



A Review of Language Textbooks and Language Teaching in Nigeria

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Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analyzed and interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

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ABSTRACT

This study is a review work which looks into the selection of language textbooks being handled by language teachers in Nigeria and more especially since the language of instruction in our schools is English, which is a second language. No doubt, education is a dynamic instrument of change and it cannot take place in a vacuum; there is the need for the instruments that will help in ensuring that the society is experiencing a positive change in all ramifications. Teachers and textbooks are, no doubt, the catalysts that can translate what appears abstract into concrete reality. This paper sees the need for the use of appropriate textbooks in the teaching and learning of language, especially the English language. Language is the vehicle through which ideas are conveyed either verbally or in written form. Therefore, in the selection of textbooks for language teaching and learning, the paper examines, through the observational approach, the various ways in which textbooks, teachers and government policies are viewed. Based on the observations and the review made in this paper, the study arrived at the findings that will be of help in the selection and appropriate use of adequate textbooks in our school system.

Keywords: Textbooks; selection; languages; teaching; language policy; content.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The current study has made quite a substantial review on textbook, teacher as well as the government policy on language and education. For any education program to be successful, the place of teaching materials, especially textbooks is clearly undisputable. Burkingham [1] describes textbooks as learning instruments which should contain the necessary materials that the students will need in teacher/learning process. In this study therefore, attempt is made to see what the principles and criteria are for the preparation and selection of textbooks that should be chosen for our educational programs. This is mandatory because such instruments should have taken into consideration the needs, interest and background of the users. There is also the need for the context of the book to be adequate in terms of examination requirements. Again such books need to be especially prepared by trained and qualified teachers who will have an overall knowledge of the entire psycho-social circumstances of the students.

2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In a study of this nature, there is the need to look into the ways textbooks, teachers, language policies and other surrounding variables are viewed by different scholars, analysts, observers and other stakeholders. Such will create a good launching pad for this type of study and as such, we shall look into those areas that will be of help for this study.

2.1 Textbooks and Language Learning

Textbooks occupy a central place among all instructional materials used for effective dissemination of knowledge in the school system. Textbooks can be said to serve the following functions:

- (a) Providing a source of comprehensive content;
- (b) Facilitating easy retrieval of information;
- (c) Providing a sense of security for both teachers and students;
- (d) Providing guides for the educational program
- (e) Explaining the content and its organization

Although these purpose may sound good to many teachers, it needs be stressed that overdependence on textbooks may sometimes be counter-productive. This is because many

textbooks are usually full of biases of the authors.

Again the question could be put as to whether individual teacher's methods of teaching will not affect the qualities of his teaching generally. We can seek answers to this question in the light of research findings to the effect that different teaching methods make very little difference in the learning achievement of students who are using the same textbooks. This declaration is based on the findings of Dubin and Tverggia [2]. These researchers analyzed 100 research studies in teaching methods in some selected courses and it was discovered that the student's final examination scores were largely unaffected by differences in teaching methods. Consequently, it was suggested in their reports that it may be that the most pervasive commonality among teaching methods are the textbooks and other reading materials. They added that if textbooks are the most significant influence in students' learning, then, future studies should examine differences among textbooks rather than among teaching methods [2].

This observation is of particular pertinence to the Nigerian educational system especially at the primary and post primary school levels. This is because different schools use different books, yet at the end of the program, the same examination will be written. It is therefore a naked truth that students who use textbooks of different compositional qualities are going to perform rather differently in whatever examination they take barring all other variables. Aboderin [3] observes that the textbooks have not yet produced programs that can adequately meet the present needs, especially in Nigerian secondary schools. This reference has revealed the dominant roles that textbooks play in the educational system.

However, many people regard textbooks as gospel truth. The content, organization and methods in such books are often seen as the rule of the thumb rather than as a tool to be used when occasion demands. This is why Taylor and Brown [4] observe that drastic change in the provision distribution and use of textbooks is needed if the students are to measure up to the challenge of this time.

Adequate learning can be achieved if the writers take care of some facts. There is the need for textbook writers to study their reading population before putting pen to paper. Unless this is done,

suitability and appropriateness of such texts will be seriously affected. This is why Farrant [5] asserts that thousands of textbooks are published every year but only a fraction of these could be taken as real textbooks. This is because within each textbook, there should be variation according to educational, principles, languages and age of the target students. This then implies that textbooks that are worth their salt should not be made anyhow if adequate learning is to take place. The ideal should be a situation where such production represents a composite effort of experts in the field. In this regard, Brooks [6] observes that teachers often find themselves in helpless situation from the textbooks available which are inadequate. The teachers themselves hardly have the time, the facilities and the responsibility for creating their own materials. The fact is that textbooks must represent a composite effort of experts from many fields if they are to be instrument that will help students to learn. The point being made here is to the effect that rather than for an individual to make name and claim absolute authorship of textbooks, efforts could be made by experts in related fields to pool their resources together to produce a good textbook that will be of good use to teachers and learners. In the light of this, it is imperative that authors should re-define their goals in the light of the changing events in our educational sector. It is only through this that good textbooks could be produced for the school system.

2.2 Teachers and Textbooks

Teachers are perhaps the most important and in fact, the primary source in any teaching/learning situation. He is seen as a model in the classroom and the students will always want to follow and learn from him. Because of this fact, the training and qualification of the teacher handling a subject is a matter of great concern in the school system. This is so because even if the textbooks chosen for a subject are suitable and adequate, the way in which the teacher handles the subject matters a lot. A teacher can make the class highly enjoyable thereby creating an avenue for effective and optimum assimilation of the subject matter. On the other hand, a teacher can make the class to be dull and uninteresting thereby hindering the learning process.

A good teacher could be born and made. This is because of the growing complexity in teaching techniques. A teacher who is adequately trained would be armed with the necessary skills and

techniques of teaching using textbooks only as useful guides. Such a teacher would be able to handle the available books cautiously. He would know that he has to use the textbooks not as an end but as a means to an end. This observation is supported by Farrant [5]. A teacher cannot enlighten his students if he himself is ignorant. Teachers' effectiveness and methodologies will go a long way in teaching/learning process [7-10]. The place of the teachers is therefore focal to any educational system and this is the reason why they should not be left out in the planning of curriculum since they are ultimate executors of whatever program designed at the top.

2.3 The Role of Textbooks

A research into the extent of the usage of textbooks in secondary school has been carried out by English [11]. He reported that in reality, textbooks accounted for about 80% of the information to which students were exposed. Normally textbooks should provide the basic instructional information that is supplemented liberally from other sources; hence, they are still a major force in the educational process. Textbooks are used to present organized knowledge in a selected, simplified, ordered and methodical way that will enhance effective understanding [12]. In this connection, Wilgar (1968) hints that in textbooks, many decisions are often taken tenaciously and such decisions include the following:

- (a) Content decision – what the students will be exposed to before learning is to take place
- (b) Skills decision – those skills that will receive major emphasis. The most creative and talented teachers even the novice, at times, take any selected textbook to form the core, the base and inspiration for the majority of the classroom activities. No doubt, textbooks are good, they set the pace of teaching/learning process; however, the teacher should make use of his initiatives that will enhance his teaching effectiveness [13]. That is why Johnson [14] advises that no teacher should want to be a slave of particular textbook or set of materials. Teachers should be free to select textbooks or textbook contents which they consider most suitable for their classes. They should not be compelled to follow or slavishly teach the contents of selected textbooks [14].

Trained teachers, to Deighton [15], are greatly needed in the teaching professions. A situation where every teacher is a teacher of English should be totally condemned if we are to make progress. Therefore the shortage of manpower has given textbooks a rather more conspicuous role to play. This is because textbooks now determine the content and methods of teaching for many teachers. Close observation has shown that majority of the teachers in primary and secondary schools hold on tenaciously to the scheme presented in textbooks. Such a textbook teaching has been condemned [16].

2.4 Education Policy and Textbooks

The National Policy on Education (1981) is a document containing the educational aspiration of the Federal government. Because of the importance of textbooks in the school system, the Federal government recognizes the significance of textbooks in such an educational set-up like ours. As a result, it has expressed its awareness of the present inadequacy of textbooks in Nigerian schools. Therefore the NPE (1981) states:

...most of our textbooks at present are either unsuitable inadequate or expansive. New curriculum calls for appropriate textbooks and reference books. The Federal Government has established a National Book Development Council whose function should include the development production and distribution of books for all levels and encouragement of indigenous authors.

This is a very reasonable pronouncement in view of the acute shortage of suitable texts for the reasoned criteria for the production and selection of adequate textbooks for the various levels of our educational system [17]. This is why in its guidelines for the Fourth National Development Plan (1981 – 1985), the government declares that more work will be done in:

- (a) the establishment of relevant curriculum for various disciplines;
- (b) the provision of adequate inexpensive and locally produced textbooks;
- (c) the provision of local science apparatus. Further the plan maintains that policy guidelines will therefore be geared towards achieving the following target during the plan period;

- (i) 100% of all schools' textbooks and equipment will be produced locally;
- (ii) 50% of all educational materials at the university and technical levels will be produced locally.

In addition to these, the policy further stipulates the need for adequate environmental factors that could enhance the educational growth, provision of the necessary motivations depending on the terrain where the schools are cited and other enhancement facilities [18].

Added to the provision of books for industrialization, the above strategy will accelerate the process of transfer of technology as well as giving real depth and quality to the educational process. These have been the stand of the government as it relates to the production of educational materials and especially textbooks. However, the reality is that three years after the end of that plan period, the objectives stated in the policy are far from being met. The same problems are still there today and this suggests that something is grossly wrong with the way our policy is being implemented in this country.

3. METHODOLOGY

As earlier enumerated, the major method used in this study is that of observation which has enriched the review already made. Through this method, we are able to look into the different views and opinions of different people and bodies generally on textbook production and selection. Particular textbooks or a group of textbooks are not selected for comparative study as done in Ogunsiji [19]. Rather, general principles and criteria are arrived at and these might be helpful for other languages apart from English.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, a good number of facts and guides have been revealed if we critically look into the opinions and views of different scholars. In the study, the followings can be seen as parts of the findings:

4.1 Principles of Textbook Selection

The teaching/learning process involves three important considerations: (a) What to teach (b) How to teach and (c) Who to teach.

Because language is an important denominator of one's educational process, it should be given a special treatment in the selection of textbooks. In the Nigerian setting, the language being used as a medium of instruction is English and it is a second language in our environment. The textbooks to be selected have to take this into consideration.

In selecting textbooks, three different criteria can be examined to serve as guides;

- i) The first principle gives the teacher the greatest freedom, initiative and control. The textbooks to be selected with this principle in mind must permit the teacher to adapt, adopt and to allow students to use the resources materials provided by the teacher so as to plan for themselves.
- ii) The second principle allows the teacher to develop a course within a carefully planned curriculum. Materials other than those in the text could be selected to suit or supplement a topic.
- iii) The third principle gives the least responsibility to teacher. The teacher can only follow the textbook or learning activities from page to page without deviation and without adding anything to the materials in the textbook. The last principle is the ordinary textbook teaching which should not be encouraged.

In addition to the above, Ubahakwe [9] adds that the textbooks to be selected must also take the following into consideration:

- (a) the terminal objectives which the course or subject strives to achieve;
- (b) the learning experience through which the course context will be mastered;
- (c) the syllabus which gives the course its content;
- (d) the approach and methods to be adopted by the teacher so as to achieve the objectives
- (e) the evaluative procedures to enable the teacher to determine whether the objectives are met or not.

In English language therefore, the selection of textbooks must be done in conjunction with the teacher who are directly involved in the teaching/learning process. Again, since virtually 80% of the information to which students are exposed is done via textbook [20], it is only advisable then that textbooks and most especially textbooks to be selected should be the

type that will meet the particular purpose of its users and should be flexible to meet the needs and aspirations of the second language users [20]. This is also supported by English [11]. The content presentation should also be well adopted so that the teacher handling the subject would be able to plan for maximum utilization.

4.2 Qualities of a Good Language Textbook

As already hinted, in the course of determining what constitutes a good language textbook, there are certain obvious qualities which must be considered. Some of the qualities include the following:

- (a) The book must adequately cover the necessary topics in the school syllabus and also meet course objectives.
- (b) A good textbook on the English Language must be recent and current since language itself is dynamic.
- (c) In English language, the book to be selected must keep in mind the four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Apart from these, the area of syntax and morphology are also essential. These will serve as good and necessary materials for the users of such books.
- (d) A book of English language, according to Williams [21], must be written in simple, clean and comprehensible language. The vocabulary and other content materials must consider the users' background without necessarily sacrificing international acceptability.

The socio-cultural situation of the students must be taken into consideration. Therefore, textbooks should not use concepts that are alien to the students of English as a second language.

- (e) Furthermore, the book must provide an atmosphere in which students are actually engaged in concept discovery rather than concept memorization. It is only when this is done that the students can carry over what they have learnt in the classroom to the outside world where those skills are really needed for effective participation in the life of the society. A good textbook should therefore be designed to ensure a high degree of students' success and provide opportunities in such activities as improvisation, role playing and purposeful interaction.

- (f) Illustration and organization can as well be of help in the use of textbook. In terms of illustration, one can raise some questions: Does the book contain picture, charts tables, constructions and other visual aids relevant to the content, age and level of the students who are to use it? What about content and index which also aid learning? It is to be noted that some illustrations and/or irrelevant details which can distract students' attentions would not be proper in textbooks. That is why Klitgard [22] says that superfluous details which distract from the main ideas of the picture should be turned away. For organization, we can as well ask whether the book has chapter organization that can promote students motivation, whether it provides review exercise and testing opportunities; whether each lesson indicates what is to be presented to the students and whether sufficient practice is allowed.

Other miscellaneous qualities are authors' background and qualification, durability of the book in terms of the quality of production. All these can help tremendously in textbook selection

5. CONCLUSION

As discussed in this paper, the use of textbooks in language and other disciplines is very essential. Effective teaching and learning will not be complete without such books which will provide the necessary ingredients needed. However, it must, be pointed out that total reliance on the content and methods which texts provide will also be unwise. Textbooks that are certified suitable are meant to be used as tools and supplementary materials. Teachers worth their salt must first and foremost have a good grasp of their subject matter and should refer to books only as secondary source knowledge but not as the embodiment of the whole stock of knowledge they want to impart. The use of 'hungry authors' books, imposition of books written by friends or acquaintances, the 'man-know-man' syndrome of textbook selection as well as other dirty means should be discouraged if we want our educational system to progress. There is the need to put what we are taught into practice in our day-to-day activities so as to be more confident and to receive the adequate respect and recognition needed in the society.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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