

## Appraisal of English Textbooks as a Tool for Effective Teaching of English Language at the Junior Secondary School Level

By

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### Abstract

*This paper looked into the contents of four English textbooks written in line with the National English Studies Curriculum contained in the 9-year Basic Education Curriculum that are used for teaching the English Language and Literature in English at the Junior Secondary School level in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. The textbooks were purposively selected and analysed to ascertain their suitability for effective teaching of the English language as well as the literature in English aspect. In addition, some Junior Secondary School English teachers were interviewed to find out the level of coverage of the contents of Literature in English in the textbooks and the effectiveness on students' performance. The findings showed that the language concepts are adequately captured with focused details while the literature aspect, through which the four language skills (Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing) are harnessed, is given peripheral focus. Moreover, the teachers interviewed revealed that many of the public school students do not buy the textbooks coupled with over-populated classrooms thus constituting a hindrance to effective teaching and learning of English. This paper recommends that Literature in English, which educates the whole person, should be taught as a separate subject at the Junior Secondary School level for proficiency, parents should be encouraged to provide essential textbooks for their children and more teachers should be employed to cope with over-population in schools.*

**Keywords:** *Appraisal, Textbooks, Junior Secondary Schools, English Studies, 9-year Basic Education Curriculum.*

## **Introduction**

Riazi (2002) submits that textbooks have an important role in language teaching classrooms. This implies that quality language teaching and learning can be influenced by the textbooks used for that purpose. Invariably, it is plausible to aver that standardized textbooks selected through reliable criteria and put to adequate use by teachers and students alike are capable of enhancing the teaching and learning of English. In Nigeria, the English language is learnt and taught through formal tuition using textbooks as training materials/guide especially at the primary, junior and senior secondary school levels. The contents of these texts are carefully developed and closely monitored by the Ministry of Education through the provision of a curriculum in order to ensure quality, accuracy, and adequate coverage of the multiple concepts of the language so as to guarantee competence and effective performance.

These efforts notwithstanding, performance of students in written, as well as spoken English in the country today reveals a dwindling trend as evidenced by mass failure and or low performance in public examinations. It therefore becomes imperative that the contents of the English Studies textbooks that are recommended and used for teaching the subject, English language, be appraised from time to time to ascertain their effectiveness in helping to improve the competence and performance of the students in the language which has become the tool through which almost all other subjects are accessed. Appraisal or evaluation of English textbooks helps to discover where the texts need to be improved and so it is an antidote for poor acquisition of the language thus, appraisal of these textbooks is a necessity in order to ensure their suitability for achieving teaching and learning goals.

Earlier efforts at evaluation of English textbooks include Olajide (2003), Amuseghan and Akinrelere (2007) and Udenwa and Ikonta (2008). Olajide carried out an evaluation of Longman's New Practical English Book 1 and he found out that the book satisfied most of the criteria for use in teaching the English Language but has some lapses, chief among which is lack of sufficient focus to listening which is crucial to human communication. Amuseghan and Akinrelere evaluated Intensive English, Book 1 using the audio-lingual method. They submitted that the book provided relevant instructions to guide the learners and attempts were made to make the textbook learner-centred. However, the authors suggested that students should be exposed to supplementary reading textbooks. Udenwa and Ikonta's 'Evaluation of English Language textbooks used in the JSS in Nigeria: A case Study of Lagos State, Nigeria' is similar to the present study. Readability, comprehensibility, availability and the level of integration of English Language and Literature in English in the textbooks was the focus of the study. Their findings showed that the textbooks are difficult for the intended readers and there is imbalance in the integration of English language and Literature in English in the textbooks. The present study also discovered that the integration of Literature in English into the English Language scheme is a way of marginalizing the subject.

The criteria advanced by Ihebuzor, (1991) for textbook selection is adopted for this appraisal because of its relevance to this study and its context, Nigeria. It is however modified by the researchers to suit the present study. The criteria include the following:

- \* The book must conform to the existing Educational philosophy.
- \* It must be appropriate to the user's psychological age.
- \* It must follow current linguistic theory and practices.
- \* The book must be socially and culturally relevant to learners.
- \* The book has to be useable by the teacher and pupils: well bound, handy, boldly printed, well illustrated and annotated.
- \* It should be readily available.
- \* The cover price of the book should be appropriate.
- \* The book should enable the learner to practice on his/her own by being accompanied with workbook, practice book, tapes, etc.
- \* The book must have the teacher's guide, scheme etc.
- \* The book should contain a consistent method of evaluation.

### **Research Objectives**

This study is anchored on the following objectives:

- \* to examine the degree to which the selected texts cover the English Studies curriculum of the 9-year Basic Education Curriculum.
- \* to determine the extent of Literature in English coverage in the selected texts.
- \* to evaluate the level to which the texts relate materials to the interests and experiences of the learners.
- \* to assess the range of the English Language concepts covered in the selected texts.
- \* To identify other factors responsible for poor performance in English.

### **Research Questions**

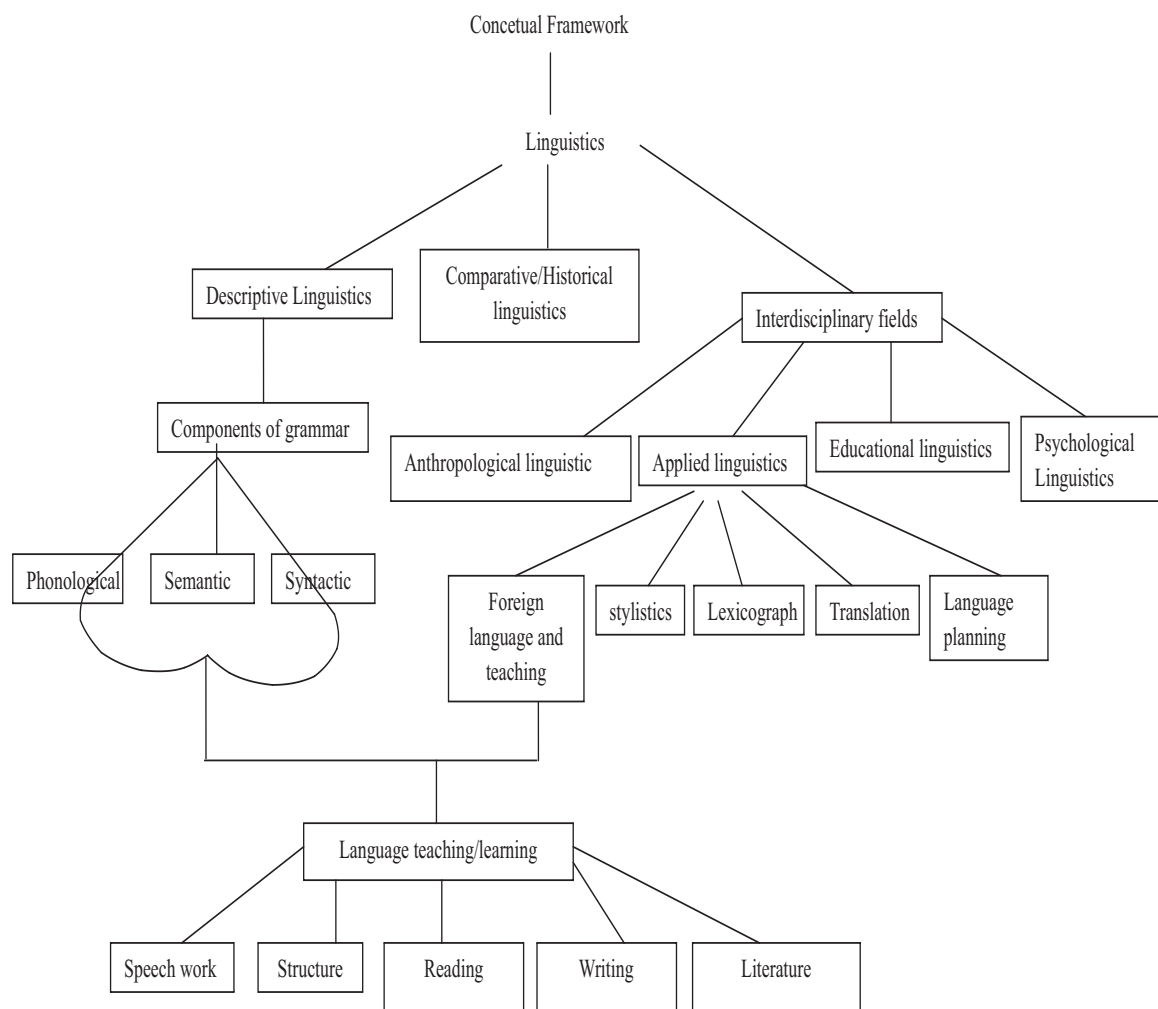
- i. To what extent do the selected texts cover the English Studies Curriculum of the 9-year Basic Education Curriculum?
- ii. What is the extent of Literature in English coverage in the selected textbooks?
- iii. What specific language skill is significantly promoted through the use of the selected texts?
- iv. Do the selected texts motivate learners' participation in English Language teaching and learning?
- v. What are the other factors responsible for poor performance in English?

## **Conceptual Framework**

The study is both linguistic and empirical. However, while the major components of the Linguistics theory such as phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics are considered sufficiently relevant in analyzing the teaching and learning of English concepts in schools, the contents of the textbooks are carefully analysed to observe level of conformity. This theory serves as a guide to account for the particular aspects of the English Language that should form part of the content of the language that is taught and learnt especially in a second language situation. The main points of the Linguistics theory are presented below:

According to the New Encyclopedia Britannica, vol. 23 (p.40) linguistics is the scientific study of language which was first used in the middle of the 19 century to differentiate it from philology - a traditional approach to language study. Three dichotomies into which linguistics is divided are: Synchronic verses Diachronic, Theoretical versus Applied, Micro linguistics versus Macro linguistics". A synchronic description of language describes the language as it is at a given time; while a diachronic description is concerned with the historical development of the language and the structural changes that have taken place in it" p.40. Structural linguistic is a method of synchronic linguistic analysis which may also be called descriptive linguistics. Descriptive linguistics studies the words and sentences of a language and from it construct its grammar. The grammar of a language has three components; the phonological, semantic and syntactic. The phonological component has to do with the rules that tell how to pronounce words and sentences. The semantic component relates to the meaning of sentences. The syntactic component describes the relationships between how words in a sentence are arranged and the meaning of the sentence. Syntax is sentence structure or the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence (Stott and Chapman, 2001: 97). In essence, word order or phrase structure is important in making grammatically correct sentences in English. Therefore, in the teaching and learning of the English language, grammar is a major constituent that has to be presented to learners. This aspect of the English language is very wide and complex and so constitutes major obstacle to learners of English in a second language context. Aspects such as word class, tense, phrase/clause, structure, concord, sentence, variation/syntax manipulation for special effects etc. must form major contents of an English textbook in order to develop linguistic competence. In addition, oral and written exercises that teach these aspects must be engaged in by learners to enhance communicative competence. Also relevant to this study is the Communicative Language Teaching approach (CLT) which developed from Nam Chomsky and conceptualized by Halliday. The primary goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence in learners.

Fig 1: The Conceptual Framework for the Evaluation of Language Content



### Data Presentation

The four texts selected for this study are of the junior secondary school category, three (3) for the J. S. 1 class and one (1) for the J. S. 2 class. The two are introductory classes and as such are significant for the current study. The English Studies Curriculum focused the concepts below and these come under the first criteria adopted for analysis i.e. conformity with existing Educational Philosophy. The concepts are:

- \* Spoken English where the segmental and supra-segmental phonemes are taught through considerable drills and exercises with attention given to inconsistency between English sounds and spellings for learners to take note of.
- \* Reading is taught through comprehension passages that are contextual and motivating for learners to be involved and participate actively in. Through these, vocabulary development which expands the word bank of students is

encouraged. Listening is also taught under the concept of reading when passages are read to the hearing of students and questions are asked to develop their listening as well as speaking skills.

- \* Language structure is the third concept or theme through which learners learn the grammar of English Language. The oral as well as written exercises help to enhance the communicative skills of students and also teach correct tense usage.
- \* Through the use of composition and letter writing, the learners are taught writing (continuous), paragraphing and mechanics are taught as well.
- \* The fifth theme or concept taught is literature which is integrated into the English scheme. Here, the basics of literature are taught followed by questions to be answered in students' notebook.

Through these concepts the criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, 8 and 10 must be captured by the textbooks.

Concepts 2, 6, 7 and 9 though crucial are not directly related to the content analysis of the books that is the focus of this study.

### Text Analysis

Textbook	Spoken English Speech
New Oxford Secondary English Course for Junior Secondary School 1 (Upper Basic Education) By Ayo Banjo Adekunle Adeniran Ayo Akano Uzoma Onaga	<p><b>Spoken English (Speech)</b>                      Unit 1 provided general Introduction to speech. How sounds are produced through air from the lungs and the sounds of language are given detailed oral as well as written description that are colourful and pictorial with practice exercises. In unit 2, the vowels /i :/ (long) and /i/ (short) are presented to the students following the procedure used in unit 1.</p> <p><b>Structure</b>                      Parts of speech (also known as word classes) are presented one after the other in the different units through explanations followed by exercises which help the students to identify and recognize the part of speech taught. Articles are also taught along with the noun part of speech. The structures taught are presented in different colours for easy identification by the student e.g. The nouns and articles are written in red colour as against all other words written in black.</p> <p><b>Vocabulary</b>                      Vocabulary development is presented as <i>increase your word power</i>. The target words are written in red with colourful pictures to complement the passages used to teach the students. The use of dictionary is introduced to find out the meaning of more difficult words.</p>

Textbook	Spoken English Speech
	<p><b>Continuous Writing</b> This is presented as Guided Composition under which other concepts such as outlining, paragraphing, narratives, descriptive composition, punctuation, letter writing, etc are taught.</p> <p><b>Reading Comprehension</b> Passages on different topics that students are familiar with are presented with colourful pictures to complement them. E.g. The zeal for secondary school, Diet and Nutrition (1), etc. Questions are provided to evaluate the level of comprehension.</p> <p><b>Literature</b> This concept or theme is introduced through explanation of what literature is, the purpose of literature, Genres or forms of literature and explanation of each form. Exercises are provided to test the concept as taught. The literature concepts are taught like comprehension passages.</p>
Macmillan Brilliant English Book 1.	<p><b>Speech</b> The vowel /i:/ (long) is presented with production steps/listen and repeat, dialogue practice, spelling of the sounds and exercises with which to practise. The presentation is colourful, detailed and with pictures. The second unit presented the short /i/ sound with practice exercises. There is the addition of sound games and compare and contrast drill.</p> <p><b>Comprehension</b> The comprehension passages are preceded with pre -reading talks on pictures or particular topics related to the passages. These afford students opportunity to practise speaking and reading skills. Questions are then provided to practise the writing skill. The passages range from family life to school and travelling experiences.</p> <p><b>Vocabulary</b> Vocabularies related to the passages read are provided with questions to practise new vocabularies learnt.</p> <p><b>Language Structures</b> Language structures for Grammatical Accuracy are provided in colourful pictures with games and practice exercises. Examples of the structures studied are related to the eight (8) word classes of English such as Nouns, Verbs, Adverbs, etc.</p> <p><b>Listening Skill</b> Listening skill is presented with comprehension passages read out for students to listen to then questions provided are answered. The writing skill is practised with pictures which students are made to study and questions are asked which students provide answers to.</p> <p><b>Literature</b> Literature is introduced with explanation of what literature is and activities that are related to literature such as the various genres of literature – poem, short story, play, drama, folktale, etc. These are followed with questions to be answered by students.</p>

Textbook	Spoken English Speech
	<p><b>Conclusion</b> The book co-authored by Wale Osisanwo, Victoria Alabi, Bunmi Owoeye and Azuoma Onuoma (2018) is fully loaded with graded materials that learners can use to practise on their own, all the English Language skills.</p>
<p>New Concept English for Junior Secondary School 2 (2018) by Ademola-Adeoye, F. Eto, J. Eyisi, J. Adekunle, A. Adepoju, B.</p>	<p>Each of the units in this textbook has the learning objectives spelt out. A good innovation so the student knows what he stands to gain in each unit. This serves as a form of evaluation.</p> <p><b>Spoken English is presented as Oral English</b> The vowel and consonant sounds are revised with the exercises provided. The sounds taught are described pictorially and students are expected to imitate, spell the sounds, observe the contrast between sounds, listen and practise through repetition after the teacher. Exercises such as <i>fill in the gaps</i> and multiple choice questions are used to teach the listening and speaking skills.</p> <p><b>Reading (Comprehension)</b> Reading is taught through comprehension passages. The concept of “scanning” is introduced before the passage is read. This makes the passages presented to be understood easily. Questions are provided for evaluation. Summary writing is introduced and exercises are given.</p> <p><b>Vocabulary</b> Words are taught from their roots or origin with examples provided Grammar is also taught through discussion, pictures and exercises.</p> <p><b>Writing</b> Writing an outline Narrative writing Descriptive writing Informal letter writing Formal letter writing Argumentative essay The introduction and ending of these essay types are taught followed by exercises and/or homework.</p> <p><b>Literature</b> The literature concepts appeared only in four (4) units of eighteen (18) units.</p>
<p>New Effective English Course for Junior Secondary School Book 1 (2018) by Omobowale, E. B. Fashina, N. O. Nwigwe, N. Amosun, M. D. Ezechukwu, J. Sonubi, O. A.</p>	<p>This book followed the order: Comprehension and Vocabulary Development, Writing, Listening and Speaking, Grammatical Structure and Literature.</p> <p><b>Comprehension and Vocabulary Development</b> The passages are presented with pictures but preceded with hints on the passage as a form of introduction. They are then followed by questions which teach students the reading and writing skills. For vocabulary development, some words from the passage are singled out for further study and clarity and the students are asked to make use of the words in sentences of their own.</p>

Textbook	Spoken English Speech
	<p><b>Writing</b> Students are introduced to composition writing and the benefits, types and useful hints are provided with revision exercises to practise the skill.</p> <p><b>Listening and Speaking</b> The vowel and consonant sounds of English are presented as a whole and not in isolation but to be taught in isolation by the teacher as a role model. The sounds are learnt through listening and speaking.</p> <p><b>Grammatical Structure: Parts of Speech</b> The eight (8) parts of speech are presented at once but are taught one after the other in the different chapters. Students are paired to carry out tasks or activities that help to entrench the particular part of speech taught. Pictures are used to teach the concepts.</p> <p><b>Literature</b> This concept is taught through explanations, activities and exercises. The literature aspect in this text is given the widest coverage compared to the others.</p>

Figure 7: Summary of language and literature contents text by text

	Language Concepts	New Oxford Secondary English Course Book 1	MacMillan Brilliant English Book 1	New Concept English Book 2	New Effective English Course for Junior Secondary School Book 1	Total frequency
1	Spoken English (Oral)	21	18	19	17	75
2	Reading Comprehension (reading)	21	18	19	12	70
3	Vocabulary Development (Word focus)	19	18	19	25	81
4	Grammar (structure)	21	19	19	25	84
5	Continuous Writing (Composition)	21	19	19	25	84
6	Listening	-	19	05	25	44
7	Literature					
	i. General introduction	i. 3	i. -	i. 07	22	51
	ii. Prose	ii. 9	ii. 4	ii. -		
	iii. Poetry	iii. 2	iii. 4	iii. -		
	iv. Drama	iv. 1	iv. 1	iv. -		

### Frequency rating

1. English Language Components – 443
2. Literature Components - 51

## **Results/ Discussion of Findings**

Without any gainsaying, the English language is a key factor to the development of the country, Nigeria, hence much attention is paid to its teaching and learning.

- \* The English textbooks evaluated revealed that elaborate discussion of language concepts and components are targeted while discussions of literature concepts are not as elaborate. The integrative approach is utilized, thus, the basics of literature are taught using mere question-and-answer strategies.
- \* The integrative approach does not provide J .S.S learners opportunities for creative language use. Specific texts (prose, drama and poetry) are compressed into sketchy and brief passages which are neither sufficient nor regular. For instance, where the language component has a one hundred and nine rating (109), the literature component has only nine (9) in Macmillan Brilliant English for JSS Upper Basic 7 pgs. Iv-xi.
- \* Selected texts, as revealed in the analysis, indicated a sufficient use of attractive pictures, drawings, colour charts and photographs which serve as useful instructional materials.
- \* Finally, the interview of English teachers by the researchers showed that many students of the public schools do not buy English textbooks and the classrooms are overpopulated.

## **Conclusion**

According to Shankar (2004: 230), 'A late 20th century maxim of language teaching has been "Don't teach about language, teach language." Content-based instruction proponents say, "Don't teach a second language, teach content in a second language".'

Evidence of high level of language content in the analysis above sufficiently supports these sayings and also confirms the fact that the texts can develop linguistic and communicative competence in the learners if properly handled especially as each of the language aspects focused on one skill at a time with ample practice exercises.

In a related vein, Shankar avers further that, "the natural content for language people is language itself and literature". This statement upholds the importance of literature in language teaching. However, our analysis shows that only the facts of literature are taught without exposing the learners to the reading of prose and drama works (texts). This renders the literature aspect dysfunctional. The utilitarian value of literature transcends mere definition of terms, information and education. Apart from its usefulness as an effective tool for shaping and moulding

lives, it is a potent means for developing the expressive skill of learners. 'You learn to do by doing,' so goes the age long saying. Literature is the means through which the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing are practised. When literature is placed in its correct perspective in schools, the students are forced to listen, speak, read and even write language. In fact, it is through literature that the latent creative skills in children are stimulated and awakened, In addition, language(s) is (are) easier acquired and learnt at a tender age. If the problem of poor performance in the use of English in schools is to be arrested, literature should be returned to its 'former' place in the school syllabus. Presently, majority of the literate - speakers of the English language today are those who 'schooled' in the good old days. It is also noteworthy that the word literate is the stem of the word, literature. Reading of creative works should be intensified at the Junior Secondary School level.

Literature is not a subject that should be marginalized in order to create space for other subjects on the school curriculum. The curriculum developers did not have it that way.

### **Recommendations**

One of the goals of education is to raise self-reliant individuals who will not depend on others for survival. Self reliance begins with the ability to communicate confidently anywhere. This is what 'literature-active' use of language bequeaths on a learner. This implies that more attention needs to be paid to the teaching of literature in schools therefore Literature in English should be recognised as a subject on its own in the school curriculum at the Junior Secondary School level.

In addition, the Literary and Debating Society should be handled by capable hands and treated like a school subject that is allocated marks in students' report sheets at the Junior Secondary School level and Library should form part of the content of Literature where students read at least one literary text per term. Finally, parents should endeavour to provide necessary materials for their children while the appropriate authorities should provide more hands to cope with overpopulation in the classrooms.

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