

Needs Analysis of an English for Academic Purpose (Eap) Programme: English Language Curriculum to the Effectiveness of the Primary School Teacher in Nigeria

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Abstract: *There is need to ensure the production of competent primary English teaching specialists. All colleges of education in the country are running their programme for this purpose. But the minimum standard seems lacking in essential ingredients that would guarantee the training of effective primary English teachers. It is equally realised that effective teaching and learning of this nature constitute functions of a combination of factors among which are the teacher, the material, learner and the learning situation. This paper focuses on need analysis as a process and product orientation towards the production of competent primary English teaching specialists.*

I. Introduction

An English language primary education graduate is expected to acquire communication skills in English to a level that will support him/her in basic employment or in the pursuance of further education. It is a generally held view that only trained specialist teachers with at least NCE can make the realisation of the above expectation possible. At the 1980 Bagauda Conference, it was recommended that by the year 2000, the minimum teaching qualification policy for primary schools, (i.e. NCE) should become effective. The body of experts at this conference identified the essential qualities which the NCE primary teachers should possess.

These include a wide knowledge in the area of specialisation and ability to teach effectively (Awokoya, 1981). Several other conferences have been held at various levels to work out the modalities for the concrete implementation of the teacher supply policy for primary education. However, as revealed by the syllabus survey (earlier mentioned) the NCE PELA (Primary English Language Arts) training course seems inadequate to equip the trainees with required skills and abilities for effective teaching of English at the primary educational level.

At the 1986 Institute of Education, Ahmadu Bello University NCE/PES Board of Studies Seminar/Workshop, participants expressed dissatisfaction with the level of performance of the trainees' in the teaching of English during teaching practice. They observed that a good percentage of them lack adequate competence in English for effective teaching of the subject in primary schools. Other areas of inadequacies of the trainees mentioned were inability to produce simple supplementary instructional materials and inability to handle basic grammatical errors in pupils' written work (1986 NCE/PES Board of Studies Report).

The above inadequacies exhibited by the trainees may be a reflection of the primary English language courses designed for them. The observed omissions in the syllabuses earlier enumerated are crucial for the efficiency of a course. Therefore, the specific problems for this paper are:

- i. Is needs analysis-based assessment sufficiently adequate for the evaluation of the content of primary English language syllabus?
- ii. What does the teacher trainee need to handle English teaching in primary school effectively?

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A survey of PELA syllabuses showed that not all the components of a language course for training English teachers at NCE level were included. It was also observed that the syllabuses did not reflect the needs of learners as potential specialists in the teaching of English at the primary education level, and as a student undergoing a professional course as well as an individual capable of aspiring to a higher level of education. In order to ascertain the efficiency of NCE PELA courses, an objective and systematic procedure need to be adopted to evaluate the existing minimum standard to ascertain its adequacy. From the finding, a need-based analysis would be carried out to get the actual needs of the learners. Such a procedure should reveal objectively the lapses in the existing courses and lead to the design of a more efficient and standard course for NCE trainees.

II. Need Analysis Based Assessment

One of the fundamental principle underlying learner-centred systems of language learning is that teaching/learning programmes should be responsive to learners needs. This is now widely accepted as a principle of programme design, that needs analysis is a vital prerequisite to the specification of language learning objectives.

Over recent years, there has been a good deal of disagreement in ELT (English Language Teaching) circles over the meaning of needs and what needs analysis (NA) entail. The disagreement has resulted in the emergence of two orientations to need analysis. The first is termed the 'narrow' or 'product-oriented' interpretation of needs; whereby the learners' needs are seen solely in terms of the language they will have to use in a particular communication situation. Needs analysis therefore becomes a process of finding out as much as possible before learning begins, about the learners' current and future language use. On the other hand, proponents of the second interpretation of needs, which is called the 'broad' or 'process-oriented' interpretation, see needs primarily in terms of the needs of the learner as an individual in the learning situation. If this view of needs is adopted, then needs analysis means much more than the definition of target language behaviour, it means trying to identify and take into account a multiplicity of affective and cognitive variables which affect learning, such as learners' attitudes, motivation, awareness, personality, wants, expectations and learning style.

The necessity of finding a balance between these two approaches to needs analysis and by extension, to curriculum design and evaluation has been echoed by numerous authors (Holac, 1981). In the words of Richerich (1983) "it is clear that we must find a happy mean between the technocracy of needs, which claims to be able to define and foresee everything and by which everything is imposed, and the infinite diversity and mobility which makes all action absurd and futile".

This paper would make suggestions that would be geared towards finding the happy mean, to which Richerich refers,

A general definition of NA according to Brown (1996, p. 272) is "systematic collection and analysis of all relevant information that is necessary to satisfy the language learning needs of the students within the contexts of the particular level of study. In this particular case, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programme, whose intended aim is to facilitate the transition of non-native speakers (NNS) into English speakers.

Echoing Brown's sentiments, Richards (1990, p. 2) identified purposes of NA:

1. providing a mechanism for obtaining a wider range of input into the content, design, and implementation of a language programme through involving such people as learners, teachers, administrators and employers in the planning process.
2. identifying general or specific language needs that can be addressed in developing goals, objectives and content for a language programme.
3. providing data that can serve as the basis for reviewing and evaluating an existing program.

It is the third purpose which is of concern here, reviewing and evaluating an existing primary language arts pupil's programme. Existing programmes have established goals designed to meet the needs of their Primary Language Arts pupils being the subjects. These goals are relatively permanent and determine the aims of the course. NA, however, can identify intermediate objectives, which are intended as the means to achieving the goals. These objectives, as determined by evaluation, are subject to revision (Chambers, 1980). In other words, as Brown (1995, p. 36), states, "needs are not absolute, that is, once they are identified, they continually need to be examined for validity to ensure that they remain real needs for the pupils involved". Most good teachers conduct their own informal NA in their classrooms, but it is a sign of a good programme that routinely conducts NA on a programme-wide level.

Once the decision is made to conduct a NA, the first source of information is usually the students. Granted, learners are not always a reliable source of information in a NA, but they should constitute one of many possible sources; others according to Long (in press) are, "experienced teachers and graduates of the program concerned, employers, subject-area specialists, and written sources". Even from this brief review, it is apparent that researchers agree as to the limitations of learners' self-perceptions of their language needs (Long, in press; Chambers, 1980). In many cases, learners, even experienced workers/learners, are not fully aware of their language needs, as can be attested by Jasso-Aguilar in her 1999 study of the language needs of Waikiki Hotel workers.

The most common method of conducting a NA is through a questionnaire survey, which allows the researchers to gather as much data in the most efficient way. But as with the learners' limited self-awareness of their language needs, questionnaires also have some weaknesses, Horowitz (1986) points out those researchers cannot be certain whether the data truly reflects what the respondents actually do. The problem lies in deciphering whether the responses are what it is that they actually do, what they think they do or what they think the researchers want to hear.

Questionnaires are also limited because they tend to be too general and not applicable to a specific course (Horowitz, 1986) and too transient, just as students continually enter and exist a programme, needs change even during a course (Chambers, 1980). In an effort to overcome these weaknesses, Long (2005) emphasises triangulation, comparing different sets and sources of data. This can include triangulation of sources e.g. students, teachers, employers, triangulation of method, e.g. questionnaires, interviews, observations; triangulation of investigators, e.g. participant observer, outside observer. Carefully, sequencing multiple procedures can give better quality data. An example of sequencing might consist of conducting a literature survey, to prevent what Long (2005) calls “wheel-reinvention”, then unstructured interviews, which would lead to a questionnaire, followed by observations etc.

III. Suggestion and Recommendation

3.1. Educating the Educators

Ideally, teacher educators should possess PhDs in their specialty and should have taught in primary and secondary schools for a number of years. One way to overhaul teacher education is to focus on the quality of those who train teachers. Any teacher educator who has not had exposure to additional professional training in the last five years as evidenced by attendance at international/national workshops and conferences relevant to his/her specialisation cannot be expected to be in touch with progress in that field. These, together with staff research, publication, and teaching assessment are additional indicators of quality teacher educators. The importance of these is that teacher trainers must themselves be constantly enriched in education and professional knowledge if much improvement is to be seen in those they teach.

International/national exchange and linkage programmes and other means of raising staff quality are equally important with a planned programme for upgrading teacher educators are fully reorienting them in attitude (sensitisation, mobilisation, commitment, a sense of mission), content knowledge, educational philosophy, new pedagogical insights from constant touch with general education research and research journals in their subject specialisation. The provisions of up-to-date library and laboratory facilities guarantee quality teaching and learning for staff and student alike.

IV. Conclusion

Whatever other factors may be involved, these findings enjoy educators to ask important questions regarding the competence and effectiveness of teachers in raising the level of learner achievement. One response may be restructuring of teacher education curriculum for improving the quality of pupils learning at the primary level with potential snowball effect for secondary education as well. The aim would be to reflect what the prospective teachers are going to do in schools and have as central focus the competence to be developed in pupils at primary school levels (Falayajo et al, 1997). There is a significant degree of mismatch between teacher educators’ perception of a qualified teacher, especially for primary schools and the actual situation in schools. The focus of any “good” teacher education programme must be the realities of the classrooms for which teachers are being developed, more specifically, what teachers need to know and the equipping of trainees for making visible impact on pupils’ progress. But how ready are the colleges of education to live up to their responsibilities? In addition to these, the NCE should focus entirely on primary education (NCE Primary). The PELA curriculum should be tailored to meet the general and specific learning needs of pupils/students. Added too are the need for a practical, and functionally-oriented teacher education programme, and analytical thinking skills and competencies. The curricula should integrate theory and practice, applied and problem-solving.

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