

# CHALLENGES TO THE PRODUCTION OF ENGLISH TEACHERS IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

The importance of teachers, particularly of English language in Nigeria cannot be over stressed. This is because English is relatively central in acquisition of all types of knowledge; hence, English teachers are as important in academic discipline as air is to life. However, many things have cropped into its teaching/learning scene, which affects the production of qualified teachers in it. This paper identifies those factors such as new openings, social/material demands, poor self-image, "book-sell" etc that militate against production of qualified English teachers. It also suggests ways of curbing the malaise including the provision of welfare packages for English Majors, provision of favourable working environment for both students and teachers of English etc.

## **Introduction**

Generally, every aspect of life, whether human or non-human has got its challenges which sometimes are multi-dimensional. English language is very essential. It is used for the teaching of various subjects and carrying out other activities. Science, vocational and technical education for instance can only be acquired using a medium which in Nigeria's case is English. Riki (2003) says it is almost hackneyed that English language is currently the language of science and technology. This is even why it is made compulsory in all academic institutions including the Polytechnic which has a technically-based curriculum (NBTE, 1999). Interestingly, Akpan (1997) argues that even if Nigeria decides to establish another lingua franca to replace English, it "will not likely be a better alternative to English in the teaching of science". If English is as important as this, then English teachers are overwhelmingly a force to reckon with in Nigerian educational set up.

Assumedly, for the value placed on English teachers, those produced in it are expected to be of high standard, that is to say that they should be very effective in the subject. This will enable them, having been trained to train others to use it appropriately. Nonetheless, what is obtained today is a far cry from the ideal. Many contemporary issues snare the production of English teachers.

This paper therefore discovers that there are problems confronting the production of teachers that are trained to teach English. The paper is aimed at pointing out those recent factors affecting the easy and competent making of English teachers; and further attempts to offer suggestions on how these problems could be curtailed so as to advance the status of English teachers and English teaching generally in Nigeria.

## **Challenges to the Production of English Teachers**

The researcher earlier said that English has assumed a place of importance in Nigerian educational sphere. Because of this position, availability of teachers to meet up with its demand is necessary. To make the teachers sufficiently available, teachers have to be trained and produced. However, it is sad to say apprehensively that we may soon run short of qualified English teachers. This is because there are new things that are creeping into the English acquisition domain which are affecting the production of English teachers. Some of the challenges are highlighted as follows:

### **New Openings**

Nigeria is getting advanced and having many-new job openings everywhere. Political, business and technological opportunities abound now, and the teacher finds this wide range of opportunities exciting and inviting. For instance, Nigeria's political system creates room for many people to vie for electoral positions so, the teacher finds himself suitable for it. Also, the computer age has made it possible for every interested person to fiddle with a system and eventually become an expert and tap the benefit that accrues therefrom. The teacher sees these opportunities as a "waiting" offer and immediately gives up teaching for any of them at any slightest opportunity.

### **High Social/Material Demands**

The modern society places high demand on social-cum-material values, the teachers inclusive want to make ends meet. For this reason, teachers seem to forget their primary assignment of teaching in pursuit of material gains seemingly available only outside the class. When there is no commitment, definitely, students are half-baked, and cannot perform effectively as teachers of English when demanded.

### **Poor Self-image**

Teaching profession seems to be given less class value. The teacher is most times only associated with children or students. When he appears in a function, a ward councilor who is also present at the occasion is prestigiously identified while the teacher is not noticed, talk more of giving him a seat. Again, when the teacher goes to a family's house, he is seen to be a visitor of the student, not of the entire family. With this attitude meted out to him he feels really less important and when he goes to the classroom, he is reluctant to teach.

This lack of recognition for teachers has made students to run away from the profession -even if they study it, they are likely to prefer becoming media workers, bank secretaries or Public Relations Officers, than becoming teachers.

### **Handout and "Book-Self Syndrome**

Many teachers who prepare handouts and write books tend to use them as source of high income by enforcing their sale at skyrocketing prices and threatening failure for students who do not purchase them. The effect of this is that proper teaching is hot done; yet, students pass since they have paid for the marks through the books or handouts. Thus, students graduate, but still cannot speak good English, talk more of teaching it to other students. On the other hand, good students who cannot afford paying for the texts, are forced to drop out of school, reducing the making of those who could teach English effectively.

### **Over-Crowded Language Classes**

Over-population is a serious problem in the effective teaching of English. Murana (2004) comments on the issue of over population in an English department to be "a population of about two thousand students". She quotes William (1999, p. 12) who analyses the problem of over population of learners in the classroom that "there is a world of difference in teacher-effectiveness between a class of fifteen and a Class of fifty". This being the case does not permit effective supervision of exercises, testing and class control, leading to poor production of English learners.

### **Lack of Learning Materials**

Speech intelligibility is very vital to an English user because he is seen as a model of speech. But language laboratories from where this can be acquired are not available; where they are nonfunctional or obsolete. Apart from the language laboratories, other teaching aids such as chalk, duster and chalkboards are scarcely provided during teaching. Some of the materials, say, chalk and dusters are of very poor qualities that they cease to perform their function of writing and cleaning in the class. With these, the teacher gets discouraged and leaves the work undone or if done, partially.

### **Examination Malpractice**

Examination malpractice in English is registering an alarming position in Nigerian educational system. This happens because English is a pre-requisite for entry into all courses in tertiary institutions. The English teacher thus becomes overwhelmed by this practice - since the appraisal of a secondary school or even of a teacher is hinged on the performance of *WAEC\NECO* or *NABTEB* examinations, the English teacher aids malpractice whether directly or indirectly so that he will be commended for students' good result in English. Even if he opposes such an act, he may not succeed because the school authorities or parents of wards encourage it. This practice affects effective acquisition of English, consequently the production of incompetent teachers of English.

### **Method of Lesson Presentation**

According to Murana (2004, pp. 8 & 11), "how we teach is as important as what we teach": The method of presentation of our lesson compels or dissuades learners. Some teachers have adopted the "note-giving" method. Such teachers simply give notes to students without adequate explanation on the topic. The students in this circumstance read the notes and get little they could without in-depth understanding. At the end, they graduate without having a grip of their subject such students do not make good teachers of English later. Also, with this attitude, learners feel that English is difficult and run away from it.

### **Recommendations**

This paper identified various challenges facing effective production of teachers in English language. These challenges come from the teachers of teachers, the school managers and the students themselves. If this should continue it will have a devastating future effect on the status of English language in our society. To arrest these challenges, the following are suggested:

- > The teaching profession should generally be given more recognition by Nigerians so that many can accept going into English education and becoming teachers of English with pride.
  - > Today there are many job openings for English specialists. To retain them in the teaching profession, they should be given higher entry point into the government civil service or even the private service. This, if done will attract English graduates taking to teaching.
  - > Scholarship awards should be given to all those who accept to study English. This will greatly assist those who could not afford self-sponsorship and at the end there will be available teachers for English.
  - > Immediate employment on completion be provided for English graduates. This will attract many to study English, hence availability of teachers.
  - > Teachers' salaries, promotion and entitlement should be given as at and when due.
  - > Managers of educational institutions should ensure adequate and conducive learning environment. Also over-populated classes should be discouraged to enable teachers give accurate assessment of each student. In this case, the ratio of 1:40 should be adhered to.
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- It should be ensured that only texts that are mandatory for effective teaching and learning be imposed on students for acquisition. No student should be denied marks for non-purchase of irrelevant texts that their alternatives are available.
  - > Relevant and qualitative English teaching materials should be provided at the right time by managers of schools.
  - > In the face of accommodation difficulty, English majors should be given accommodation once they can pay.
  - > Every prospective English student should have entry requirement. If he has already passed English at the initial stage, he will find it easy to cope in the class and turning him an English teacher will be easy.
  - > Fraudulent exam practices in English at common entrance examinations, National Examination Council (NECO), National Business and Technical Examination Board

(NABTEB), West African Examination Council (WAEC) etc, should be completely eradicated. This will give room for assessing genuine candidates to be admitted for English, which will in turn affect their turn over as English teachers.

- > The quantity and quality of teachers depends on those who teach them. Therefore, teachers of English should be committed to their work — using appropriate teaching methods, testing students adequately and ensuring syllabus coverage.
- > The quality of work produced is synonymous to the quality of teacher. It is therefore necessary that the teacher of English update himself or herself through researches, seminars, conferences and workshops. The British Council's Summer School for English teachers who are teaching English as a second language for foreign students for say 3 or 6 months should be re-enforced by managers of schools. If appropriately carried out, this will enhance the quality of teaching and in turn affect the caliber of people produced to teach English in Nigeria.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper, English has been considered as fundamental to the realization of Nigerian's education, and that it can be sustained only through availability of teachers who are competent and effective. The paper further tried to identify a catalogue of challenges that hamper the production of adequate and efficient teachers in English. It has attempted to proffer solutions to the said challenges with a view to bringing back sanity to the English class, that is, an environment where English can be taught and learnt with ease and zeal, and thereby producing teachers who can teach English competently and comfortably.

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