Scientific Research

An Evaluation of the English Language Curriculum of the Nigeria Certificate in Education: A Case Study of a College of Education

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Abstract

This treatise is a pilot study that evaluated the implementation of the English language curriculum of the Nigeria Certificate in Education at a College of Education in Ogun State, Nigeria. The certificate is the basic qualification for teaching. The poor performance of Nigerian students in external English examinations has continued to be a source of worry to parents, educational stakeholders and the government. This problem has impeded the transition to higher education of many Nigerian students. In order to proffer solution to this problem, the effectiveness of the training of English language teachers need to be examined. The study sought to fill the gap by evaluating the implementation of the English language curriculum of the NCE in order to determine the effectiveness of the schooling of teachers. In investigating these issues, a mixed methods approach was used to utilise a case study. The sample comprised ten lecturers and twenty students drawn through convenience sampling techniques. The instruments were questionnaires, observation checklists, interviews and field notes. The methods of analysis were descriptive/inferential statistics and thematic content analysis. The findings revealed that lecturers employed mostly a combination of teaching modes in classrooms. The resources (physical and human) were found to be inadequate and the school technologically deficient. Furthermore, the negative attitudes of the students impacted on the implementation of the curriculum. The study identified the ineffective implementation of the NCE English language curriculum. The paper recommends that parents and other stakeholders should thoroughly investigate teacher training.

Keywords

Curriculum Evaluation, Curriculum Implementation, Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE)

1. Introduction

This study will evaluate the implementation of the English language Curriculum of the NCE Program. The Nigeria Certificate in Education is the minimum prerequisite for teaching in Nigeria. It is a 3-year certification program at a college of education that qualifies the graduates to teach at the basic levels of education in the country.

There has always been public concern about the poor performance of students in external English examinations [1]. There have been incidents of mass failure recorded at the primary and junior secondary examinations conducted in the country [2]. Again, at the senior secondary and tertiary levels, reports also abound on the continual failure of students in English ([3] [4]) and these have been attributed to their faulty foundation [5]. This continual release of poor results by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) has engendered general interest and research into this problem [3].

The cause of the poor performance was attributed to parental [4], teachers' [6], students' [7] and governmental [8] factors, with emphasis being on the teaching strategies employed by teachers [3] [9]. However, the focus has shifted to the skills and adequacy of the training of English language teachers [9] [10]. It is in line with this thought that this study seeks to bridge the gap by evaluating the NCE Curriculum in order to determine the effectiveness of the schooling of the teachers.

Earlier studies had identified students' achievement as a correlate of the quality of teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000 & Anderson, 1991, cited in [11]). It has also been noted by [10] that "effective teaching could be measured by the level of teachers' subject matter competence."

Furthermore, this view was corroborated by Ajelayemi (2002, cited in [12]), who commented on problems confronting secondary schools in Nigeria, and asserted that "the teacher factor has been identified as the most crucial and indirectly, the teacher education programs have been indicted".

Moreover, [9] asserted that the collaboration between Nigeria Teacher Institute and the British Council has identified that effective teaching by teachers will improve students' performance in the language. There have also been reports of the lack of interest of teachers in training as a result of the low status accorded the teaching profession [13].

Finally, Villaune and Brabham (2003, cited in [9]) assert that the main factor in the positive achievement of students is the expertise of teachers but not the methods of teaching.

Research Questions

The research questions are:
- What mode of teaching do lecturers use in the classrooms?
- What is the state of available resources in the implementation of the curriculum?
- What is the role of students' attitude to learning in the implementation of the curriculum?
- How does the implementation of the curriculum equip students to develop the four language skills?
- What are the lecturers' perceptions of the implementation of the curriculum?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Curriculum Implementation

Curriculum implementation is the practical utilization of an innovation [14]. The implementation phase of a syllabus is the most important phase in curriculum change [15]. It has been asserted by Adams & Chen (1981, cited in [16] that an approximate 75% innovation is unsuccessful. The problem of better implementation is related to quality, which is 90% of the problem [17].

The success of a curriculum will depend on teachers [18] as they are often "the agents in the implementation process" [19]. However, in Nigeria; teachers are not involved in the planning of the curriculum [20]. It has been noted by Beauchamp [21] that the implementation of a curriculum is accelerated, when teachers are involved in planning it.

2.2. Teacher Quality

In any country, the quality of education cannot surpass the teachers' quality [22]. Teachers' quality is an important variable in the achievement of students as research has shown that the outcome of students' performance is dependent on teacher quality [23]. Teacher quality is an indicator of the importance of teacher training. The dif-

ferent achievement levels of students is majorly dependent on the quality of teachers as research confirms that a positive difference in the achievement level of students is mainly traceable to teachers [24]. It has been asserted by the Science and Engineering Indicators (2004, cited in [24] that the index of teacher quality are the academic capabilities of the entrants into the teaching workforce, the education and preparation of teachers preparatory to teaching, consistency or inconsistency between teachers' schooling and subject content allocated each teacher and the experience level of the teachers.

The prosperity of the economy of a nation is dependent on the quality of the teacher workforce [25]. It has been affirmed that the quality and quantity of education provided is the rationale for the distinctiveness in the economies of developed and undeveloped nations [24]. In addition, Olulobe (1997, 2004, cited [26]) contends that "a country can only develop significantly and attain greater heights in the committee of nations through a comprehensive teacher education program".

In some countries, such as Finland, the teaching profession is an enviable one as 1 of every 10 selective candidate is accepted into teacher training programs after two processes of selection and also, in Singapore, potential teachers are chosen from the best students in the secondary schools (Sahlberg, 2010; Asia Society, 2006 cited in [27]) thereby limiting the number of entrants into the teacher training programs. In England, the teaching profession rose from its position as the 92nd occupation choice to the best career choice within a period of five years [22].

It has been noted by [28] that the major consideration of the policy of any country should be the sufficient production of skillful teachers. It has been reported by [12] that current research has shown that the majority of the graduates from the Nigerian education system in the last 15 years are "incompetent as teachers". He also concluded that there is a dearth of teachers in the nation and that "effective teaching" which is a consequence of "quality teachers and teaching" is non-existent and that efficient teachers have not been produced by teacher education programs.

2.3. Critiques against the Minimum Standards (English Language Curriculum) of the NCE

The Curriculum of the Nigeria Certificate in Education is known as the Minimum Standards for NCE. In the following paragraphs, some of the critiques against the curriculum are related.

The extent to which the objectives of the curriculum are attained every year by the graduates of the colleges is in doubt, as [29] noted that the teaching of English is defective in schools (primary and secondary) and teachers are not proficient in the four language skills. There has also been a call for the review of the curriculum (Slavin, 1987; Evans, 1992, cited in [29]. In [30], it was discovered that students' academic performance was poor and there was the need for a review of the curriculum.

In a study conducted by [31] to investigate the entry qualifications of colleges of education students and their reasons for enrolling in the colleges, it was revealed that most of the students admitted into the colleges were the "dregs of the society". Students admitted usually had no other admission option and it was also reported that just 24% of the sample studied met the requirements of good students (students, who got 5 credits at one sitting) from secondary schools; the colleges had intended at their inception to admit brilliant students of secondary schools and teacher training colleges (Adesina, 1977, cited in [31]).

2.4. Teaching/Learning Facilities in Colleges of Education

The importance of educational facilities in an institution cannot be over-emphasized. The necessity of educational facilities has been noted [32]. The problem of facilities in higher institutions in Nigeria is not limited to colleges of education as the Federal Government of Nigeria (2000, cited in [33]) has noted that all levels of education in Nigeria are deficient in the provision of teachers, principal infrastructure that includes instructional materials and resort centers. Most of the colleges lack basic facilities [34]. This is a fundamental problem in the educational sector.

3. Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in April, 2013 at a College of Education in Ogun State. The sample for the pilot study comprised ten lecturers and twenty students drawn through convenience sampling technique. The school is located in the south-western geo-political zone of Nigeria. The population of the students is 7128 (Admission

Analysis Document, 2012). The small sample size is justifiable on the grounds that Hill (1998, cited in [35] proposed 10 - 30 participants for a pilot survey research.

The student sample consisted of 13 (65%) females and 7 (35%) males. Half the students were from Year 2, 7 (35%) from Year 1 and 3 (15%) from Year 3. All the questionnaires collected could not be analyzed due to completion defect. However, this does not impact on design of the instrument. The majority (75%) of the students possessed West African School Certificate (WASC), 1(5%)—General Certificate in Education (GCE), 2 (10%)—Teachers Grade II Certificate (TC2) and 2 (10%)—other. **Table 1** depicts the lecturer sample.

3.1. Data Analysis and Results

The method of analysis was descriptive and inferential statistics and thematic content analysis. The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS IBM 20) was used to analyze the quantitative data. According to [36], the ideal Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be above 0.7. In this current study, the Cronbach alpha coefficient of the scale for the students' questionnaire is 0.72, which is acceptable [37], while for the lecturers' questionnaire; the alpha coefficient is 0.24 (the mean is 2.552, with values ranging from 0.20 to 4.3); this is connected with the small sample size [38]. The data was analyzed qualitatively for recurrent themes [39]. The results are presented below in response to the research questions.

3.1.1. Teaching Modes Employed in Classrooms
Table 2 shows that the lecturers adopted mostly the combination of modes. The discussion method is the second in rank.

Table 3 indicates that the students were mostly taught using the lecture mode.

The discrepancy in figures of the mode of teaching as perceived by students and lecturers could be due to their various perspectives of the modes. In other words, a lecture method combined with a tutorial session by a lecturer may not be perceived as a combination of methods by students. The lecturers as well as the students were also asked the most effective mode of teaching: the lecturers (70%) chose a combination of the modes, while the students (45%) preferred the lecture method.

3.1.2. State of Available Resources in the Implementation of the Curriculum
This question was analyzed with resources being categorized into equipment, personnel and facilities. The first category was equipment (see **Table 4**).

Table 4 shows that the three technological aids were not always available. Most of the students indicated that they were never available.

The second category was personnel. The findings from the questionnaires indicated that there were junior administrative staff and lecturers for all courses, while the observation checklist showed that the school lacked stage/theatre technician and a messenger.

In relation to the third category, facilities, the findings also revealed that the school has a language laboratory

Table 1. Composition of the lecturer sample.

				Total
Gender	Male 4 (40%)	Female 6 (60%)		10
School Type	Federal 10 (100%)	State 0 (0%)	Private 0 (0%)	10
Age	36 - 40 2 (20%)	41+ 8 (80%)		10
Qualification	Masters 9 (90%)	PhD 1 (10%)		10
Experience (Years)	Below 10 4 (40%)	11 - 20 4 (40%)	21 - 30 2 (20%)	10
Category (Level of Lecturers)	Senior 8 (80%)	Junior 2 (20%)		10

Table 2. Teaching modes according to the Lecturers.

Mode/Frequency	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Missing
Lecture	1 (10%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	4 (40%)
Tutorial	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (10%)	3 (30%)	0 (0%)	6 (60%)
Project	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	4 (40%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	5 (50%)
Discussion	2 (20%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)	0 (0%)	4 (40%)
Combination	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	3 (30%)

Note: n = 10. Missing means data not completed by the respondents.

Table 3. Teaching modes according to the students.

Mode/Frequency	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Missing
Lecture	11 (55%)	3 (15%)	4 (20%)	0 (0%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
Tutorial	2 (10%)	3 (15%)	8 (40%)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)
Project	4 (20%)	1 (5%)	8 (40%)	1 (5%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)
Discussion	7 (35%)	7 (35%)	2 (10%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	3 (15%)
Combination	3 (15%)	3 (15%)	3 (15%)	1 (5%)	0 (0%)	10 (50%)

Note: n = 20. Missing means data not completed by the respondents.

Table 4. Availability of technological aids according to the students.

Aids/Frequency	Always	Frequently	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Missing
CD Players	0 (%)	1 (5%)	1 (5%)	4 (20%)	7 (35%)	7 (35%)
Projectors	0 (0%)	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	3 (15%)	5 (25%)	4 (20%)
Cassettes	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (10%)	4 (20%)	7 (35%)	7 (35%)

Note: n = 20. Missing means data not completed by the respondents.

but that the equipment is not in good condition. The lecture theatres and classrooms are without modern technological equipment. Physical observation showed that the lecturers' offices lacked decent furniture, and the library was not conducive for reading because the lighting was faulty.

3.1.3. Role of Students' Attitude to Learning in the Implementation of the Curriculum
Table 5 shows the students' interest in English.

The findings showed that the lecturers unanimously agree on all the items. Half the lecturers indicated that the students were sometimes interested in English; one third felt that the students sometimes did the minimum work required, while a half also felt that they sometimes had a negative attitude.

3.1.4. Development of the Language Skills in the Implementation of the Curriculum
Table 6 indicates the students' knowledge in the language skills.

As can be seen from the table, the students agree that they have knowledge of the language skills.

3.1.5. Lecturers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Curriculum
Table 7 indicates the lecturers' views on the Curriculum.

The findings showed that the lecturers agreed that the curriculum needs to be reviewed, Half (50%) the lecturers felt that the curriculum was rarely and sometimes detailed, while the other half thought it was frequently detailed. All the lecturers agreed that there were guidelines for the implementation of the curriculum.

Table 5. Students' interest in English according the lecturers.

	Frequency	Percent	C %
Students are interested in English language			
Sometimes	5	50	30.0
Frequently	3	30	60.0
Always	2	20	100.0
Total	10	100	
Students generally do the minimum work required			
Sometimes	3	30	5.0
Frequently	6	30	35.0
Always	4	40	100.0
Total	10	100	
Students have a negative attitude that hinders the implementation of the curriculum			
Sometimes	5	50	50.0
Frequently	3	30	80.0
Always	2	20	100.0
Total	10	100	100.0

Note: n = 10.

Table 6. Students' knowledge of the four language skills.

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
I have a knowledge of the reading, writing and listening skills			
Frequently	4	21.1	21.1
Always	15	78.9	100.0
Total	19	100.0	
Missing	1	4.8	
My lessons on listening skill have improved my writing			
Never	1	5.0	5.0
Frequently	6	30.0	35.0
Always	13	65.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	
Missing	1	4.8	
My lessons on listening skill have improved my listening pattern			
Frequently	4	20.0	20.0
Always	16	80.0	100.0
Total	20	100.0	

Note: n = 20.

Table 7. Lecturers' views on the curriculum.

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
The topics in the curriculum need to be reviewed			
Sometimes	2	20.0	20.0
Frequently	3	30.0	50.0
Always	5	50.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	
The English language/Minimum Standard is detailed enough			
Rarely	1	10.0	10.0
Sometimes	4	40.0	50.0
Frequently	5	50.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	
There are guidelines for the implementation of the curriculum			
Sometimes	5	50.0	50.0
Frequently	2	20.0	70.0
Always	3	30.0	100.0
Total	10	100.0	100.0

Note: n = 10.

4. Discussion

4.1. What Mode of Teaching Do Lecturers Use in the Classrooms?

The findings for the question revealed that students (45%) recommended the lecture method as the best, while the discussion method was rated second best. This concurs with the studies conducted by [40].

However, the lecturers suggested the combination of modes as the most effective. This suggestion would be considered appropriate by this researcher as the grouping of teaching strategies into participatory and non-participatory methods [41] encourage the participation of students and the development of critical thinking skills. A combination of modes would encourage participation of students. Participatory method also includes discussion, which makes the students participate in class and reflect on what is learnt [42]. The interviews showed that the lecturers laid emphasis on the discussion method.

The method also leads to cooperative learning, which can be achieved in this situation by using tutorials. However, tutorials cannot be used due to large class size. A possible explanation for the preference of lecture method by students could be that it encourages a passive form of learning.

4.2. What Is the State of Available Resources in the Implementation of the Curriculum?

The report for the question showed that the college lacked some basic facilities [34]. The reason for the non-availability and state of facilities in the colleges was given as limited funding by the government.

Physical observation revealed that a language laboratory is available but the equipment was not in good condition. The necessity of educational facilities such as teaching and learning resources has been noted [32]. In this particular school, the number of students exceeds the facilities. The researcher's visit to the library revealed that it needs to be refurbished.

The results also illustrated that the school was deficient in personnel. The school lacked administration staff/cleaners and theatre technicians. A probable explanation for the non-existence of technicians would be the lack of equipment in the lecture theatre.

The students indicated that technological aids were not always available. It was also observed that language

films, slides/projectors, language teaching tapes and CDs were not available. This shows that the school is not technologically oriented. This agrees with the findings of [43].

4.3 What Is the Role of Students' Attitude to Learning in the Implementation of the Curriculum?

The outcome of the question showed that the students were only sometimes interested in English language courses and that they had a negative attitude to their studies. According to research (Anoma, 2005; Fakeye, 2002; Gardener & Lambert, 1972; King, 1981, cited in [11] [44]), these factors will impact on their success at learning and gaining proficiency in the language.

The interviews with the lecturers gave an insight into the negative attitudes of the students as perceived by the lecturers. The attitudes were described as laziness, failure to write tests, poor attitude to reading. The reasons given for the negative attitudes were societal, economic and domestic factors. These caused the students to engage in other activities instead of reading. The consequences of poor attitude were given as poor learning and poor performance; this is in accord with Weinburgh 1998, cited in [44].

The excerpts from the interviews below confirm the views earlier stated that the students did not possess reading culture; the reasons ranged from domestic to societal and the students were also described as being lazy. The lecturers were asked about the attitude of the students to their studies:

"Generally, one will be able to say that African students or Nigerian students have a poor attitude to reading but it is not necessarily their fault, it is as a result of societal challenges; I mean economic challenges. Some of the students do not have parents who can readily sponsor them. Some of them fend for themselves. So, instead of reading, some go on how to make ends meet." (**Interviewee 1**)

"Generally, the students are very lazy, For instance I gave them an assignment and I told them where to get the answers to my questions. From the response, I cannot say up to 10% went to library." (**Interviewee 2**)

"That is one of the major problems. I don't know if it is a global issue or sometimes I ask some of them, if they were forced to come to school, because of the negative attitude that they have towards some of the subjects. One of the factors that affect performance is the attitude to learning. When the attitude to learning is poor, the outcome will be poor." (**Interviewee 3**)

The result that the students only do the minimum work required, is consistent with previous studies that language learning attitude influences behaviour (Kaballa & Crowley, 1985; Weinburgh 1998, cited in [44]). In addition, the attitude of students affects the implementation of a curriculum [44].

A null hypothesis was tested, the data showed a non-significant difference in the English standard of male and female students. This finding agrees with the study of [45], which found no significant difference in the language proficiency of male and female Iranians. Gender was considered, as female educational attainments outshine males in industrialized nations [46].

4.4. How Does the Implementation of the Curriculum Equip Students to Develop the Four Language Skills?

The analysis of the question revealed that the students have knowledge of the four language skills, with an improvement in their acquisition of the skills. The finding contradicts the view of [47] that the contents (listening and reading comprehension) of some English courses are lost in Nigerian higher institutions. The result also refutes the contention of [29] that teachers are not proficient in the four language skills. The result further indicates that listening is taught in the laboratory, though it is necessary to note that when discussions are held, listening takes place [48].

The teaching of reading skills by actual reading in class suggests an elementary acquisition of the skill. At this stage, it is expected that students should be taught the methodology of imparting the skill. The production of writing by imitation of good write-ups is commendable but using the genre process approach [49] would be more appropriate.

4.5. What Are the Lecturers' Perceptions of the Implementation of the Curriculum?

The analysis of the question showed that half the lecturers wanted a review of the curriculum always. This aligns with previous studies (Evans, 1992; Slavin, 1987, cited in [29]. In addition, the perception that the curriculum

does not meet the needs of the present society is buttressed by earlier studies (Obanya, 2004; Ololube, 2006, cited in [50].

The issue of non-involvement of lecturers in the curriculum development process was mentioned. This corroborates the view of [51]. The involvement of lecturers in the process will lead to optimum performance. Therefore, teachers should not be merely implementers of the curriculum alone but also partners in the process of development [52].

The observation of a lecturer on the quality of entrants into the college had been noted by scholars (Akinbote, 2000, cited in [31]). A parallel was drawn by the lecturers on the relevance of the curriculum contents to the needs of the lower level of education. This view had also been emphasized by Kuiper *et al.* (2008, cited in [51]). The issue of congested classrooms agrees with the study of [43].

The aforementioned views will definitely impact on the implementation of the curriculum [53].

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study has identified the ineffective implementation of the NCE curriculum as a cause for the poor performance of students in external English exams. The ineffective implementation has been noticed in areas such as the overcrowded classrooms, which can no longer accommodate the students, the non-availability of some specialized facilities such as projectors, language film slides, CD players etc., and the old stock of books and the inconducive state of the library, lack of equipment in some offices, the non-availability of certain personnel necessary for the smooth running of the school and the poor quality of entrants as observed by the lecturers as they fall short of the benchmark set by the curriculum:

The paper recommends that the parents, lecturers, government and educational stakeholders involved in teacher training at the colleges of education should thoroughly investigate the training of teachers and take the appropriate measures for improvement.

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