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Lecturer Quality and Effective Implementation of Use of English Curriculum for Polytechnic Students' Self-Reliance

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Abstract

*The goals of Use of English (UoE) courses in the polytechnics are to provide the student with the necessary language skills, to consolidate the student's competence in the use of English, and to further improve the student's level of proficiency and competence in language use. The course, therefore, is not an end in itself but a means to an end - which is to develop the student's ability to acquire language arts skills. For the students to benefit maximally in the acquisition of vocational language skills via the UoE courses, the practical dimension of the teaching must be emphatically, adequately, and expertly handled. This is where the shortcomings of the lecture method become glaring. This study was conducted to investigate the effect of lecturers' quality and competence in the teaching of language skills in the UoE curriculum to enhance students' language skills acquisition and boost their self-reliance. Forty lecturers from federal-, state-, and private-owned polytechnics were involved in the study. The lecturer Quality Questionnaire designed by the researchers was administered. Results showed that lecturers' level of understanding of the objective of polytechnic education, the objective of UoE curriculum, the vocational relevance of UoE, and lecturers' self-rating of the curriculum implementation process are high with the mean values of 2.425, 2.275, 2.175 and 2.325 respectively. However, lecturers' self-rating on skill teaching competence is low with a mean value of 1.975. There is an insignificant positive correlation ($r=.270$) between lecturers' level of understanding of the objectives of polytechnic education and self-rating on skill teaching competence while the *t*. test shows significant differences in school type ($t = 2.130 p<.05$); lecturer's qualification ($t = 5.208 p<.05$); and length of service ($t = 7.415 p<.05$). The study concluded that*

though the lecturers have a high level of understanding of the objective of polytechnic education, the objective of UoE curriculum, and vocational relevance of UoE curriculum, their self-confidence and ability in language skills teaching for students' vocational self-reliance is limited. It recommended the input of trained professionals along with the provision of required instructional resources in the teaching of UoE. UoE lecturers should be availed opportunities for training in one or two vocational language skills which they can in turn impart to their students.

Keywords: Lecturer competence, language skills, self-reliance, collaboration

Introduction

i. The self-reliance objective of polytechnic education

There is no gainsaying the importance of skill acquisition to individual and national development. Skill acquisition, according to Uzochukwu (2017), is the ability to be trained on a particular task or function and become an expert in it. To him, skill is like a key used in opening the door of fortune. As water is very essential to human life so is a skill needed in the life of every serious-minded human being. Skills can do a lot of great work in the life of every living soul. Lack of skills is a major cause of corruption. The importance of skill acquisition includes self-employment, diverse job opportunities, employment generation, effective function, and crime reduction. He believes that the reason why many technicians earn more than some university graduates is that the technicians acquire more skills than the theories the graduates were fed with when they were in universities.

The etymology of the word 'polytechnic' shows it is loaned from French and its origin is from the Greek word *polutekhnos* which means 'multi-skilled' (Microsoft Encarta). A graduate of the polytechnic is therefore expected to possess more skills than one. Among the objectives listed by Ale (2004) is 'to give training and imparting necessary skills for the production of technicians and other skilled personnel who shall be enterprising and self-reliant'. It becomes imperative therefore for every graduate of the polytechnic to learn other skill(s) apart from his course of study if he is to be self-reliant after graduation. This is the reason for the inclusion of the *Use of English* in the General Studies Department.

The Self-reliance Objective of UoE

The National Board for Technical Education (1999) is clear about the goals of the *Use of English* (UoE) courses at various levels of polytechnic education. It is variously put as: 'to provide the student with the necessary language skills...' (p.4); 'to consolidate the student's competence in the use of English (p.10); and 'to further improve the student's level of proficiency and competence in language use' (p.15). Apart from the teaching of the rudiments of grammar, specific language skills all of which have vocational significance are listed to be taught – story writing (storytelling), drama (playwriting); registers (varieties of language use), poetry (poetic composition); oral composition (broadcasting).

If we are guided by the objectives of polytechnic education, we must agree that there is more to the teaching of UoE in the polytechnic than passing an examination. The course is not an end in itself but a means to an end - which is to develop in the students the

ability to acquire language arts skills. The focus of technical education is on the application of knowledge so, at the polytechnic level, the focus is on the development of appropriate skills, abilities, and competencies. Therefore, the objective of teaching UoE should be primarily to develop in the students the skills of language so that they could through the practice of the skills attain the objective of self-realization advocated in the National Policy on Education.

UoE is taught at all levels in polytechnic education and all four language skills – reading, writing, speaking, and listening – are taught apart from the grammar component. In recognition of the vocational significance, different skills are taught at different levels – prose writing and drama at the first and second levels of the national diploma stage respectively. At the two higher diploma levels students are respectively taught the skills of poetry and oral composition. Others are registers (varieties of language use), public speaking, small group (leadership), and dyadic communications (interviews). The implication is that after their national diploma course, polytechnic students are expected to have picked considerable interest and skill in storytelling/writing and playwriting/acting. Students who pass through the higher diploma training should be able to diversify to poetic composition, oral delivery skills, and public speaking on diverse channels, among others.

It goes without saying that for the students to benefit maximally in the acquisition of vocational language skills via the UoE courses the practical dimension of the teaching must be emphatically, adequately, and expertly handled. This is where the shortcomings of the lecture method become glaring. Despite the advantages of the lecture method, Farooq (2012) explains that learning is an active process thus students should be encouraged to actively participate in the classroom instead of just listening to the teacher. This is especially necessary when the learning content is more practical than theoretical. The current practice of teaching the UoE in the polytechnic does not give much premium to the practical aspect. One popular topic is registers - which requires students to be taught the varieties of language use. The objective of teaching this topic should be for the students to attain a measure of proficiency in at least one or two of the identified varieties. A student should, for instance, be able to produce in the form of a project an advertisement of a product, a jingle, a commentary on live events, or a poetic or dramatic composition. The only way this is possible is for students to undergo hands-on training under a specialist.

Coupled with the weaknesses of the lecture method and the dearth of teaching aids, the lecturers' approach to the teaching of UoE also has a great propensity to significantly demotivate the students or kill their interest in the study of UoE. The trend in the polytechnic today is that while adequate attention is expected to be on the acquisition of diverse language skills in the teaching of UoE, the lecturers focus more on the theory and grammar of the language relegating the skills to the background.

Indices of Teaching Effectiveness

Studies on effective instruction have harped on the need to promote and sustain the interest, motivation, and attitude of the students to aid their academic performance in a particular course of study. Banjo (1989) has established that learners who have little need to know and understand expend little learning effort; manifest an insufficiently meaningful learning set; fail to develop precise meanings and devote little or no time and effort to practice and review. Rotter (1954) had earlier postulated that the tendency to achieve

success in any activity was a manipulative function of motive to achieve success, the strength of expectancy that the performance of a task will be followed by success and the incentive value of success.

In the acquisition of skills, Fitts and Posner (1967) recognize three stages: cognitive (or understanding) stage, associative (or practice) stage, and autonomous (or automatic) stage. The Associative stage in comparison with the cognitive stage is quite long. In this stage, the fundamentals and mechanics of the skill are learned and put into practice more consistently and with fewer errors because the student has developed the ability to detect and correct errors. At the autonomous stage, the skill becomes habitual or automatic. In this stage, there is good consistency of performance. Skill is performed without thinking and students can give more selective attention to higher-order cognitive activities and can detect and adjust errors and disguise actions. This develops self-confidence and risk-taking in performance situations. For a student to attain this level of automaticity in skill performance there is a need for specialized handling and practical modeling and tutoring which give a tremendous boost to the triple factors of students' motivation, interest, and attitude. Learning is a tedious activity that requires proper motivation to achieve. Motivation, according to Omrod (2014), is something that energizes, directs, and sustains behavior; it gets students moving, points them in a particular direction, and keeps them going. He observes that we often see students' motivation reflected in personal investment and cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement in school activities. In his write-up on 'How Motivation Affects Learning and Behavior', he made the following points:

- *Motivation directs behavior toward particular goals:* Motivation determines the specific goals toward which learners strive; whether to spend an evening completing a challenging homework assignment or playing with friends.
- *Motivation leads to increased effort and energy.* Motivation increases the amount of effort and energy that learners expend in activities directly related to their needs and goals. It determines whether they pursue a task enthusiastically and wholeheartedly or apathetically and lackadaisically.
- *Motivation increases initiation of and persistence in activities.* Learners are more likely to begin a task they *want to do*. They are also more likely to continue working at it until they've completed it, even if they are occasionally interrupted or frustrated in the process.
- *Motivation affects cognitive processes.* Motivation affects what learners pay attention to and how effectively they process it. For instance, motivated learners often make a concerted effort to truly understand classroom material - to learn it meaningfully - and consider how they might use it in their own lives.
- *Motivation determines which consequences are reinforcing and punishing.* The more learners are motivated to achieve academic success, the more they will be proud of an A and upset by a low grade. The more learners want to be accepted and respected by peers, the more they will value membership in the "in" group and be distressed by the ridicule of classmates.
- *Motivation often enhances performance.* Because of the other effects just identified—goal-directed behavior, effort and energy, initiation and persistence, cognitive processing, and the impact of consequences—motivation often leads to improved performance.

In his contribution to ‘*What Keeps Students Motivated to Learn*’, Schwartz (2014) harps among others on **making it hands-on. The implication of this is that lecturers should not just lecture but also get the students ‘to do the work being told about it’ sometimes in a way that requires collaboration. She also advises making the activities interest-based and relevant because she believes** students like to know why they are learning something and they want to access that information through a lens that interests them. If teachers give broad guidelines for the project and then have students do something they are interested in it will bring students along the whole time. She advises that “If you let them know, and use real-life problems, it will help them understand it and they will feel like it’s worth doing”.

Two other factors linked to students’ motivation from the above are interest and values. Matthews (2001) opines that values are seen as antecedents of behavior. Values have a direct influence on learning behavior. When a student places high importance or value on a subject he is most likely going to develop a keen interest in it and invest much time and effort in it. Such students according to him study to learn and are motivated to go beyond the basic requirements for passing. Their learning involves a problem-solving approach and their interest carries them beyond a superficial understanding of what they are studying. These students are actively involved in the learning process and the process involves meta-cognitive activities that narrow any gaps in knowledge acquisition. In his study carried out to investigate the relationships between values and approaches to study, Matthews (2001) reports that the group that measured high on the values scale used a deep approach described by Marton and Säljö (2006) in terms of *phenomenographic* understanding - a deep process that precipitates a broad involvement in the learning process itself. Education through deep learning involves conceptual change that goes beyond the basic acquisition of information.

The Roles of Lecturers in UoE Curriculum Implementation

The pivotal role of lecturers in the UoE curriculum implementation is in facilitating the students’ demonstration of learning in language arts. Fawkes (2015) underscores the importance of theoretical and practical learning when he quotes Benjamin Franklin “*Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I remember. Involve me and I learn.*” to strengthen the idea that theory and the practical application of theory are equally important. This is why specialists are advocating for the practice of demonstration of learning which refers to a wide variety of potential educational projects, presentations, or products through which students “demonstrate” what they have learned, usually as a way of determining whether and to what degree they have achieved expected learning standards or learning objectives for a course or learning experience.

Hidden Curriculum (2014) explains that in contrast to worksheets, quizzes, tests, and other more traditional approaches to assessment, a demonstration of learning may take a wide variety of forms in schools:

- Oral presentations, speeches, or spoken-word poems
- Video documentaries, multimedia presentations, audio recordings, or podcasts
- Works of art, illustration, music, drama, dance, or performance
- Print or online publications, including websites or blogs

- Essays, poems, short stories, or plays
- Galleries of print or digital photography
- Scientific experiments, studies, and reports
- Physical products such as models, sculptures, dioramas, musical instruments, or robots
- Portfolios of work samples and academic accomplishments that students collect over time
- Presentations or slideshows that provide a summary of the skills and knowledge students have learned

In his memorandum titled Proposal for Vocational Training in Use of English (language arts skills) submitted to the College Management towards the establishment of Entrepreneurship Centre, the following areas, Olajide (2015) identified the following:

- i. Writing
 - a) Script writing – stories – prose, play, or poetry for sale or performance
 - b) Printing and Publishing
 - c) Bookbinding
- ii. Reading
 - a) Freelance broadcasting – News-casting, Reporting
 - b) Radio/T.V. program presentation – stories, social diary/comments, business promotion, etc
- iii. Speaking/Singing
 - a) Master of Ceremonies – Alaga
 - b) Stand-up Comedy
 - c) Sports Commentary
 - d) Cultural songs – Ijala, Irewoje, Ewi, Esa, Oriki Orile
 - e) Choral performance
 - f) Voice Training – Mimicry
 - g) Advertising /Jingles Production
- iv. Musical Instruments
 - a) All types of drums – drum set, gangan, iya-ilu, omele, bata, agogo, sekere, akuba, maracas
 - b) Modern instruments – guitar, trumpet, saxophone, flute, accordion, violin, keyboard, etc
 - c) Costuming
- v. Movements
 - a) Cultural Dance
 - b) Choreography
 - c) Acting - Solo, Duet, and Group performances
 - d) Music - Solo, Duet, Group performances
- vi. Listening
 - a) Hearing incapacitation
 - b) Inconsistent feedback

Statement of the Problem

In teaching students for language skill acquisition for self-reliance, the most vital quality of a UoE lecturer is the ability to collaborate. Most of the language skills could be acquired only through practical training which the course lecturers alone might not be able to provide the students. Course lecturers, who are employed mainly based on

academic qualifications, might not possess the requisite practical proficiency to train the students in the acquisition of linguistic skills so it becomes necessary to collaborate with practitioners with proven ability who can easily transfer the skills to the students so that at the end of the course the students will have attained a measure of ability and proficiency in their skills of choice.

The collaborative approach is patterned after the collaborative approach to teaching social skills – a program designed by the Foundation for Exceptional Innovation for educators to work together as partners with other specialists in a practical way to teach social skills to all students in the classroom and across the school settings. (Rutherford, 1992). It is based on three distinct rationales:

- Some students need social skills training to derive maximum benefit from academic instruction
- Social skills training can facilitate inclusion efforts, contribute to peer- and teacher-acceptance, and improve prospects for post-school employment success
- Social skills training can facilitate some students' capacity for independent living and recruitment of adequate social support networks.

The collaborative approach offers educators a practical skill to teaching social skills by combining instructional framework with a collaborative model with the skills instruction serving as the technical content or intervention focus of the collaboration. Situated in the context of this study, the focus of collaboration is language skills. The approach runs through three stages starting from curriculum planning, to Instruction and implementation, and Student Self-control. The second phase which is the instruction stage makes use of 5 instructional strategies:

- i. Direct teaching of the social skill steps
- ii. Modelling
- iii. Practice
- iv. Social Reinforcement or feedback
- v. Self-control

The collaborative model, though designed for the teaching of social skills, is equally useful for the teaching of language skills. After teaching about the identified language skills harping on the values and technical intricacies that warrant specialized handling, the collaborating specialist will be brought in to expose them further to the nitty-gritty of the skill. He will perform practically as a model to be observed and imitated. He will thereafter direct them to engage in constant practice as necessary under his close watch. While this is going on, he will provide them with necessary correctional feedback and provide appropriate reinforcements - negative or positive - to goad the students to better performances. At the self-control level coming after the students might have attained a satisfactory level of competency, they shall be required to perform unaided by the instructor for assessment. Their performances which may be in a group or on an individual basis shall be captured on audio/video recordings. This paper investigated the effect of lecturers' quality of collaboration competence in the teaching of language skills in UoE to enhance students' language skills acquisition and boost their self-reliance after graduation.

Research Questions

The following five questions are answered in the study:

- i. What is the lecturers' level of understanding of the objective of polytechnic education?

- ii. What is the lecturers' level of understanding of the objective of the UoE Curriculum?
- iii. What is the lecturers' level of understanding of the vocational relevance of UoE?
- iv. What is the level of lecturers' self-rating of the curriculum implementation process?
- v. What is the level of lecturers' self-rating on skill teaching competence?
- vi. What is the relationship between lecturers' understanding of the objective of the UoE curriculum and their self-rating of the curriculum implementation process?
- vii. Is there any significant difference in lecturers' self-rating on skill teaching competence?

Method

Design

The study was ex post facto in nature. The variables already existed and nothing was done to manipulate the lecturers' quality. It was merely captured through the instrument of a questionnaire constructed for the purpose.

Study Population, Sampling Procedure, and Sample

Polytechnic lecturers in Nigeria constituted the study population. The samples were drawn purposively from 2 states in the southwest region considering the proximity to researchers. Institutions were selected based on ownership – state, federal, and private. Lecturers of UoE of all qualifications, ages, genders, and years of experience were involved. In all, 40 study samples were selected from the 6 institutions.

Instrument

Lecturer Quality Questionnaire (LQQ) was constructed by the researchers. It contained 30 items in 5 sections. Respondents were requested to rate their perception of the various indices UoE curriculum, including an understanding of the objective of polytechnic education, an understanding of the objective of the UoE Curriculum, an understanding of the vocational relevance of UoE, self-rating of the curriculum implementation process, and self-rating on technical skill teaching competence. Researchers relied on their years of experience as lecturers and the competence of the lead researcher to vouch for the validity of the instrument. The split-half reliability test yielded a coefficient of .88.

Procedure

Researchers visited the institutions, spoke with the Heads of relevant Departments, and met with all the lecturers of UoE. The Heads of General Studies Departments served as research assistants as they helped in the distribution and retrieval of the questionnaires. This made it possible to collect every copy of the questionnaires distributed.

Data Presentation, Analysis, and Interpretation

The respondents were required to rate their perception of each questionnaire item on a 4-point Likert scale: Strongly Agree, Agree, Partially Agree, and Disagree. The responses were given the values of 3, 2, 1, and 0 respectively. The values were reversed in items that had negative orientation. The mean values of each item, section, and whole study were calculated and interpreted as follows: 2.6-3.0 (Very High); 2.0-2.5 (High); 1.0-1.9 (Low); 0.0-0.9 (Very Low). The test of correlation was conducted to determine the relationship between lecturers' understanding and competence. The t. test was also conducted to determine the significance of differences recorded in the responses of lecturers to the **effective Implementation of UoE curriculum for students' self-reliance** based on school ownership, qualification, gender, and length of service.

Table 1: Lecturers' Level of Understanding and Self-Rating

Item	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Level of understanding of the objective of polytechnic education	40	2.4250	.63599	0.00	3.00
Level of understanding of the objective of UoE Curriculum	40	2.2750	.71567	0.00	3.00
Level of understanding of the vocational relevance of UoE	40	2.1750	.59431	0.00	3.00
Lecturers' self-rating of the curriculum implementation process	40	2.3250	.52563	0.00	3.00
Lecturers' self-rating on skill teaching competence	40	1.9750	.65974	0.00	3.00

Table 1 shows that lecturers' level of understanding of the objective of polytechnic education, the objective of UoE curriculum, the vocational relevance of UoE, and lecturers' self-rating of the curriculum implementation process are high with the mean values of 2.425, 2.275, 2.175 and 2.325 respectively. However, lecturers' self-rating on skill teaching competence is low with a mean value of 1.975

Table 2: Correlation Co-efficient

Variable	N	Sig. (2-tailed)	Corr. Co-eff.
Lecturers' level of understanding of the objective of polytechnic education	40	.091	.270
Lecturers' self-rating on skill teaching competence			

Table 2 shows that there is an insignificant positive correlation ($r=.270$) between lecturers' level of understanding of the objectives of polytechnic education and self-rating on skill teaching competence.

Table 3: One-Sample t. test

	N	Mean	S.D.	S.E.M	t	Df	Sig. (2tailed)	Mean Diff	95% Confidence Interval of Diff.	
									Lower	Upper
School Type	40	1.75	.742	.117	2.130	39	.040	.250	.01	.49
Gender	40	1.38	.490	.078	-1.612	39	.115	-.125	-.28	.03
Qualifications	40	1.98	.577	.091	5.208	39	.000	.475	.29	.66
Length of Service	40	3.35	1.578	.249	7.415	39	.000	1.850	1.35	2.35

Table 3 shows that there are significant differences between lecturers' level of understanding of the objectives of polytechnic education and self-rating on skill teaching competence for students' self-reliance based on school type ($t = 2.130$ $p < .05$); lecturer's qualification ($t = 5.208$ $p < .05$); and length of service ($t = 7.415$ $p < .05$) while lecturer's gender ($t = -1.612$ $p > .05$) presents no significant difference.

Discussion of Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This study has shown that even though the lecturers have a high level of understanding of the objective of polytechnic education, the objective of UoE curriculum, and the vocational relevance of UoE, their self-confidence, and ability in language skills teaching for students' vocational self-reliance is limited. This is not unexpected as they were not professionally trained in many of the language skills that carry vocational values. The lecturers were hired based on academic qualifications. Many of them that responded that they needed no assistance in teaching Grammatical rules of English and sentence construction, (strongly) agreed that they needed assistance in teaching the practice of advertisement and jingle production, playacting and dance movements, musical composition, and rendition accompanied with musical instruments, choreographic and choral group public performance, and jokes composition and presentation as a stand-up comedian, to mention a few. To promote the practical teaching of these language skills, the input of trained professionals is needed along with the provision of required instructional resources. This much is what Olajide (2022) recently advocated when he wrote

... it needs to be emphasized that the thread of 'value intervention' runs through literature in a concerted effort to boost the attitude, motivation, and interest in practical skills acquisition, especially in language arts. The practice of collaborative approach in this study along with the traditional lecture method may prove auspicious to high value rating of the *Use of English* course...

The finding of this study is that a positive correlation between lecturers' level of understanding of the objectives of polytechnic education and self-rating on skill teaching competence underscores the helplessness of the lecturers of UoE. They know

what to do if the students are to achieve language skills competence for self-reliance but they do not know how to do it. This underscores the need for training and retraining needs for lecturers in vocational language skills teaching to complement the academic knowledge that forms the basis of their employment as UoE lecturers. That an individual has a first-class university degree in English does not make him a good teacher of language skills. According to Olajide (op.cit.)

It goes without saying that for the students to benefit maximally in the acquisition of vocational language skills via the *Use of English* course, the practical dimension of the teaching must be emphatically, adequately, and expertly handled. This is where the shortcomings of the lecture method become glaring.

In the same vein, the third finding confirms that irrespective of their school location, qualification, or length of service, there is a wide disparity between the UoE lecturers' understanding of the objectives of polytechnic education and their self-rating on language skill teaching competence. This underscores the need for training as discussed earlier because those factors cannot replace practical skill training.

To remediate the shortcomings, UoE lecturers should be availed opportunities for training in one or two language skills which they can in turn impart to their students. This is the only way polytechnic students could be taught language skills for self-reliance as espoused in the UoE curriculum.

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