



EVALUATION OF COURSE BOOKS USED IN TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

English is an important language in Nigeria because it is the official language of the country, the language of communication among the different ethnic groups, the language of commerce, science and education. As a result of its status in the country, there is a need for every Nigerian particularly the educated, to read and write, understand and speak the language fluently. But it is not the case in Nigeria. There is a record of massive failure in English language tests conducted by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and the National Examination Council (NECO) both at Junior and Senior Secondary School Examination. Many scholars have conducted research on these problems of massive failure and the lack of fluency on English language and came up with some recommendations. These recommendations are: better teachers, better textbooks, small classes etc (Albel, 2003; Okebukola, 2008; Warwick, 1999). Though the problems are numerous and all of them cannot be dealt with in a single thesis, this study will be limited to one problem i.e. better textbooks and will aimed at evaluating course books used in teaching and learning of English language in Nigeria in order to find out how effective they are in terms facilitating long term acquisition of the language.

Keywords: Evaluation, Course, Books, Teaching, Learning.

Introduction

The writers decided to undergo this research because of findings of some scholars based on the massive failure in English language examination recorded in Nigeria at West African Examination Council (WAEC) as well as National Examination Council (NECO). One of these findings is poor textbooks (Albel, 2003; Okebukola, 2008; Warwick, 1999). There are so many textbooks used in the teaching and learning of English in Nigeria and since there are problems in the books used in teaching and learning English in Nigeria, where could the problems be? To find out where the problems are, this research evaluated three (3) prominent course books used for teaching English in Nigeria's schools to see how they effectively they engage learners in facilitating a long term acquisition.

Research Background

The essence of designing books for language teaching and learning is to ease the difficulties learners faced at the course of learning a second language. Meaning that, book designers should provide books that will help the learners to learn the second language with ease. Books that help learners learn a language with ease are books that contain texts which are engaging. These engaging texts help learners affectively and cognitively at the cause of learning a second language. An interesting or engaging text used in teaching a second language makes great "impact" on the learners (Tomlinson 2011, p8). "Impact" used by Tomlinson here means motivation which evoke learners' interest and curiosity. Interest and curiosity usually come up in learning process when a text engages learners which in turn facilitate learning. Providing learners with engaging text, will make them to willingly put into the lesson "energy and attention in experiencing text" in order to "achieve interaction between the text and their senses, feelings, views and intuitions" (Tomlinson 2013, p8). Activities which motivate and encourage cognitive thinking in learning a language will "lead to deeper and more durable learning" as compared to "a narrowly focused series of activities" that required a bit of cognitive processes (Tomlinson 2011, p21). Cognitive engaging activities help learners to bring into class their top-down knowledge and the experiences they have of the language while

doing their activities. Tomlinson (2011, p21), is with the opinion that in order to make learners' learning processes deeper and more durable, book designers should use "thought-provoking" text while designing their books. The engaging text used in the books should relate to learners' daily experiences as Bell and Gower (2011) lamented that many students seem to be more interested in some everyday topics than topics which are far away from their daily lives. The reason is for the learners to have related experience when talking about everyday topics. Everyday topics that relate to learners will motivate them to make use of their previous experiences as resources in speaking and writing activities and practices. Bell and Gower (2011) is also with the view that book designers should look for new ways on the topics that will in some ways relate to old topics in order to keep them fresh and interesting.

'A truly motivated learner' forward by Ortega (2009, p170), is likely to learn the language far better than unmotivated or slightly motivated learner. Motivation with regards to second language learning situation has been grouped into three categories by Dörnyei (1994, p77) and these are: "Course-specific, Teacher-specific, and Group-specific motivational components. Course-specific motivational component as presented by Dörnyei (1994, p77) relates to 'the syllabus, the teaching material, the teaching method, and the learning tasks'. From the Course-specific motivational component which relates to teaching material among others, shows that teaching material is one of the sources used to facilitate learners' motivation.

When learners are motivated, they participate actively at the cause of learning a second language. Active participation using the target language facilitates second language acquisition (Swain & Suzuki, 2008). There are many people that can read a text or listen to someone talking in a target language but cannot communicate using the same language. Having the input of a language is essential in second language learning so also the output. Swain & Lapkin (1995) are with the opinion that output plays a vital role in the learning of the second language as it facilitates learning processes differently from the input and also output can help the learners to realize the gap between how they use the target language and the way it

should be used. This common process is peculiar to second language learners as they usually encounter problems which stimulate their curiosity to pay attention to the expressions in the target language. Meaning that, output motivates second language learning. Ortega (2009) argues that, negotiation can occur in communicative interaction which provides learners with comprehensible input.

As a result of this negotiation, some important features of the target language can be discovered by the learners which help in facilitating their learning abilities. Discovering some features in a language is very important to learners of second language as it increases the possibilities of noticing other features of the language in future. As lamented by Tomlinson (2013), that self-discovery activities make learners ready to acquire certain target language features.

Material and Method

Material

Materials used for this research are the course books used in the teaching and learning of English language by many teachers in Nigeria. Though the course books used in teaching English in Nigeria are so many, fifteen (15) among them were sampled and three (3) among them were selected in terms wider range in use for the benefit of this research. No preference was made at the course of selecting these course books as such no harm is intended for anyone or any book. Senior Secondary School 1 (SSS1) versions of each of the fifteen course books are used. Reason for this selection is, SSS1 students are intermediate students, they are within the range of 14-16 years and at this stage in life, learner are matured enough to make decisions and give out their own opinions with regards to things that affect their lives.

Method

The method used in the evaluation of these course books are based on the criteria which was designed for research. There are seven criteria used in the evaluation of the course books and these criteria are:

- 1 To what extent does the material provide the learners with a rich exposure to the target language in use?
- 2 To what extent does the material engage the learners affectively?

- 3 To what extent does the material involve the learners cognitively?
- 4 To what extent does the material stimulate multi-dimensional representation in the learners mind?
- 5 To what extent does the material provide opportunities to make discoveries about how the target language is used?
- 6 To what extent does the material provide the learners with opportunities to use the target language for communication?
- 7 To what extent does the material provide evidence of the writers' skills in material design?

This research focused very much on the likely effectiveness of the course books in relation to what is believed to facilitate long term acquisition of an L2 (i. e. deep processing from engaged and meaningful interaction with the target language). Unit 3, 11, and 19 of each course book is evaluated using the criteria. While evaluating each unit, comments were made on the likelihood of effectiveness of the unit in relation to the criterion on a scale of 1-4. 1, indicating 'very weak' in facilitating long term acquisition, 2, indicating 'weak' in facilitating long term acquisition, 3, indicating 'strong' in facilitating long term acquisition and 4, indicating 'very strong' in facilitating long term acquisition. These three units selected from each course book are meant to be the representative of the other units in the books.

Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

Three among the 15 books are taken for the benefit of this proposal and are taken by random sampling. The three books are: Intensive English (IE) for Senior Secondary Schools, Senior English Project (SEP) for Secondary Schools and New Concept English (NCE) for Senior Secondary Schools. For the sake of this proposal, two chapters were taken from each book to represent the entire book. Unit 3 and 11 of each was selected to represent the entire book.

Evaluation of the Course Books

To what extent is course book likely to provide the learners with rich exposure to the English language in use?

Intensive English (IE)

This book is scored 2 in this criterion. There are three dialogues on pages 39, 40 and 41 that are not authentic because they lack the feature of a typical spoken discourse like hesitation, pauses e.t.c. The three dialogues are short and does not portray the real-life like activity and were not recycled or revisited. The three other texts used in the book are authentic. 'Malaria' on pages 34-35 was adapted from 'in Reading Faster'. The text is extended with variety of language use. The text was recycled and revisited. 'Agriculture and Economic Development' was adapted from an article in 'The Guardian' on page 160-162 and from number of the pages, we can deduce that the text is long but the language used on the text is higher than the level of the learners. The text was revisited but was not recycled. 'Do and Learn' on page 167 is short not extended, no evidence of real-life like activity and does not reflect natural communication. The text was not recycled neither was it revisited.

Senior English Project (SEP)

This book scored 2 on this criterion. 'Traditional Nigerian Religion' on pages 18-19 though extended, is not authentic because it was written for teaching purposes. That can be evident in the organization of the text. The text was not recycled neither was it revisited. 'The Hidden Persuaders' on pages 90-91 is authentic. It was adapted from 'The Hidden Persuaders'. The text is long and revisited. Dialogue on page 97 though extended, reflect a typical informal conversation among semi-literates Nigerians with features of spoken discourse throughout the text. The English is bad and learners may tend to use a part of the text. The text was revisited and recycled.

New Concept English (NCE)

This book scored 2. Most of the texts used in this book are not authentic as they are written for teaching purposes. The dialogue lacks the features of a

spoken discourse. The only texts that are authentic are 'Dogo is Deserted' pages 35 and 36 and 'Dogo Refuses Advice' on pages 125 and 126. The two texts are extended, revisited and recycled.

To what extent is course book likely to engage the learners affectively?

Intensive English (IE)

This book scored 1. Most of the texts used in this book have the capability of engaging the learners affectively as they relate to their lives. As such affective responses and self-investment can be recorded but the activities designed do not invite learners to make affective responses or stimulate their self-investment to the topic and their self-esteem is not promoted. The focus of the activity is mainly on comprehension checks and grammar exercises.

Senior English Project (SEP)

This book scored 1. Like in IE, the texts used in the book have the potential of engaging the learners affectively. Religion, tradition, advertisement are topics of interest to Nigerians particularly, religion and tradition. These topics can bring light into the lesson because learners will participate actively to the lesson but the activities main focus is on comprehension checks and grammar exercises.

New Concept English (NCE)

This book scored 1. The scenario of affective engagement of the learners in this book is not different from the other two books i.e IE and SEP. The topics have the affective connection with the learners which can stimulate them to affectively respond to the lesson but the activities are not designed to for that purpose.

To what extent is the course books likely involve the learners cognitively?

Intensive English (IE)

This book scored 1. In achieving mental challenges from the learners, this book is very weak. The only place where we can find an activity that make

learners think intensively is activity 3.5.1 on page 47 where they are asked to criticize a letter in order to show how bad the letter is written.

Senior English Project (SEP)

This book scored 2. There are four activities that challenge learners to think mentally. These activities are: 'Discussion and Opinion' on page 19 and 'creative writing' on page 96, 'Role Play' and 'Improvisation' on page 98. Beside these activities, the rest focused on grammar exercises and comprehension checks.

New Concept English (NCE)

This book scored 1. Only one activity seems to challenge learners to think mentally and the activity can be found on page 126 'Reflect and Discuss'. The rest of the activities are geared towards comprehension and grammar exercises.

To what extent is the course books likely stimulate multi-dimensional representation in the learner's mind

Intensive English (IE)

This book scored 1. Learners' resources are not exploited in this book. Though the topics of discussion have connection with the learners, but the activities are controlled on either grammar exercises or comprehension checks

Senior English Project (SEP)

This book scored 1. Learners' resources would have been easy to exploit because the topics of the texts are topics of interest to Nigerians. Religion and tradition are highly cherished and respected. The activities did not give room for this exploitation. The focus of the activity is just the same with IE.

New Concept English (NCE)

This book scored 1. The topics of the texts have connection with the learners. This can give room in making use of the learners' resources to view the topic in different ways based on their understanding and believes.

The activities are not designed to accomplish this objective. The main focus of the activity is on grammar exercises and comprehension checks.

To what extent is the course book likely to provide opportunities to make discoveries about how the target language (English) is used?

Intensive English (IE)

This book scored 2. Learners were not given the opportunity to notice any feature of the language used on the texts by themselves. There were directed to discover certain words or expressions which could be used for grammar exercises. This can be evident throughout the book. As such exploration of language use as well as comparison between the target and current performances cannot be achieved.

Senior English Project (SEP)

These books scored 2 each. The scenario in this book as well as NCE is the same. Discover are made by directing learners on certain features that can be used in teaching grammar and comprehension.

To what extent is the course book likely to provide the learners with opportunities to use the target (English) language for communication?

Intensive English (IE)

This book scored 1. Speaking or interaction among learners and teacher using the target language is very rear in this book. Speaking skills is not found in the book unlike Reading and Writing skills. Activity 11.5.1 on page 176 is the only activity that engaged learners to speak using the target language and with restrictions to certain guidelines. As such varied patterns of interaction cannot be achieved.

Senior English Project (SEP)

This book scored 3. Opportunity to make use of the target language by the learner can be found in few places: activities 2 and 3 on page 98. Learners were given the opportunity to complete the dialogue on page 97 and make improvisation of a similar dialogue. 'Discussion' on page 26, gives learners the opportunity to speak among themselves.

New Concept English (NCE)

This book scored 2. There two interacting activities in this book. This can be found on page 130 'Pair Work' and on page 126 'Reflect and Discuss'. Like the other books, speaking as a skill was not treated.

To what extent is the course book likely to provide evidence of the writers' skills in materials design?

2 score is given to each book. In the three books, there is evidence of writers' skills in material design to some extent because there is a coherent sequencing. Teaching points are motivated and the instructions were clear. The use of visuals is effective to some extent. But the major problem with the books is Listening and Speaking skills were not treated. They are equally important and supposed to be taken before Reading and Writing in terms of sequencing.

Conclusion

The format used on the books is more or less the same and repetitive. The activities are not preparing learners for real-life situations and do not engage the interest of the learners. Learners were not invited or engage to talk about their own experiences and to think, talk and write about their own views, opinions and responses. In the case of discovery, the activities are restricted to helping learners to discover predetermined correct answers rather than the open-ended exploration of language use. The main focus of the books is on accuracy rather than fluency. That is why grammar exercises and comprehension checks have dominated the books. Listening and speaking skills are neglected despite the relevance in the teaching and learning of the second language.

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