An Evaluation of the Junior Secondary School English Language Curriculum

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Abstract: This study evaluates the English language Junior Secondary School Curriculum. Teachers and students were randomly selected from 21 (Public, Private and Federal) Schools in Lagos. The study investigates the academic performance of students based on the teachers qualifications, the academic performance of students based on the available (used) and unavailable resources, the identified difficult aspect of English language, methods of teaching English language and finally the academic performance of students and their gender status. The findings reveal that the academic performance of students does not entirely depend on the qualifications of teachers; the method used in teaching English language; the availability of instructional materials but on the proper implementation of the Curriculum. It recommends that English teachers should make sure the Curriculum is properly implemented. Parents should encourage students to speak the language and that government should provide resources for the teaching of the language.

Key words: Evaluation, academic performance, methods, Lagos

INTRODUCTION

There are so many languages in the world. The living languages number between 4,000 and 5,000 and the most widely used of these languages is English language.

English language ranks second only to Chinese when it is considered a mother tongue. Most of the world's radio programmes and the world's mails are in English. Four hundred years ago, English was a dialect, but today, it has attained the status of major world language.

Hook in Kolawole (2004) opines that "English began from being spoken by a relatively few thousand Anglo Saxon invaders in the fifth century". Some countries have English as a mother tongue while others use it as a second language. According to Kolawole (1991) English is synonymous with western civilization.

The language in its characteristic way of spreading across the globe got into Nigeria as early as the 15th century through the Europeans who came to trade, explore, christianize and colonize Nigerians, in particular and Africans in general (Baugh and Cable, 1978; Kolawole, 2004). The language has also spread to other parts of the world and has gone through changes as a result of the contact with indigenous languages especially in Nigeria.

English is studied mere extensively than any other second language in the continent of Europe; it is the national language of Australia and the leading second language in the United States and United Nations. It is an active or required course of thousands of South American schools and it is mainly spoken in Canada, where 31% of its population speaks French (Kolawole, 2004).

There are many varieties of English in England. These varieties, which are called dialects, differ in pronunciation (accents), spelling, grammar and vocabulary. There are differences between American and British English.

The other varieties of English are Australian English, Nigerian English, Malaysian English and Zambian English etc. None of the varieties is superior to the others. The administrators and teachers of English do not know which variety to teach. Kolawole (2004) opines that what made English become a world language has in turn resulted in new Englishes.

Until recently, Standard English was the model for grammar and Received Pronunciation (R.P.) the mode for pronunciation. Today we have indigenous teachers who cannot mode Standard English and Received Pronunciation.

The quality of English language acquired will determine the quality of education. The decline in the standard of English can be attributed to the quality of English teaching and learning in schools. "Educational failure is basically a linguistic failure" (Baldeh, 1990). Proficiency in English is required for a person to be regarded as an educated Nigerian.

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The english language curriculum for junior secondary schools: English is a core subject in the curriculum. The National Policy on Education aims at the development of skills, which will enable students to be self-reliant and self employed at the end of their educational career.

The English language curriculum is an integrated English study that embodies the following elements-vocabulary development, comprehension-listening and reading, structure, spoken English, writing and literature. The curriculum emphasizes the development of the four language skills, which are speaking, listening, reading and writing.

The idea of the curriculum is to provide a systematic development of both language skills and literary knowledge that are considered essential for effective use of English in oral and written communication as well as in learning other subjects in the school curriculum (FME, 1985).

Isuigo-Abanihe (1996) notes that even though there is an apparent consensus existing in terms of what the objectives of the language curriculum should be, it has been observed that practice differs from prescription.

The aim of the syllabus in vocabulary development at the junior secondary is to expose students to a wide range of vocabulary items of familiar and everyday situation. For comprehension, two skills to be acquired are listening and reading skills. For any student, a good reading ability would certainly lead to a good academic performance. For structure, the curriculum committee asserts that in designing the syllabus an eclectic approach has been adopted.

The curriculum reveals the fact that teaching and learning Oral English which takes place at the secondary schools is mainly for the preparation of examination. The Committee further notes that Oral English is examination oriented and therefore in most cases haphazardly done. Reading and writing are two components of literacy, reading which is usually silent is not a visible form of literacy when it is compared to writing which is visible. Writing is very important as asserted by Aboderin (1985). Writing provides a link with the past and future.

English syllabus shows that students would have to write a composition each week. Writing skills can be developed in students when they are well tutored. Language and literature 'have been merged in English at the JSS level'. (Ihezubor, 1991). English is practiced in literature. Ihezubor (1991) suggests the use of literature to demonstrate words and their meaning, synonyms antonyms, homonyms, idioms, figures of speech, smile and metaphor.

English standards in schools: The standard of English has declined at all levels of the educational system. A number of writers have corroborated this view. Most students do not have a mastery of language before and after the completion of secondary school.

Akere (1995) notes that the primary school leaner apart from the products of a few elite private schools does not posses the required competence in the four language skills both cognitive and communicative functions. Mohammad (1995) describes the situation thus:

"Many students come to secondary school knowing little or no English thereby necessitating the continued use of mother tongue as a medium of teaching the subject in some instances."

The problem extends even to tertiary level as Akere (1995) observed that: at the tertiary level of education students have so much difficulty with the communicative skills in English that they cannot function effectively in their academic use of English.

Adejare (1995) agrees with the view by stating that: university entrants are so linguistically defective that many would not have acquired secondary certificate in English two decades ago. But they come in good grades and no thanks to JAMB, they are literally foisted in the universities.

The mass failure syndrome has no doubt continued down the years. Kolawole (2004) attributes the mass failure of students to the spread and development of the subject in Nigeria. However, what is imperative is that there must be an improvement in the standard of English.

Hypotheses: For a number of years now, the teachers have implemented the curriculum. But one wonders, the extent that the variables (available facilities, personnel, teaching methods and materials have contributed to its implementation.

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.5 level of probability:

- There is no significant correlation in the academic performance of students and the qualifications of English language teachers.
- There is no significant difference in the academic performance of students and the instructional resources available and used and the non available ones.
- There is no significant difference in the academic performance of students and the aspects of English language considered difficult.
- There is no significant difference in the academic performance of male and female students.
- There is no significant difference in the academic performance of students taught by Guided Discovery (I), Teacher's centre (II) and both methods (I and II).

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistics. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was also used. Twenty-one secondary schools were used for the study: Ten public secondary schools, ten private secondary schools and one federal government college. Two teachers and four students were chosen at random. Three teachers were chosen from Federal Government College, while seven students were used. The instruments used were: An achievement test (ATLEA) of which the students responded to twenty items. Also a product and process questionnaires based on Oral English.

Questionnaires based on the implementation of the curriculum and items related to the difficult aspects of English, number of times essays are written and so on, was administered to the students (respondents). An observation and checklist were used. Teachers indicated the resources available in their schools, the use of such resources and so on.

RESULTS

Data collected were analysed using Descriptive Statistics, which involved using frequency on percentage, mean, standard deviation. ANOVA was also used to draw. The findings are presented below:

Ho$_1$: There is no significant difference/correlation in the academic performance of students and the qualifications of English language teachers.

Table 1 shows the ANOVA score of students taught by teachers of different qualifications like NCE, B.A. and B.A./PGDE holders and it was found significant (F-calculated > F-value, df = (2,84), p<0.05). As a result the stated null hypothesis one is rejected; hence there is significant difference/correlation in the academic performance of students and the qualifications of English language teachers. As a result the post hoc analysis was carried out to find specific group of significant as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows the Scheffe's post hoc analysis of students taught by teachers of different qualifications (NCE, B.A. and B.A./PGDE holders) and it was found that there was no significant difference among students taught by NCE and B.A. holders and B.ED. holders (S-value< F-value, df = (2,84), p<0.05); but there was significant difference among students taught by NCE and B.ED. holders (S-value>F-value, df = (2,84), p<0.05). The amazing finding is that students taught contrary to the belief that Educational biased teachers tend to produce highly academic students.

Table 1: ANOVA scores of students based on teachers qualifications

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-value	F-calculated	Significant
Between-groups	3994.63	2	1997.31	3.07	6.492	p<0.05*
Within-groups	25843.30	84	307.66			
Total	29837.93	86				

*Significant

Table 2: Scheffe post hoc analysis on significance on teachers' qualifications

1st group	Jth group	Scheffe's values of significant
	B.A.	1.494263364
NCE	B.ED.	5.614126221
B.A.	B.ED.	1.653618519

*Significant

Table 3: ANOVA scores based on non-available and available used resources

Variations/variables	Non-available resources	Available used resources
Sum of squares between groups	13187.22	1805
Sum of squares within groups	150389.6	31828.95
Sum of squares total	1469211.6	33633.95
Degree of freedom between groups	4	2
Degree of freedom within groups	82	92
Degree of freedom total	86	94
Mean square between groups	3296.8	902.5
Mean square within groups	1835.2	345.97
Mean square total	-	-
F-value	2.450	3.07
F-calculated	1.796	2.61
Significant	p>0.05	p>0.05

Ho$_2$: There is no significant difference in the academic performance of students and the instructional resources that were available used and non-available ones.

Table 3 shows the ANOVA score of students taught with non-available and available used resources in the schools and it was found not significant in non-available resources with (F-calculated <F-value, df = (4, 82), p<0.05) and available used resources with (F-calculated value, df = 2, 92), p>0.05). As a result the stated null hypothesis two is not rejected; hence there is no significant difference in the academic performance of students and the instructional resources that were available used and non-available ones. Hence, the contribution of these resources to the academic performance of students in English language is not significant.

Ho$_3$: There is no significant difference in the performance of students and the aspects of English language considered difficult.

Table 4 describes the ANOVA score of students based on the identified topics considered difficult and it was found not significant with (F-calculated<F-value, df = (3, 80), p>0.05). As a result the stated null hypothesis three is not rejected; hence there is no significant difference in the academic performance of students and the aspects of English language considered difficult. Hence, the nature of difficult aspect of English language to the academic performance of students in English language is not significant.

Table 4: ANOVA scores of students in the difficult topics

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-value	F-calculated	Significant
Between-groups	1631.92	3	543.97	2.68	1.68	p<0.05
Within groups	25935.68	80	324.20			
Total	27567.6	83				

Table 5: T-test scores based on students' genders

Genders	Mean(x)	S.D. (o)	df	t-value	t-calculated	Significant
Male	44.89	18.6	43	1.980	1.119	p>0.05
Female	39.53	18.0	42			
Total	41.98	18.9	85			

Table 6: ANOVA scores of students based on methods of teaching

Source of variation	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F-value	F-calculated	Significant
Between-groups	503.99	2	252	2.68	0.725	p<0.05
Within-groups	28833.5	83	347.4			
Total	29337.5	85				

Ho₄: There is no significant difference in the academic performance of male and female students in English language

Table 5 shows the genders' score of significance of students with males' mean score and standard deviation (x, o) of (44.89%, 18.6) and females' mean score and standard deviation (x, o) of (39.53%, 18.0) though not found significant (t-calculated < t-value, df = 85, p>0.05). As a result the stated null hypothesis four is not rejected; hence there is no significant difference in the academic performance of male and female students in English language.

Ho₅: There is no significant in the academic performance of students taught by Guided Discovery (I), Teacher's centre (II) and both methods (I and II)

Table 6 describes the ANOVA score of students based on the methods of teaching by the teachers of English language and it was found not significant with (F-calculated < F-value, df = (2,83), p>0.05). As a result the stated null hypothesis five is not rejected; hence there is no significant difference in the academic performance of students taught by Guided Discovery (I), Teacher's centre (II) and both methods (I and II). Hence, the nature of methods employ by the teachers did contribute significantly to academic performance of students in English language.

DISCUSSION

The results indicate that there is no significant correlation between the academic performance of students and the qualifications of English teachers. As Scheffe Post Hoc Analysis carried out shows that there is significant difference among students taught by NCE and B.ED holders. Students taught by B.ED holders

performed poorly. This result contradicts an earlier study by Ibhafidon and Jimoh (2005) where it was asserted that, there is a relationship between teachers' qualification and students' academic achievement in Social Studies. Nevertheless, the result of English language may be due to the fact that most of the teachers who possess higher degrees in Public schools are often times are dedicated. And most of the teachers do have the knowledge of the subject content of the language.

A significant correlation was not found between the academic performance of students and the instructional resources available and used and the non-available ones. The study shows that a difference was found in the performance of students exposed to instructional materials compared to those not exposed to the materials. This corroborates the views of Akinpelu (1999) that instructional materials stand as the pivot upon which effective instruction hinges.

The results also reveal that no significant difference exists between the performance of students and the aspects of English language considered difficult. Findings reveal that students who identified Oral English, Lexis and Structure and Essay as being difficult did not perform better than students who identified Comprehension.

A significant difference was identified between the academic performance of male and female students in English. This is in consonance with Tom-Lawyer (2002), who found that boys performed better than the girls. This may not be unconnected with the fact that Oral English is not properly taught at the junior secondary school level (Attah, 1990).

The findings further reveal that, there is no significant difference between the performance of students taught using the Guided Discovery/Teacher Centred Approach those using both methods.

The students using the Guided Discovery method have a higher mean than those using the Teacher Centred Approach. The Discovery method is the recommended method of the Curriculum Committee (FME, 1985). This shows that most teachers do not take to the prescriptions of the Curriculum.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For effective teaching of the subject, the students, teachers, parents and the government have roles to play:

- The students should pay more attention to their studies in English language; listen to the speakers of the languages; listen to the speakers of the language and imitate them.
- The teachers should plan the approach to the lesson, have a requisite background knowledge of the subject. (Tom-Lawyer, 2002)

- The parents should encourage the students to speak English instead of pidgin and provide books for the students on the language.
- The government should review the training of English teachers to meet the current standard, provide resources for the teaching of the language and review the implementation of the Curriculum. Provision for retaining of teachers through in-service training, workshops and seminars, textual materials and Language Literature should be provided in the school library.

CONCLUSION

The junior secondary school curriculum needs proper implementation. The effective performance of the students does not entirely depend in teachers' qualifications, method used to teach the students, difficult aspect of English and instruction facilities available. Proper implementation of the curriculum is vital. With qualified teacher, the recommended method being used to teach the students, the available resources will contribute to the proper implementation of the curriculum, the performance of the students will be enhanced. This agrees with Obidoa (1990) that any student who is properly exposed to Curriculum should be proficient in English.

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