

AFRREV IJAH
An International Journal of Arts and Humanities
Bahir Dar, Ethiopia
Vol. 1 (3), August, 2012:116-132

ISSN: 2225-8590 (Print)

ISSN 2227-5452 (Online)

English for Examination Purposes (EEP): A Norm or a Genre?

Oladunjoye, Oluwayomi S.

Department of Curriculum Studies and Instructional Technology (Language Unit) Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Nigeria

E-mail: yomi_yemi@yahoo.com

Phone: +2348056031278

Abstract

This is a paper proposing the recognition of English for Examination Purposes (EEP). It is a report of an 'unscheduled' quasi experimental research over 278 college students in Nigeria getting prepared to sit for Senior School Certificate English. The researcher was consulted to bring in a palliative measure as an intervention model on a school at comatose for roughly four years with reference to making the students in the Certificate year acquire the qualifying credit in English to proceed after their graduation from the college. Relying heavily on Communicative English Approach, the researcher focused the in-coming examination in choosing the

right strategies to carry out the consultancy. The seven week project saw the students writing over thirty essays (including letters), engaging in extensive practice in Lexis and structure with more than a hand on Summary and Comprehension while receiving immediate feedback in all cases. The highest mean grade of 4.51 was recorded in 2006 when the treatment and the examination took place compared to the previous years. Thus Exam focused English language strategy is recommended for practice in countries where students need a minimum of credit grade in English to make it into the university and the teaching and learning conditions were not favourable enough to equip them for their public examination under normal circumstances.

Introduction

The place of English as a world language is a usual point of discourse in academic conferences where there is the need to advance a medium of communication for effective ‘translation’ of the school subjects, especially in multi – cultural communities. Urgent efforts have been made time and again by mega English bodies like the British Council to reach more learners and teachers using its generous but limited resources. The desperate concern for over 11.4 million English language teachers and 1.1 billion English language learners, (Umeh and Wood, 2010), is partly the reason for evolution of varieties of English to meet specific purposes in different cultures of the users. Today we have English teaching to speakers of other languages, (ESOL), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), Radio English, (RE) and English Language Teaching (ELT). While Gilway recommends English grammar for Academic Purposes (EGAP), building on the previous experiments of Biber et al,(2000) and Swales,(2004), Alimi, (2010) feels there should be a workplace English programme, citing the emerging multicultural work environments like Botswana as a case study.

Rationale for this Paper

This paper is written to justify the need for a kind of English teaching that will focus Examination. In Nigeria where longitudinal ‘experiments’ took place on making passing examination a focus of English teaching, the researcher is overwhelmed by the discovery that quite a number of students would learn English if the stake is making the required credit to register for higher education.. While English may be in some sense, a simple tool of communication in and across Nigeria societies especially among the elite and

the fairly literate people, it complicates the linguistic patterns of the high school students from diverse ethnic settings who have not just to learn it but also to acquire a qualifying certificate in it. Less than a credit pass in English will make them to miss their place in the university in the year of their application. It is a compulsory subject to be passed with a minimum of “B” (credit, formerly ‘C’), no matter the course a student intends to study. Unfortunately, candidates had kept failing the subject.

English Language in Nigeria – An Unofficial, Official Lingua Franca

A colony of Britain, Nigeria, so named by Flora Shaw, the wife of Lord Lugard in 1914, obtained independence in 1960 and became a Republic in 1963. Because of her multiethnic and multi-lingua nature, it has no common national language from either the major or minor linguistic groups. While Awoniyi (1971) and Bamgbose (1976) submit that Nigeria has more than 320 different tongues, Ubabukoh (2005) put the number at 515. Out of these languages Ubabukoh highlight, 505 are living languages, two are second languages without mother tongue speakers and eight are extinct. Not much had been achieved from the efforts being made to solve the nation’s political, cultural and religions problems through formulation of national indigenous languages, Oladunjoye, (2005) Today, English is Nigeria’s language of official records and communication. Colonial rule had the conduct of every affair of the colony in English. Thus, English became the language of administration, law and order, executive and legislative functions, Ker (2002) and must be taught in all schools and at all levels.

Students’ Performance in English

Ubahakwe (1988) blames students’ failure in English on “declining competence.” Of whom? Ayodele (1988), probably analysing Ubahakwe’s position better, argues that the causes ‘must be traced to the classroom practices’ which sum up the classroom factors responsible for the regular high rate of failure in English to include teachers’ low level of competence in the language skills, especially reading, unduly large classroom, too many periods per week, lack of incentive and learners’ unserious attitude. Unoh (1990) and Kolawole (1997) agree that students’ failure to express their thoughts through the medium of English is responsible for their failure in the writing aspects of the language.

The Experimental Setting

This work is a report of series of treatments (palliative support) applied on the final year students of a Federal government college in Nigeria where the researcher was invited as a consultant to conduct a remedial course prior to the students' Senior School Certificate examination (S.S.C.E), an equivalent of General Certificate Examination (G.C.E). In accepting the invitation, I did not have the mind to conduct an experiment. This explains the reason the word experiment either appears in italics or is simply quoted wherever it occurs in this report. Like most of the Federal Government Colleges and other state-owned secondary schools, the 'experimental' school is well-staffed with qualified and experienced teachers. Out of their fourteen teachers of English language, there were three Masters Degree holders, among whom one was(then) on doctorate degree programme. From the interaction with them at a one-day seminar, the teachers put the entire reason for students' years of setback in English language as shown in Table 1 below, on the lackadaisical attitude of learners, touching on their: (a) coldness to essay writing, (b) indifference to communication in the standard English in and around the campus, (c) unwillingness to do extra-lesson except by force, (d) refusal to do take-home assignments or doing it in half, and (e) not reading story books, comics, magazines and other periodicals in addition to the neglect of doing study exercises from their recommended textbooks.

Table 1 shows the English language result of the school for four years prior my invitation for an intervention model before the 2006 examination.

Table 1: English Language Results of a Nigerian Federal Government School over a Period of Four Years.

	Yr	A1	B2	B3	C4	C5	C6	D 7	E8	F9	No of candidate	% A+B+C	A+B+C +D+E
1	2002	-	03	22	22	21	67	82	76	53	346	39.0	84.7
2	2004	-	-	04	06	19	133	88	54	19	324	50.0	94.1
3	2005	-	-	02	03	13	97	83	44	08	250	46.0	96.8

Note: *A+B+C represent distinctions and credits, while D, E, and F represent Pass (D and E) and Fail (F) respectively. Therefore, 'A – C' is considered pass, and qualified, while D, E, and F are unqualified. 2003 result was not available at the time of the gathering of this data.*

Source: *The results were obtained from the School's Counselling and Evaluation Department*

None of the teachers, as expected, advanced any teacher-related reason for students' poor performance in the subject for such a long time. Why not holding brief for the students, it is obvious that the teachers probably over-bloated students' role as the architects of their problem. That is not to say, however, that the teachers did not work nor that the students were altogether blameless. Quite far from that, the teachers did what they know best to do; talk, teach, test and complain. The students also did what their restless limbs and brains could afford them; receive lectures without concentration, rebuff every bit of encouragement to be diligent and rebel against authorities whenever the noose was tighter.

Generally in countries outside Europe in particular, there are teachers who speak English with mother-tongue accent and, yet, not feeling in any way deficient or inferior to others whose accent approximate to a native model (Jubril, 1986). This model has far reaching consequence on the learners. In some places, there is the problem of absence of an enabling environment confirmed by disheartening features of over-populated and ill-equipped classrooms, poorly-paid teachers, unmotivated, hungry and poorly prepared students', hurriedly written textbooks, uncoordinated litany of policies and documents and old fashioned bureaucracy and resistance to change (Aliyu, 2002).

Nigerian Teachers' approach to teaching English as a Second Language

Not all teachers of English in Nigeria have qualifying English teachers' status. To teach English in the primary and junior secondary schools, the minimum qualification is Nigeria Certificate in Education (N.C.E) while Bachelor's Degree in Education with specialization in one teaching subject will qualify a recipient to teach in the senior secondary. However, non education specialists graduating from universities had had to find their way into teaching to have a job at all cost. On the part of the ministry of education, missionary and private school managers, such people are readily absorbed to the ever waiting vacancies in secondary schools. Unlike what operates in developed nations, however, there is no provision for short term course like Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults (CELTA) to brush up graduates of English without ESL certificate. Though such teachers are in the majority in Nigerian secondary schools the problem is actually more than *qualification* as even teachers with qualified status tend to lack the

basic contemporary methodology for addressing students preparing to write examination. Thus it is observed that:

- (a) Teachers have taught, overtime, and are still teaching now, by imitation, following, look-and-copy method.
- (b) Some teachers simply give unedited ‘model’ essays and letter writing without caring to supervise them for vetting.
- (c) Lexis and structures (grammar) are taught without practical, adequate involvement of students.
- (d) The recommended books, produced in modules, have good content but lack examination focus.
- (e) Students are deficient of wealth of words to combat the summary aspect.
- (f) Apart from having problem with general understanding of the comprehension passages, teachers and students do not fully understand what I call “grammar in comprehension” like classification of clauses, figures of speech and parts of speech. Unfortunately, students are expected to treat questions in that area in the two passages they are given.
- (g) The problem of the teachers possibly emanated from their diverse backgrounds in their learning of English as a second or foreign language whereas that of the students emerge from confusion following improper clarification of technical terms like Noun clause and Noun phrase, in what way do they differ? If Relative Clause can also be called an Adjective Clause, why two names?
- (h) What the curriculum of Oral English recommends is known in Nigeria as *alternative to oral*. No tape test. Students are tested on their ability to identify a word that carried a particular sound – consonant or vowel. They are also tested to identify proper stress placement and so on. However, I discovered there are two extremes to the teachers’ handling of Oral English.
 - (i) Deliberate, careful avoidance of Oral English aspects to cover their deficiencies;
 - (ii) Handling it the wrong way like dictating their own training notes from the College or University to students; giving

them definitions of consonants, vowels, diphthongs, glides, stress, intonation, etc, instead of teaching them what the examining body wanted at the SSCE level, where no definition but application is required.

Procedure: Exam-Focused English Teaching Strategy

The procedure for the remedial course was to be guided by the need to touch base with existing practice in English teaching to achieve the desired change. Since over fifty years ago when Michael West first talked about 'teaching English in difficult circumstances' (West, 1960), not much has changed in most parts of the world as 50 or more pupils still congest on benches, ill graded, with a teacher who perhaps does not speak English very well (Smith, 2010) to learn English. For the present project, the consultant focusing on the proposed School Certificate Examination adopted a combination of Communicative English, Collaborative Approach and Individual Learner Autonomy altogether to make learners identify their learning strength, improve their own learning strategies and develop as independent language learners irrespective of their socio-cultural backgrounds, age, gender or academic standard. The teacher (the consultant) as is common in communicative language teaching guided the learners to analyse discourse and demystify conventions while providing on the spot progress with verbal feedback.

Meeting two times in the week over a period of seven weeks, the consultancy programme involved:

- (a) A commitment to covering all aspects of English required of the students by the West African Examination Council.(WAEC), the Examining body for the Senior School Certificate Examination(S.S.C.E).(Please see the appendix)
- (b) In every meeting, students wrote at least one essay or letter which I took away for marking to be distributed in the next meeting. That is, there was always a writing of essay in all interactive sessions no matter which aspect of English was taught. And there was always a feedback for students to peruse in every session. Meanwhile, students will retire to their hostels (90% were boarders) or to their houses with at least 3 or 4 more continuous writing assignment.
- (c) For Lexis and Structure which constitutes over 64% of the entire examination, concepts were discussed, relevant past questions

given, treated, and another question or two, sometimes three, follow, also with immediate feedback. (please see the appendix)

- (d) In tackling the problems associated with Summary and Comprehension, students work in groups discussing topical issues or analysing printed passages from their text books. They could also be asked to compare similar newspaper reports from different media. At another time, story books were distributed to them part of which they were expected to read first individually (within a group or peer) and later to be discussed. Presenters were to be appointed from each group who would come to the front of the class to share the group's ideas about author's style, literary devices, setting of the story or the plot. From focusing on linked ideas in literature stories and the media, students were guided to transfer their knowledge, experience and comprehension ability to addressing examiners' questions in English Comprehension and Summary.

Results and Findings

Both the management and Parents Teachers' Forum attested to the efficacy of the model after the release of the result as clarified on the following tables.

Table 2 Both the Mock and the 2006 results

	Yr	A1	B2	B3	C4	C5	C6	D7	E8	F9	No of candidate	% A+B+C	A+B+C+D+E
1	2006	-	2	22	52	41	105	32	23	-	277	80.1	100.0
2	2006 mock	2	4	17	19	50	51	45	38	56	278	51.4	79.9

Note: A+B+C represent distinctions and credits, while D, E, and F represent Pass (D and E) and Fail (F) respectively. Therefore, 'A – C' is considered pass, and qualified, while D, E, and F are unqualified

The Mock was conducted by the researcher as a predictive validity for the eventual 2006 public examination.

Table 3

Comparison of the Differences in English Performance between 2002 and 2006

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	305.331	4	76.333	34.253	.000
Within Groups	3275.873	1470	2.228		
Total	3581.204	1474			

The table shows a large value of F (34.25) with a low significance. This indicates that the difference in the performance of the students in English is significant even at 0.01 levels.

Table 4: Scheffe Multiple Comparisons

(i) Treat	(j) Treat	Mean difference (i - j)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% confidence interval	
					Lower bound	Upper bound
Year 2006	Year 2005	1.19*	.13	.000	.79	1.59
	Year 2004	1.16*	.12	.000	.79	1.54
	Year 2002	1.23*	.12	.000	.86	1.60
	Mock	.93*	.13	.000	.54	1.32

The Scheffe post hoc test reveals the difference among the means. When the means of other years are deducted from that of year 2006, the result is positive, signifying that the mean of year 2006 is better than the rest. The * is an indication that the difference is significant at 0.05 level. See below the mean grade for each year.

Table 5: Showing the Means of the Performance for Each Year

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Year 2006	277	4.51	1.39
Year 2005	250	3.32	1.02
Year 2004	324	3.35	1.14
Year 2002	346	3.28	1.73
Mock	278	3.58	1.93

The table shows the mean grade for each year. It is glaring from the table that year 2006 has highest mean grade of 4.51, thus justifying the

effectiveness of the strategy under review – Exam-focused Language Teaching Strategy.

Relationship between Year 2006 Mock and Exams

Variables	N	X	SD	R	R ²	Sig.
Year 2006	277	4.51	1.39	0.94	0.88	0.01
Mock	278	3.58	1.93			

The table shows a high positive value of R (0.94) which signifies a high positive relationship between mock and exam. The R² (0.88) further confirms that the mock exam affects 88 out of every 100 cases.

Conclusion

In advocating English for Examination purposes (EEP), an Exam-focused English Language Teaching Strategy, the researcher had discussed the place of English as a second language in Nigeria, the very many problems of English usage and the common complain of teachers about students’ lack of readiness to learn English.

While he applauded the use of other strategies to teach English, and the well coordinated English language textbooks written in modules, the researcher notices that the situation with English in Nigeria is such that students should be taught with the mind of making them pass their examinations in addition to developing the skills for an everyday proficient user.

Both the school management and the staff acknowledged the 2006 result that brought a visible change which broke the chain of failure in the English language. The consultant was asked to repeat the same ‘experiment’ in both 2007 and 2008 as a follow up to 2006 outstanding performance of the students on the request of both the school management and the Parents Teachers Forum (PTF) of the school. Results in both cases were outstanding. It is therefore, recommended that English for Examination Purposes (EEP) be given a recognition in countries where learners have to pass it to qualify for further education and in places where academic English is required at the foundation level to acquire skills for study and practice in effective communication.

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Appendix 1

The six-year secondary school curriculum that dove-tail into the writing of the Senior School Certification Examination expects so much from the candidates in the area of:

- a) **Lexis and Structure**; Students will be required to choose from given options to complete gaps in questions testing: Homographs, Homonyms and Homophones, Alternatives close in meaning, Nouns and Articles, Pronouns, Tenses, Modals and Auxiliaries, Conjunctions, Intensifiers, Prepositions, Word Order, Question and Answer Tags, Language Registers and Comparative Adjectives. Some three sections of this aspect is also devoted to Nearest in Meaning, Nearly Opposite in Meaning and Interpretation of Statements. The tests in this section give statements that will be followed by at least five possible interpretations out of which candidates will choose the most suitable.
- b) **Comprehension**; Two passages are presented before the candidates; testing: substitution of words and phrases, general comprehension, which involves a test of the ability of students to show a clear understanding of author's themes, literary terms like metaphors, similes, onomatopoeia, oxymoron, pun, hyperbole, metonym, irony etc., grammatical structures like Noun phrase prepositional phrases, adverbial clause etc., and parts of speech like adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, nouns, verbs etc.,
- c) **Summary**: Only one passage of summary is tested where the candidate is expected to demonstrate an understanding of precision as a skill. In testing ability of students to paraphrase, they are scored

on their willingness to deliberately avoid lifting of author's word and to write sentences with or without preambles without presenting phrases as sentences or subordinate clauses.

- d) **Essays and Letter Writing:** Here the candidate is tested on continuous writing. Five options are given covering Narrative, Descriptive, Explanatory, Argumentative, and Expository essays as well as Informal and Formal letters. The candidate is expected to attempt only one and he/she is not restricted to any number.
- e) **Oral English:** Oral English test comes with Lexis and Structure paper and candidates are tested on their ability to identify vowels or consonants that are similar to the underlined vowel or consonant in the underlined word of a specific question. They are also tested in the same way to identify syllabic patterns, stress and intonations of words. Presently there is no audio test.

Each of these items contain complex sub-items that are loaded into the recommended books – *English Project*, *NOSEC (New Oxford English Course)*, *Practical English*, *Effective English*, etc, in modules beginning from book 1-6.

Appendix 11

(Example of treatment package)

The exam-focused English strategy presupposes that irrespective of the ability or deficiencies of the certificate – year students, the teacher will handle them with the focus of examination in mind. To do this,

Example A:

Concept: Nearest in Meaning

Instruction

Teacher: In a group of four or five read the two sentences below and study the use of proud.

1. Mr. Benson wears a proud look always.
 - (a) a fair
 - (b) an arrogant
 - (c) a costly

- (d) an authentic
(SSCE, 2001)

2. An explorer once said he was proud of his country.

- (a) in love with
(b) desirable of
(c) uninterested in
(d) weary of

GCE, 2000)

The first use of proud above is in a bad or negative sense. So option ‘B’ is the nearest in meaning to it. In the second sentence, proud is used in the positive sense to mean pleased with or satisfied about something or person with whom you are connected. Thus, option ‘A’ is the nearest in meaning to proud of.

Example B:

Teacher: Study the examples below:

1. You do not need to dissipate your energy on a futile exercise.

- (a) waste
(b) combine
(c) employ
(d) direct
(e) allow

(GCE, 1998)

Teacher: At different items ‘A’, ‘C’ and perhaps ‘D’ and ‘E’ with changes in the use of the prepositions, can be used to replace the underlined word – dissipate. Thus, we can have a table like this based on this context.

dissipate		
Near	Nearer	Nearest
allow direct	Employ	waste

2. It is absurd to say you cannot live on your salary.

- (a) strange
- (b) humorous
- (c) ridiculous
- (d) merry
- (e) joyful

(SSCE, 1980)

Teacher: In arbitrary meaning, absurd means ridiculous. Yet ridiculous idea or opinion could be humorous especially when one considers who the maker of the opinion or the idea is. Again, an absurd statement or attitude could be strange or look strange to use if it comes from an unexpected source. Like the previous examples, we can have a table like this:

absurd		
Near	Nearer	Nearest
humorous direct	Strange	ridiculous

Students' Activities

Divide into a group of four to build a box for each of the following items in order to arrive at the nearest in meaning:

1. Olu seems rather optimistic about the future.

- (a) hopeful
- (b) convinced
- (c) believing
- (d) sad
- (e) expectant

Optimistic		
Near	Nearer	Nearest
believing	Expectant	?

2. My friend's sister said that she felt forsaken.

- (a) undermined

- (b) abandoned
- (c) insulted
- (d) dejected
- (e) disappointed

(GCE, 1983)

Dissipate		
Near	Nearer	Nearest
disappointed	Dejected	?

B. Tenses (Simple present). Learners gather to discuss the following sentences.

1. She writes legibly.
2. We meet once in a month to evaluate our progress
3. I like sleeping late
4. He watches his diet these days.
5. You speak like your European friend.
6. They usually respect others' opinion.
7. The dog barks indiscriminately

PCN + V – S e.g. Sentences ‘2’, ‘5’ and ‘6’

SCN means Singular Countable Noun

V means Verb

PCN means Plural Countable Noun

V means Verb

S means ‘s’

The exception to the above rules is when an auxiliary or modal verb comes between the subject and the verb.

For example:

Don't say: He should comes here occasionally.

Say: He should come here occasionally.

As a group, study this question and discuss the answer:

Q1: Many a preacher these days _____ dishonest.

- (a) is

- (b) are
 - (c) were
 - (d) was
- (WASCE, Nov 1999)

Students' Activities

Pupils discuss the question as a group, reasoning out each option to arrive at the correct one.

Note: The teacher will only supply the answer after the pupils had thoroughly reviewed it. The answer is 'A'

Teacher: Now that we have understood the process of arising at the answer, attempt the following individually.

Q2: Nigeria, like many other African countries _____.

- (a) has being predominantly agricultural
- (b) have been predominantly agricultural
- (c) are predominantly agricultural
- (d) is predominantly agricultural

(SSCE, 2003)

Q3: Ibrahim _____ say that to my face.

- (a) does not dare
- (b) dares not
- (c) dare not
- (d) did not dare