



A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF THE EMPIRICAL STUDIES ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES PROGRAMME IN THE NIGERIAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM.

By

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Abstract: Following the dissatisfaction with the General Use of English Programme in the Nigerian university system, it paved the way for a need for a more effective English programme that will be result-oriented, much more functional and derivable from Needs Analysis. The English for Specific Purposes which is being fashioned in Nigeria as English for Academic Purposes finally emerged; “not as a product but as a panacea’ meant to fill the gaps General Use of English has not been able to fill since its inception. This paper is therefore, out to announce further the great funeral of the General Use of English by critically examining some of the empirical studies that have been carried out in Nigeria in order to install English for Academic Purposes in the Nigerian university system to mark the “pull out” of the General Use of English. The general approach of the paper is analytic and discussive. The paper hopes to open new grounds and make substantial contribution towards more efficient English Language teaching and learning, expand the reader’s knowledge and frontiers of both the theory and practice of English for Specific Purposes and the functional application of the principles of Needs Analysis in any academic programme implementation and finally, to let the world know about the ‘state of the art’ with EAP in Nigeria. The paper concludes with recommendations to further accomplish its task.

Keywords: dissatisfaction, general, use, English, programme, specific purposes, academic, result-oriented, functional, needs, analysis, university, COMSKIP, research and Nigeria.

Introduction

When we look at the highly structured organizations that hold most power, control the way we live and influence the way we think, we can see that language is an integral part of that control. Given the many important roles that English language performs, it becomes expedient for any Nigerian that wants to be relevant to his social, economic and political environment to learn and acquire some appreciable knowledge of English. This explains why both the literate and non-literate have a great respect for anyone who has an admirable proficiency in English. In fact, educated Nigerians who are deficient in their mastery of English and indeed some of the uneducated lot make frantic effort through private tuition to learn it.

According to Herbert Igboanusi (2001), English is the open sesame for anyone who wants to participate in local, national and international political affairs and economic enterprises. This need, coupled with the dissatisfaction with the Use of English programme in the Nigerian University system brought about the need to review the Use of English programme in order to bring it to terms with the requirement of the times. The answer to this need fell on English for Specific Purposes in the Nigerian university system. The idea was to strengthen the English language component of the general studies programmes in all the conventional universities in the country. This brought about the communication skill project popularly known in Nigeria as “COMSKIP.” This was inaugurated in 1987 for the tertiary level of education. COMSKIPTECH was for university of technology. This marks the beginning of English for Academic Purposes practice in Nigeria.

English for Academic Purposes in Nigeria

The effort to apply the tenets of EAP to language teaching and learning have also taken off in Nigeria with studies and researches by such language teachers as Okunnuga (1979), Awonuga (1984), Odejide *et al* (1993), Williams (1993), Astil *et al* (1993), Okedara and Oyerokun (1993), Nwankwo (1998), Olaofe (1998), and Aborisade (1998).

Okunnuga (1979) contends that the problem of designing EAP programmes for students in developing countries is primarily concerned with concept formation and language learning. According to him, the communication needs of students include:

- i. Listening comprehension training in spoken scientific, technological, arts and Social Science English.
- ii. Reading comprehension and fast reading training to the satisfaction of scientific, technological, arts and social science students.
- iii. The ability to write scientific, technological, arts and social science English.
- iv. The ability to speak scientific, technological, arts and social science English.

In getting around this problem, Okunnuga enunciates using diagrams, illustrations and exercises, programmed for the teaching of discourse organization to an EST Class. The programme Okunnuga designs is guided by three factors:

- i. Concept of science and technology (S&T)
- ii. Concept of grammar as it pertains to S&T
- iii. S&T vocabulary

For providing practice in discourse, Okunnuga first presents a reading passage followed by exercise on intra and inter sentence relationship, reference features, re-expression, writing based on non-verbal forms (generalizations, definitions, classifications, etc) and discourse organization. The activities either take the form of word study or reading comprehension activities, grammatical-rhetorical analysis of S and T discourse, discussion and case study exercise. Okunnuga also provides an appendix to his work dealing with further and more extensive exercises for practicing intra and inter sentence relationship. He enjoins his colleagues in other disciplines to do same.

Much of Okunnuga's work is an adaptation of Allen and Widdowson's work (1979). Descriptions of the teaching of rules of use of English and classification of exercises also are modeled after those of Allen and Widdowson. What Okunnuga, however does is to contextualize his work in an L2 situation and examines requirements for teacher training in EST in developing countries. Nevertheless, Okunnuga's findings are significant by highlighting some of the communication needs of not only science and technology students, but also those of other disciplines. Like in the studies of Tan (1988), Okunnuga fails to show the process of identifying the needs of the Science and Technology students. There is no empirical data to support his assertion.

In like manner, Adedeji (1984) draws attention to the communication needs of the technical students of polytechnics. Among the needs Adedeji lists are:

- i. The need to define concepts and describe substances, objects, location and processes,
- ii. The need to explain procedures and process, to report facts, draw inference and conclusion, classify and generalize,
- iii. The need to cope with listening to and understanding lectures as the students perform the above functions,
- iv. The knowledge and skill to cope with instructions on technical materials and literature in one's area of specialization,
- v. The ability to interpret and express information through graphic modes,
- vi. The need to participate in professional and social life (p.144).

Unfortunately however, like Okunnuga's work, Adedeji does not present any empirical evidence for the needs of the technical students he identifies.

A related study is carried out by Awonuga (1984), using University students. Awonuga (1984), examines the English language needs of literature students in the Nigerian University. This concern with literature students arises from his claim that students' lack of interest in the subject is due to poor language and so proposes that literature students need to be familiar with the following aspects of language if they are to enjoy their study of literature.

- i. Exposure to and creation of diverse registers (literary and non-literary),
- ii. Mastery of cohesive and structural relations,
- iii. Exposure to as wide a range of the potential of use as possible and to the range of possible meaning available in English,
- iv. Knowledge of generation of sentences (p.102).

Awonuga's discussion on this issue is too generalized, a fault which he admits when he states:

A lot of research needs to be done to enable us systematize (sic) our understanding of the ways in which language study is of benefit to the study of literature (1984:105).

At the University of Ibadan, Odejide *et al* (1993) investigate speaking skills among students of the nine faculties of the university. The aim of the study is to find out the degree to which students of these faculties need or feel they need the various speaking skills and the degree to which they use the oral skills. For their study, Odejide *et al* outline ten oral skills and twenty oral tasks. Upon analysis of the administered questionnaire, the researchers categorize two levels of the students' needs:

- i. Skills which rank high generally across faculties. These are reporting event, preparing a critique of a paper for presentation, participating in group discussion, interpreting data and explaining a process.
- ii. Skills regarded as more important by certain faculties than others. Examples are interviewing techniques which rank third for arts but thirteenth for medical faculty; debating in formal situation which ranks first in the arts but second in medical and agriculture faculties, etc.

In effect, Odejide *et al* provide helpful insight into the method of executing a need analysis.

Another researcher, Williams (1993), investigates the reading needs of the nine faculties of the University of Ibadan. His sample populations are asked to indicate the extent of their needs in respect to five sub-components: word recognition, vocabulary, comprehension, reading speed, and critical evaluation. For each of these skills, Williams also tests five to ten micro-skills and tasks students are expected to perform while reading. Questionnaires to this effect, are administered to both students and lecturers. Analysis reveals that the major needs of the respondents are the following:

- i. Distinguishing between words with similar sounds,
- ii. Deriving meaning from word elements,
- iii. Recalling of facts, faster reading and assessing the value of content.

Items which rank next include:

- i. Coping with words of more than three syllables,
- ii. Dealing with idioms and figures of speech,
- iii. Assessing writing styles.

Williams, however, remarks that the low ranking of an item in the analysis of students' responses should not be taken to mean that the students do not need such an item. Hence, he suggests that none of the items should be totally ignored. Within the same university, Astill *et-al* (1993) investigate the writing skills of the students. The researchers identify the respondents' writing needs from their responses to a set of questionnaires, which asks them to indicate the following:

- i. How often they have to carry out each of the twelve given tasks,
- ii. The extent to which they think they need each of them:
 - a. Five given basic writing skills in performing some written tasks,
 - b. Thirteen skills in organizing and expressing information,
 - c. Nine given English language competence (p.18).

On the whole, the team identifies the needs common to all faculties as:

- i. Conveying thought clearly,
- ii. Drawing relations between facts and ideas,

- iii. Maintaining a trend of thought,
- iv. Expressing facts and opinions,
- v. Connecting sentences in paragraphs.

Specific writing skills peculiar to particular respondents are listing, comparing, contrasting, defining and classifying ideas/problems, actions/reactions, processes/procedures, causes/effects for agriculture, social science, Education and arts. Technology departments prefer describing and classifying. As in their other three studies, Okedara and Oyerokun (1993) investigate students' needs in the areas of listening and study skills at the University of Ibadan nine faculties. Two sets of questionnaire one for study skills and the other for listening are designed and administered to the respondents. From the intensive analysis, the two researchers find out that students' needs vary from faculty to faculty, it was the result also arrived at by Odejide *et al* (1993), and Astill *et al* (1993). This study also encourages the needs analysis of each particular academic discipline. It is in this respect that the study of Odedara and Oyerokun is useful.

Another needs study is carried in the University of Jos. Ojo *et al* (1993) study needs of students in the faculties of arts, social science, education and medicine. The aims of the needs analysis are:

- i. To identify the language skills the students need most in their study:
- ii. To find out the frequency of the students' involvement in various language activities:
- iii. To define the students' areas of need with the help of their lecturers to be able to structure their syllabus and learning experience to meet such needs (P.39).

The responses to the administered questionnaire indicate the following areas of need:

- i. Developing speaking skills,
- ii. Reading in content areas,
- iii. Writing essays, notes, summaries,
- iv. Writing and presenting term papers, seminar, projects,
- v. Learning appropriate examining techniques,
- vi. Developing good listening skills.

Unlike in the studies of Odejide *et al* (1993), Williams (1993), Astill *et al* (1993) and Okedara and Oyerokun (1993) all of whom present to varying degrees specific micro-skills/tasks for each of the language skills they identify, Ojo *et al* simply provide a broad categorization of the contents they propose to include in the UOE syllabus. This, however, does not reduce the applicability of Ojo *et al's* work. Consequently, the work is to some extent useful for consideration.

Bamgbala (1993) is another researcher who carries out a needs study in Ahmadu Bello University Zaria, using only students and staff of the Pharmaceutical Sciences. The aim of Bamgbala's study is to find out the students' competence in each of the four language skills. The responses of students and lecturers differ as to the tasks that are regarded as important.

For instance, Bamgbala writes that:

The responses of lecturers indicate that listening is very important -53% compared to 29.3% recorded for speaking, 36% for reading and 39% for writing. Students, on the other hand, rate speaking higher than the other skills followed by reading, writing and listening.

Bamgbala does not make a conclusive comment on balancing the two diverging needs indications. This reduces the impact of her study.

The next work we shall review is Otagburuagu (1996), which studies the lacks of Nigerian bi-lingual undergraduates in chemistry with the aim of finding out the syntactic-discourse variations between the students' expository writing and their chemistry texts. The study is expected to provide a basis for an EAP writing programme among Nigerian chemistry undergraduates, using the university of Nigeria as the focal point. Otagburuagu's appraisal instruments are expository essay topics administered to the sample population and checklist of syntactic and cohesive features of chemistry texts. On analysis, Otagburuagu lists the lacks of the chemistry students in their use of syntactic and cohesive strategies. The cohesive features are:

- Co-ordinators
- Result indicators
- Expectation deniers

- Condition indicators
- Maximizers
- Diminishers (p.278)

While the syntactic features are:

- Subordination
- Compounding
- Fronting
- Wh-questions
- Infinitization
- Imperatives
- Comparatives
- Complementation
- Relativization (PP.279-230)

Another important variable in Otagburuagu's study is that he investigates gender-linked variations in the use of these strategies. The analysis in this aspect indicates that "lacks in the use of syntactic strategies between males and females in our study are sex-linked" (pp.292). In the area of cohesive strategies, Otagburuagu's result shows that males use more of the following strategies than females:

- Deixis
- Anaphora
- Result injectors
- Expectation deniers
- Compromisers
- Condition indicators
- Co-ordinators (p.293)

Females use

- Homophora
- Comparatives
- Adducers
- Sequencers
- Diminishers
- Reformulators
- Emphasizers
- Maximizers (p.293)

more than males.

Consequently on the above, Otagburuagu opines that writing pedagogy will attain optimum goals if the determination of the lacks of given target audience in an EAP-based programme is directly centred on the prior identification and knowledge of the target requirements of the audience.

Another study at the University of Nigeria, at Nsukka campus is by Enuesike (1998) who carries out a need analysis survey to find out lecturers' and students' views about the needs, wants and lacks of the first year students of the faculty of agriculture. Enuesike designs two sets of questionnaire: one for lecturers and the other for students. He also applies interviews and observations of the respondents to supplement the responses to the questionnaire. The analysis of data reveals that, while speaking skills have less relative importance than reading, listening and study skills, writing ranks highest in the scales of students' needs.

Nwankwo (1998), in a similar study, examines the needs of law students at the Enugu Campus of the University of Nigeria. Her main technique for the needs analysis is examination of legal registers (documents, law reports and textbooks). This is complemented by a Standard Needs Analysis Questionnaire produced by the Ibadan COMSKIP team (Ubahakwe, 1990), for both law lecturers and law students. Nwankwo's study centers only on the writing skill.

Her analysis reveals that, because the most frequent writing students do is taking lecture notes, they are deficient in grappling with the techniques of legal writing which includes analyzing legal problems, reporting, comparing, deducing and writing critical reports. Students also lack adequate mastery of the cohesive features of legal language.

Enuesike and Nwankwo's studies contain useful insight into the language needs of the disciplines they investigate. A good communication skill course is derivable from their studies.

Another needs-based study is carried out in Jos by Oguine (1998). Oguine records a research at the university aimed at developing instructional materials for medical students. Oguine's study arises out of the obvious objectives of these classes of students and out of the proposition put forward he observes like other linguists that:

“One of the obvious differences between ESP and general ELT is that the ESP teacher will not expect to use a general course book organized around general human interest topic but will expect at least that the students specialist even textbooks which may be appropriate in terms of subject matter may be inappropriate in terms of level of function, and of skill.”

Oguine hopes that by presenting language in medical contexts, she will increase medical students' motivation to study English thereby increasing their achievement level.

Oguine begins her study by making an analysis of target and present situation of the Jos Medical Faculty. She uses questionnaire, interviews of staff and students, observation, and text-analysis. Based on these, Oguine outlines the following strategies for COMSKIP use:

- i. Recording live-viva;
- ii. Employing debates and short specters in pairs or small groups;
- iii. Using more authentic medical texts;
- iv. Devising more strategies for word-attack and making more use of medical dictionary;
- v. Fashioning the written language to be more technical, on the one hand, and less technical on the other.

Oguine also recommends maintaining a balance between the communicative items and the structural items including phonology. Oguine's incisive investigation does much to foster the concept of EAP and can lead to a good communication skills course-book for medical students.

Olaofe (1998) evaluates the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) extensive reading programme. This programme is a component of the university's EAP programme aimed at improving the learners' reading skills, hence, Olaofe notes, that reading extensively is the real problem of the university students.

Using the faculty of education of the university, Olaofe, investigates the extent to which the reading programme has improved the students' overall language proficiency. The programme consists of the following steps:

- i. Initial selection of novels to be read
- ii. Grading of the novels
- iii. Students own selection of the novel to be read
- iv. The reading of the novels
- v. Writing a short answer test on the novels
- vi. Grading of the short answer test (pp.202-3)

Using a questionnaire, Olaofe examines the effects this programme has on the faculty of education students who were selected for the study. From the analysis, Olaofe notes that the areas of language use that the programme improved include general expression, vocabulary, reading speed, and to a least extent, sentence patterns. Olaofe also reports that apart from the linguistic gain, the students experienced such psychological changes as positive attitude to extensive reading, improved attitude to life in general, improved interpersonal relations and emotional life.

Olaofe's study is useful in that it shows how an institution can design special EAP programme to meet the specific needs of the institution. But because Olaofe's work is based on reading skills only, it is microscopic.

The last work in review is a need-based study carried out in the Federal University of Technology at Akure campus where Aborisade (1998) executed a need analysis project in order to design an EAP programme for students of the university and an EOP course for officers of the United Local Government Service Commission in the State. Aborisade carried out the EAP needs analysis using the School Certificate scores in English as baseline data,

questionnaire survey of 90 students and 10 science teachers, and unstructured interview. The EOP needs analysis involved officers as well as text analysis of materials used in the local Government Commission.

The analysis of data obtained from the university students and the local government officers indicates that writing skill ranks highest in their needs profile while speaking ranks lowest. Aborisade's study complements that of Nwankwo (1998) who identifies writing as the primary needs of his students. Aborisade's study further contains relevant issues that will prove useful. Hence, though Aborisade includes EOP in this work, the aspect on EAP for University students is significant.

Conclusion

From the analysis, therefore, we have examined issues pertaining to EAP and the efforts of language teachers to apply EAP in their classes. The major point that emerges from our empirical studies is that needs analysis is a sine qua non for any meaningful EAP based programme. Most of these studies thereby started by determining, through needs analysis, the needs of their target audience, however, except for Otagburuagu's work, which focused on target requirements, the needs analysis review concentrates on perceived wants and needs of the population with regards to skills. It is to this extent that our analysis has broken new grounds and is hoped to make substantial contribution towards more efficient English Language teaching and learning in tertiary institutions indeed, expand your knowledge and frontiers of both the theory and practice of English for Academic Purposes and the application of the principles of needs analysis in academic programme implementation.

In critical terms, from the observations of the Nigerian experience in the practice of EAP by the author, the language needs of undergraduates in Nigeria go beyond the ordinary course offered by Use of English (UOE) and therefore, there is need for perhaps major adjustments in orientation, methods and materials to satisfy the present undergraduate in the present Nigerian university. It is in recognition of this fact that Kwasau (2005), observes that progress in the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria should not be accidental but a necessity. He opines that in essence, if the goal of a development-oriented English programme is ever going to be achieved in Nigeria, there is the need to re-order teaching strategies and priorities.

Recommendation

Abstractly speaking, all teaching objectives serve the purpose of language development, maintenance, reacquisition and revitalization. A prerequisite for success is increasing the prestige. This implies specifically speaking, that language development, maintenance, reacquisition and revitalization such as required in EAP, enables language users and lecturers to use their language on a day-to-day basis without much 'ado' on proficiency. In doing this, there must be assurance that the topics and situations covered in the learner are actually relevant for him and his life. Considering all this therefore, the whole scenario of EAP is that of pedagogy. From the gaps so far left in EAP implementation in the Nigerian university system, the author recommends the following pedagogic model as a possible solution. This model has four components.

1. **CURRICULUM CONTENT:** This outlines linguistically, the semantic properties of EAP. In terms of the students, it specifies what they will learn, i.e. which phonological, orthographic, morphological and syntactic structures, which items of vocabulary and which kinds of discourse.
2. **CURRICULUM STRUCTURE:** This linguistically, outlines the syntactic properties of the curriculum. In terms of the students, structure relates to the order in which the EAP content is taught, i.e. the progression.
3. **CURRICULUM LAYOUT OR RENDERING:** This linguistically, outlines the programatic or surface properties of the curriculum. In terms of the student, layout states which teaching aids and approaches are used for the students, i.e. how the content is presented and which material is used for the presentation.
4. **CONSTRAINTS ON THE CURRICULUM:** These are factors that affect contents, structure and layout. There are also constraints due to the objectives of the teaching, the students' groups, situation of the language, and the society. These must be taken note of in the implementation of an effective and result-oriented EAP programme.

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