

## **The Challenges Of Teaching English Language In Extra-Mural Classes In Owerri Municipal Council, IMO State, Nigeria**

<sup>1</sup>Dan Chima Amadi and <sup>2</sup>Amadi Appolonia Ifeyinwa

<sup>1,2</sup>Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria

---

**Abstract:** *The challenges of teaching English language in extra mural classes in Owerri Municipal Council of Imo State and indeed all parts of Nigeria are enormous. These challenges stem from the students inability to properly separate the two language sets, their inability to manage the main structure of English and overcome their seemingly incurable mistakes. Inability to express themselves fluently in English and the appointment of inadequately trained teachers are some of the challenges. This paper makes suggestions on how to improve on the situation.*

---

### **I. Introduction**

The large enrolment of students and pupils in schools in most eastern parts of Nigeria has made non-formal education a good substitute. For one, it has led to the establishment of extra-mural classes in all parts of the South Eastern States. In Imo State, also in the south east, the situation is the same and government neglect of schools' infrastructure from the 1970s has made sourcing for alternative inevitable and to complement the falling standards in state schools. As a non-formal education, extra-mural programme is very popular even in other parts of the country. The fact that the rich and the poor, old and young patronize the programme is a pointer to its popularity and relevance. Previous works tend to emphasise the falling standard of education in the country and the causes without pointing out how the establishment of extra-mural classes can help fill in the gap. Non-formal education is that education acquired outside the conventional school system. According to Ahmed (1975), it is "any organized systematic educational activity carried out outside the framework of the formal school system, to provide selected types of learning, to particular sub-groups in the population, adults as well as children. These include agricultural extension and farmer training programmes, adult literacy programme and occupational skills, training given outside the formal school system, youth clubs with substantial education purposes, and various community programmes of instruction in health, nutrition, family planning, co-operatives and the like (Qtd Nwadiani 1999:3).

The definition of the National Policy on Education is more circumspect. Non-formal education according to the policy is that education which though the programme is organized, is not part of the formal system of education. In other words, there is no fixed curriculum and neither is there duration nor age as determining factors. Examples of this kind of non-formal education include correspondence programmes, Agricultural Extension Programmes, Extra-Mural Studies, and the Open Apprenticeship System of the National Directorate of Employment of Nigeria.

The researchable questions are; (1) Are there challenges that exist in the teaching of English of English Language in extra mural classes in Imo State? (2) What are the challenges of teaching English in these extra mural classes? (3) To what extent can the management tackle these challenges?

### **II. Literature Review**

English Language occupies a unique place in business and communication in Nigeria. As a former colony of Britain, the language is regarded as the official language of the country. As Femi Adegbite and Wale Adegbite (1999) rightly pointed out. "An official language is thus considered as a government oriented language. It may, in some sense be an elitist language. It can be seen from the various definitions that Nigeria has an official language – English – and several Lingua Francas but lacks a national language that can be considered as a language of wider communication among its people." (1999:52)

In Imo State, as in most parts of Igbo land, Igbo is the first language (L1) and the mother tongue (MT) of this monolingual and monocultural group. Since Igbo serves the basic needs of a good language that contains enough vocabulary to communicate the sensibility and thought of the people, it has co-existed with English language from the colonial period.

Thus, while English is unduly accepted and used by all strata of the society in Imo State, the Challenges of teaching it in a non-formal setting are enormous. The collapse of the infrastructural facilities in state owned schools, coupled with noticeable apathy on the part of the teachers have made recourse to extra-mural classes a welcomed development. Although intakes to these schools are not only candidates for higher

education, as many adults of all trades have been attending them to brush-up their skills, the challenges of the educating the sub-groups in English are tasking. The very first of the problem is lack of basic foundation and the need to start afresh for variegated sub-groups.

Recently, the former Governor of Anambra state, Peter Obi called for a vigorous study the Igbo language. Apart from making it a compulsory subject in schools while he was in office, he had given further governmental impetus to make its study attractive through scholarships and other incentives. The bold stand of the Anambra State government ought to be emulated by other south east state governments. The importance of studying Igbo has a spiral and consummating effect in the study of English language. A sound foundation in the mother tongue has a correlative effect on the study of the second language. Studies have shown that since a people's technology can be found in the mother tongue, in this case, Igbo, can help in the study of Western technology, which in this case is in English. As joy Oluchi Uguru (2009) has argued:

Since most experts in our indigenous technologies cannot speak English, only an improved study of this language embodying them can ensure the sustenance and survival of such technologies. Our problem does not lie in the non-existence of an indigenous national language, rather it stems from the relegation of our indigenous language, which embody our local technologies (Uguru: 106:7).

Addressing a largely inhomogeneous group, the English language teacher in an extra-mural class is confronted with a group that has no adequate control of the main structures of English. Since most members of the groups have a regional lingua Franca, which in this case is Igbo, the mother tongue interference is always hampering their fluency in the language. Mistakes made at home are hardly corrected because some of their parents cannot offer any useful assistance. Hardly can they pronounce the word 'ship' and 'sheep' with distinction. The problem of pronouncing 'L' and 'r' so that they can be clearly spelt is also interference from the mother tongue. The English language teacher is in such a situation at dilemma on where to begin. In most cases, those with incurable bad habits are left behind. The two sets of language structure must be clearly isolated so that any meaningful progress can be made in each.

The current decline in the standard of education has not helped the situation. A situation where education must be acquired by all means, even if standard has to be compromised is not the best. If the goal of education in this case is to advance literacy and numeracy, one would not be bothered. In many cases these inadequately trained people seek employment in public schools. But to assign classes to such inadequately educated teachers to teach younger ones is to compound an already bad situation. For instance, doubt has to be raised about the competence of a trader who attends classes only at weekends and who on graduation is assigned to teach in a school where he/she never attended nor knows the English language structure. In some cases, what is learnt on television, novels, films and members of the society are taught as correct because the teacher does not know better. The English language teacher should himself know when a writer is experimenting with the language and be abreast with what should be taught as correct. The Zebrudaya's English (a popular Nigerian actor and comedian) for instance should be seen as representing a character. A student who comes to class with this wrong background should have his error corrected. The English language teacher ought to know that the changes in English have been as a result of the contact with regional lingua Francas and the effect has been mutual. Just as Ayo Bamgbose (1995) has pointed out:

"Nativization of English in Nigeria is not limited to the usual features of transfer of phonological, lexical, syntactic and semantic patterns of Nigerian languages into English, including the evolution of distinctively Nigerian usages, attitudes and pragmatic use of the language". (Bamgbose:11).

The inadequacy of reading materials like novels, newspapers, magazines takes their toll on the students' improvement on the language. In libraries where these are made available, hardly do these students visit such places or make purchases of their own. Recently, the introduction of the home video has further complicated the situation. Once students reach home they glue their eyes on the television. When assignments are given, they are half-hazardly done or not done at all. The result is that the teacher is forced not to over labour himself. Even when books are recommended, students prefer to watch the films that are constantly relayed.

The usual errors are mostly in grammar. The students fail to know when to use have or has, present or past tenses. For instance, it is common to hear, "one of my friend came" instead of "One of my friends came" or "He have done it" instead of "He has done it". "You people is good". "Everybody are here". Error often results when the students translates directly from his mother tongue into English. 'I am coming' instead of "Excuse me". An Igbo student who is going away to attend to other needs translates "Abia gam" (I am coming) straight into English when he should have excused himself. Transliteration is popular in Nigeria but the students should be acquainted with this development as a unique Nigerian variant.

It has been argued in some places that bilingualism has contributed to the low linguistic competence in English. Some think that Nigeria's contact with Britain was responsible for the lack of proficiency in both English and the mother tongues. In his study, Bebam Sammy Chumbow: has submitted in "The place of the mother tongue in the National Policy on Education" that:

It is not true that bilingualism with the mother tongue first results in cognitive deficits and low productivity. Lambert and Tucker (1972) have shown that the cognitive development of a child will not be impaired by bilingualism within a well-organised programme. In fact they emphasise that the development of a second language (or official language in our case) often benefits from the development of the home language skills. A comparative study of official language and the direct method shows that the former has more crucial advantages over the latter (Engle 1975).

In other words, a better result can be achieved if we take more pains in studying Igbo as it will help us in acquiring proficiency in English. Our problem stems from the fact that our students are jacks of both trades but masters of none. The task then before the English language teachers in the south east is to have recourse to Igbo as it will make English more intelligible to his students.

Some of the challenges can be identified as sociological. The influence of the society like peer group influence can affect the attention of the students. A case where a boy or a girl for that matter registers in extra-mural classes purely to get closer to the opposite sex is a case in point. Except his/her attention is re-directed, he or she will continue to be a source of distraction to other students. His/her dressing method speaks volume on his mission in such a place. Since it is not always easy for the teacher to identify those that are genuine from those that are not serious, his challenges mount.

There are instances where parents contribute to the stress level of the non-formal education sector. Instances abound where parents send their children there to reduce their idle time. Knowing that there is no commitment, such students drift along and help in the lack of concentration of other students. The questions need to be asked again: (1) Are there challenges that exist in the teaching of English language in extra mural classes in Owerri Municipal Council in Imo State? (2) What are the challenges of teaching English in extra-mural classes? (3) To what extent can the management tackle these challenges?

### **III. Findings**

Visits and investigation done in respect of the above revealed that there were indeed challenges. Some of the English teachers spoken to complained of inadequate infrastructures, which hampered teaching and learning. Irregular power supply that forced the organizers to resort to the use of generators was a cause of serious concern. The management in an attempt to control cost did not use the generator all the time even though there was no electricity. The result was that under intense heat, the students found their condition most intolerable. In some classes, there were no fans.

Some of the teachers complained also of truancy among the students. Because attendance was poor, those who did not report regularly slowed down the pace of the teachers. The teachers then found themselves in very uncomfortable position when the students insisted on being carried along. The teachers in question finding no option because of the mode of payment complied. In some instances, those who came did not show enough seriousness to motivate the teachers into teaching them well.

Interview among the students revealed they often came late to class because of the over-crowded nature of the classes. Instead of annoying their parents by not attending, they gave excuses for coming late. And most parents did not monitor their wards to see their performances in these extra-mural classes. Many of the students milled around the corridors chanting and whiling away their precious time. To control these boys and girls was a Herculean task for most of the management of the extra-mural classes visited. They preferred passive tolerance so as not to lose their customers.

In some venues visited, some of those teaching English language were unqualified. There were instances where Sociology, Religion and History graduates were teaching English because of the management claim of lack of qualified teachers. Although excuses were made for the absence of qualified English graduate teachers, we found the scenario abnormal. We felt that good English teachers could easily be sourced from the teeming number of graduates who had no jobs. An English graduate will naturally make a difference because he could easily ram home his points with illustrations from literature texts since literature is language in action or the blood of the subject.

### **IV. Recommendation**

In the light of the findings, the following recommendations are made with the hope that if well considered and implemented, they will help to improve on the situation.

- a. Adequate classrooms and furniture should be provided by the management in order to alleviate poor conditions of teaching and learning in the extra-mural classes.
- b. Seminars should be organized for the teachers teaching in the extra-mural lessons. This will in no small measure improve and bring their methods of teaching up to date by educating them on how to be resourceful and make use of situational teaching methods to enhance knowledge and understanding by the students.

- c. The management should give more time to the supervision of instruction especially as the students do not have solid foundation and encourage them by making out time to teach them, guide them and counsel them, than staying always in to the office or away for other businesses.

### **Suggestion**

It is suggested that similar investigation be carried out in other non-formal education settings in order to find the challenges of teachers in English language and all other subjects. Through these suggestions, the situation will be greatly improved

### **Work Cited**

- [1]. Ahmed, M (1975). *The Economics of Non Formal Education*. New York: Prager.
- [2]. Akindele, Femi and Wale Adegbite (2005): Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press.
- [3]. Anasiudu B.N, Nwaozuzu G.I, Okebalam C.N (2007): *Language and Literature in a Developing Country – Essays in Honour of B.O.A Oluikpe*. Onitsha: Africana First Publishers Ltd.
- [4]. Bamgbose, Ayo (1995): "English in the Nigerian Environment". In *new English. A West African Respective*. Ayo Bamgbose, Ayo banjo, Andrew Thomase (Eds). Ibadan: Masuro N.G Publishers.
- [5]. Emenanjo, E.N (1990) *Multilingualism Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria*. Agbor: Central Books Limited.
- [6]. Ezeokoli Francis (N.D), "Towards a Successful Performance in English". *English Usage Magazine* Vol. 3. No 1 (ND)
- [7]. Chumbow, Beban Sammy (1990) "The Place of the Mother Tongue in the National Policy on Education". *Multilingualism Minority language and language Policy in Nigeria*. Emenanjo E. N. (ed). Agbor: Central Books limited.
- [8]. Nwadiani Mon (1999). *Alternatives for Nigerian Education*. Being a paper presented at the first National conference on National Policy on Education for sustainable development: issues for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century organized by the Faculty of Education, Enugu State University of Science and Technology (ESUT), ENUGU September 8<sup>th</sup> – 11, 1999.