

## **Teaching English In Adverse And Peculiar Situation: The English Language Teacher In Nigerian Primary Schools**

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**Abstract:** *Adverse and peculiar situations as impediments to teaching and learning are not created by either the teacher or the learner and so they should be dealt with. Teachers should not resign to fate. English language teachers should cater for them. We cannot wait until all situations are right because they will never be. By implication, languages must be taught in adverse and peculiar situation and that cannot be reversed. This paper gives an exposition on the adverse and peculiar situations in which English language is taught in our schools in Nigeria. It proffers suggestions on what teachers can do to redress the situation.*

**Keywords:** *Adverse situation, learning, peculiar situation, primary school, teaching*

### **I. Introduction**

Poverty is widespread and severe in Nigeria. Quoting statistics from World Bank Studies on Nigeria, in the areas of Poverty and Welfare (World Bank, 2002); School Education in Nigeria: preparing for Universal Basic Education (World Bank, 2004); such poverty indicators as illiteracy, abject poverty living conditions among Nigerian citizens, access to safe water and the like epitomise the environment captured in this paper. Nigeria ranks below Kenya, Ghana and Zambia in their purchasing power and this continues to decline with high inflation and increasing income inequality. Nigeria's GNP per capita is also lower. UNICEF classifies Nigeria as a country with severe child malnutrition and very high under 5 mortality rates. Access to education, health, water and housing is inadequate (World Bank, 2004).

Of the extremely poor, 85 percent lived in rural areas and more than two-thirds lived on farms. Education, according to Adeyanju (2006), is the most important index of socio-economic status and quality of life. He wrote that the critical impact of a society's socio-economic level is often evident in the quality of health, education and other social services available to its citizens. Where these social facilities are available, the people's level of education and orientation determine the extent to which they access or exploit them.

According to World Bank (2004) statistics, quoted in Adeyanju (2006), educated Nigerians fare better than the non-educated. Completing primary education makes a big difference between being poor and non-poor in Nigeria. Those with secondary or higher education have half the poverty incidence of those with no education. Attending primary schools reduces the probability of being poor by almost 50 percent, attending secondary by another 20 percent. Similarly, a university graduate earns two and half times more salary than a secondary school product. Nigerian children have poor health, much worse than in most other African countries. Nigerians are also not receiving good quality and job-related education. Low educational achievement in general and low literacy rates, especially for women, hinder human capital development and economic growth.

There are wide regional disparities in education and literacy. In the South, primary and secondary school enrolments double those of the north. Household surveys show that 73 percent of the male population in the northwest have never attended secular schools, compared with 18 percent in the southwest; among females, the figures are 80 and 30 percent respectively. More than 40 percent of teachers in northern schools at both primary and secondary levels do not have

**Table 1: Percentage of Mortality rate of children at various stages in Nigeria.**

Socio-Economic Characteristics	Neonatal Mortality (NM)		Postnatal Mortality (PM)		Infant Mortality (IM)		Child Mortality		Under-five Mortality (U-5M)	
	1999	2003	1999	2003	1999	2003	1999	2003	1999	2003
None										
Primary	35.4	60	41.5	64	76.9	124	86.6	166	156.8	269
Secondary	36.1	53	35.1	58	71.2	111	54.5	85	121.8	186
Higher	25.3	39	15.2	22	40.5	61	13.9	20	53.0	80

N/A = Not Applicable

**Source:** NDHS: 1999 - 2003 quoted in Adenyaju, (2006 p.7)

**Table 2: Percentage of children under 5 years classified as malnourished according to 3 anthropometric indices of nutritional status, by background characteristics, Nigeria, 2003.**

Background Characteristics	Percentages below 2 standard deviation					
	Height-for-Age (stunted)		Weight-for-Height (Wasted)		Weight-for-Age (underweight)	
	1999	2003	1999	2003	1999	2003
Mother's education						
None	56.2	50.0	15.0	10.7	76.3	37.6
Primary	39.7	36.6	12.6	9.4	23.9	26.1
Secondary	38.8	22.4	9.2	6.9	19.5	16.9
Higher	37.6	7.1	11.3	10.3	25.5	8.9

N/A = Not Applicable

Source: NDHS: 1999 - 2003 quoted in Adenyaju, (2006 p.7)

Several studies had been conducted to access the performance of learners in English language in primary schools. In the year 2001, finding of a study conducted by this writer indicated that only 20% of the pupils were able to answer correctly more than 30% of the test-items given and less than one percent were able to answer correctly more than half of the test-items. In 2003, a similar study conducted suggested that there had not been any significant improvement in performance. A World Bank Report placed Nigeria at the list of twenty-one other African nations in learning achievement (World Bank, 2004).

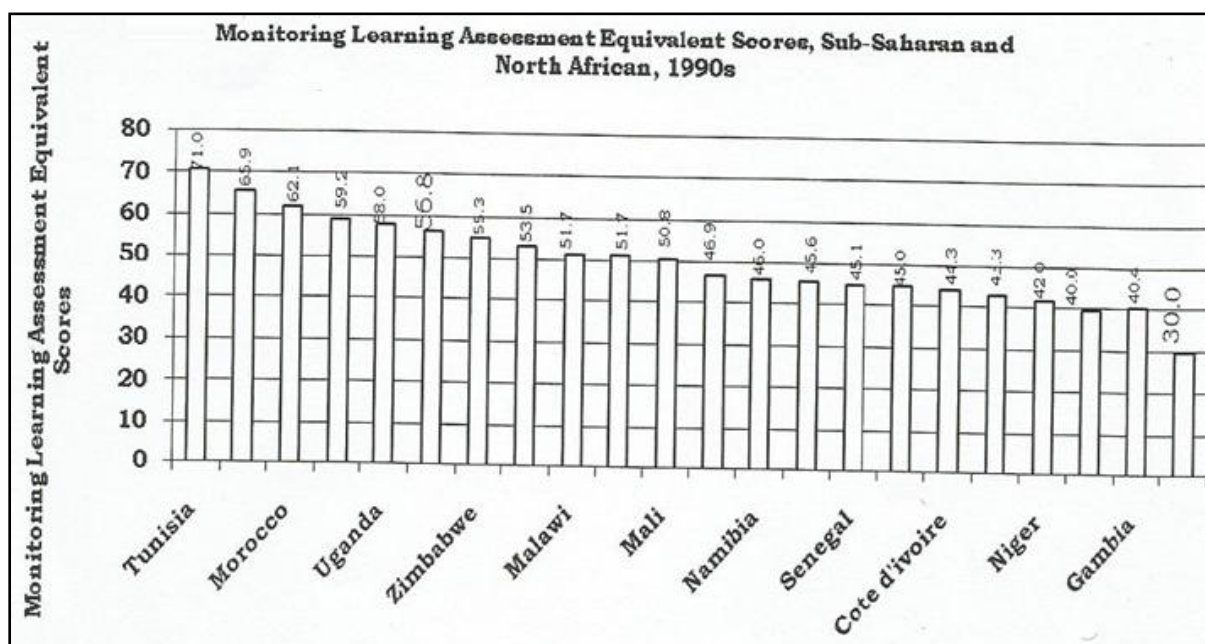


Fig. 1

Source: World Bank, 2004

As mentioned earlier, the learning achievement of secondary school students is a snowball effect of what obtained in the primary school especially in English language where credit level scores at WASSCE and SSCE hardly reach 25% in decades. Often, they are worse. The findings of a recent study of secondary education in different parts of the country indicate that the 'performance in the SSCE is poor in virtually every subject on the school curriculum' and that "the SSCE is characterised by a heavy dose of frustration", as only about 10% of candidates "meaningfully pass" the examinations (Obanya, 2004: 31-32).

Whatever other factors may be involved, these findings enjoin educators to look closely at the peculiar and adverse situations in which English language is taught in our schools. Pertinent question to ask is: What are the obvious situations under this classification?

## II. The Adverse Situations

The adverse situations in English language teaching according to Olaofe (2013) include the following:

- Limited textbooks
- Over-crowded classrooms or large classes
- Disillusionment among parents
- Mixed ability groups in a class

- The no-English group
- Short duration of language lesson i.e. 30 – 45 minutes in a day.
- Multi-grade systems i.e. classes 2 and 3 lumped together in a class and 4, 5 and 6 in another class.
- In a whole school, there may be just one teacher or two English teachers as the case may be

### **III. Peculiar Situations**

Under this list are the following:

- Monolingualism/Bilingualism/Multilingualism situations in Nigerian classroom.
- Teaching English as L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub>
- Language diverse in standard and form
- Teaching in a situation where the learner has other options and have little contact with English.
- Lack of cooperation from learners.
- Interference problem from L<sub>1</sub>
- There are so many competing languages
- Motivation problem
- Language competition especially in areas where language is most needed etc.

### **IV. Suggestions and Recommendations**

With the exposition given above, the salient issue is: what will a classroom teacher do in the face of the adverse and peculiar situations listed.

#### **4.1. Monolingual/Bilingual situation**

The English teacher must move the teaching of English beyond the short duration of the classroom situation, that is, teaching must be carried out, outside the school. The English teacher should adopt the method of whole language experience approach. Learners should be lead and encouraged to talk about the language at home, write at home, read at home and then come and report to the teacher.

Using gradual withdrawal techniques, young learners can be given the concepts in their mother tongue (MT) first and later given the English equivalent twice. Teachings should be done by immersion and sub-immersion. Learners can dramatise, mime, and given the meaning in MT or L<sub>1</sub> and later English.

#### **4.2. No English at all**

The teacher is to make massive language input using code-mixing, code-switching and bilingual strategy. English words should be pasted on the learners in their environment to boost their vocabulary. The learners must learn these before the next class. Bilingual strategy should be accompanied by gradual withdrawal. Learners should learn vocabulary of the school, home objects and different fields of life. Teacher should boost the learners knowledge of vocabulary using every available environmental resources to create a mini-classroom immersion.

#### **4.3. Language for Short Duration**

Thirty (30) or forty-five (45) minutes should be used as initial step to learn English language. There should be more English to other subjects and more of it beyond the classroom.

#### **4.4. Language Learning in a Low Resource Condition**

The teacher and learner should adopt the method of improvisation and sharing syndrome. The class can be grouped to share or shared to grouping, otherwise known as sharing phenomenon. All thrown away can be utilised by turning the class into a language resource centre. This can be achieved by bringing variety of items and labelling them and collecting them in a box or a bag.

#### **4.5. Mixed Abilities, Large Class, Limited Textbooks, Few Teachers and Similar Problems**

In these situations, grouping and sharing phenomenon would be useful to the class. Grouping could be bottom-up, top down or acrostic. The brilliant to teach the weak, average to teach the weak or learners could be mixed to encourage competitive spirit. Remedial programmes for the weak will be useful and then the teacher should use variety of activities depending on the level of the learners. Available activities include: concept mapping, acrostic technique, list-pair and share, discussion web, KWL/KLU (what I know; what I want to know; what I want to learn/what I know; what I have learnt; what is unlearned). BDA (activities for before, during and after the lessons), stirring the group, picture walk, anticipatory guide, making a big book, whole language approach, scaffolding, reading theatre, vocabulary web and story pyramid. All these involve teachers initiative and resourcefulness. Methods must agree with the age and proficiency level of the learners.

## **V. Conclusion**

Education authorities and employers as well as the teachers themselves must cater for continuous teacher academic and professional development at appropriate intervals throughout the teachers' career for the benefit of the pupils that they teach and themselves, peculiar or adverse situation notwithstanding. This is a responsibility, not a privilege, since pupils will learn and achieve only as much as the quality of their teachers. A series of teacher professional development workshops like the one organised by the NTI for primary school teachers of the South West, South South and South East and Ebonyi states would be useful. Teachers could benefit a great deal in terms of updated content knowledge and professional techniques as well as requirement commitment to the profession. This kind of workshop and retraining exercise will provide a great deal of down-to-earth feedback to teacher education programme regarding what would be truly pertinent to classroom situations. Stakeholders should beware not to abuse these opportunities.

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