to build up his cognitive and communicative skills and his overall competence in the language.

William (1990:48) argues that, through the study of literature, the second-language learner can internalize and consciously adopts the rhythms of natural speech (as in drama); economy and richness of diction (as in poetry); rhetorical and organizational devices (as in prose). The overall effect of this is that language study and usage becomes simple for the second language learner as he uses his literature knowledge and prowess to manipulate language.

The National Board for Technical Education (NBTE) syllabus on literature aspects states the general objectives as:

- i. To appreciate Literature in English.
- ii. Appreciate literary genres as sustained composition.
- iii. Understand the development of literary essay.

While the goal is to impart analytical, evaluative, and interpretative writing and speaking techniques to the students, the aim is to encourage creativity.

### ***Professional Requirements for the Teacher of English in the Polytechnic***

1. Membership of a recognized nationally based professional association.
2. Attend retraining workshop at least once a year.
3. Reading consistently well publicized novels and other articles of potentially rewarding language values.
4. Posses a visible knowledge and application of the curricula and relevant syllabus.
5. Maintain a flexible attitude in giving test, assignment and examination and strict adherence to prompt marking and returning of the students work.

### ***Academic Qualification***

Teachers of English at the polytechnic should posses a minimum of first degree with approved teaching qualification. Teachers of English language and Literature must be knowledgeable in visible language areas as posited by Joseph Aliyu (2002:345) like general fluency, listening and speaking skills, writing – planning, drafting, composing and editing, reading, critiquing and summarizing.

While on the job, in service training must be guaranteed for every teacher of English, that will ensure teachers are continuously sensitized to computing language theories, teaching methodologies and available instructional texts and related resources.

### ***Concluding Remarks***

Students in the polytechnic are expected to cultivate a very reasonable level of proficiency in the four traditional language skills and general fluency. The specific details have been provided in the curricula. While Literature in English teacher can improve the lot of his students if adequate care is taken, conferences, in-service training and workshops are some of those ideals the teacher should look up to. The responsibility of the teacher is to make sure that the learning of both English language and Literature is made pleasant and easy, not a difficult and unattainable task for the students.

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