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Time for Change

Developing English Language Teaching at Tertiary Level in Sudan

Edited by Ben Gray & Mark Krzanowski

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at Tertiary Level in Sudan

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Introduction

Time for Change: Developing English Language Teaching (ELT) at Tertiary Level in Sudan is an edited collection of the papers presented at the ELT Conference with the same title in Khartoum, Sudan, from 1 to 3 March, 2010. The event was organised by the British Council, the Association of Sudanese Teachers of English (ASTEL), Al-Neelain University, the University of Khartoum, Omdurman Islamic University and the Open University of Sudan. It was sponsored by the British Council and held at the University of Khartoum.

The conference highlighted the fact that demand from both the public and private sectors for graduates with good English skills is now at an unprecedented level and that the current provision of ELT at university level is unable to meet this demand and is in urgent need of reform. The papers focused on the key issues regarding ELT – namely curriculum reform, teacher training, language testing, using new technologies and engaging the private sector – and looked at how these could be tackled within the relevant contextual constraints.

Most papers were delivered by academics from Sudan's main universities, although a number of presentations were made by speakers from other countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, including Angola, Cameroon, Senegal and South Africa. These talks focused on examples of good practice that could be emulated in the Sudanese context. Papers were also given by speakers from the UK universities of Sussex and Westminster, and by representatives of several major international ELT publishers.

The individual chapters in this publication are adapted written renditions of the papers and presentations delivered at the conference, updated to reflect the current situation where possible. All the articles have gone through a peer review process. We hope that this volume provides a permanent record of the range of high quality and academically rich talks given at the conference, while also offering an insight into the stimulating and thought-provoking ideas these generated. We also hope that the publication will provide focused guidance to teachers, researchers, and educational managers and policy-makers who are engaged in ELT-related activities in contexts similar to those in Sudan.

Joint editors

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Toward a standardised EST testing framework at Sudanese universities

Abdunasir Ibrahim Abdulhalim Sideeg

Abstract

Several experts argue that it is the practice of testing rather than the 'curriculum' that is significantly shaping what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned, and how it is learned. The standpoint of this paper is that *external proficiency tests* rather than teacher-made achievement tests are the potential remedy for the ineffective English for Science and Technology (EST) teaching and testing at tertiary level in Sudan. Given the dynamic nature of EST and the diversity of EST curricula and materials taught at Sudanese universities, standardised proficiency testing seems to be a necessary route. Hence, this paper attempts to delineate a practical and realistic framework for external proficiency EST testing at Sudanese universities. This is done through outlining the theoretical constructs of EST testing and providing a model that satisfies these constructs.

Introduction

Madaus (1988, p. 83) points out that it is the practice of testing, rather than the 'curriculum', that is increasingly shaping what is taught, how it is taught, what is learned, and how it is learned. Shohamy (1993), observes that terms such as '*washback effect', 'measurement-driven instruction', 'curriculum alignment'* and *'systemic validity'* are some of the newly-coined terms that suggest the strong and significant affinity between testing and learning/teaching, and imply the 'integration of tests into the educational system.' (p. 7).

However, in both ESL and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) testing, Sudanese universities seem to lag far behind the principled and systematic sway of language testing worldwide. At Sudanese universities, English is taught for students of science and technology as a university requirement. Usually, EST courses are offered to the first- and second-year students and at some universities to the first-, second-, third- and fourth-year students. There are some variations in course descriptions and the materials taught at each university. Plus, there is also a lot of variation with regard to the level of English language proficiency among the students of science and technology enrolled to study at these universities. EST tests (or what are assumed to be EST tests) are usually administered to the students at the end of each semester or academic year. Despite the fact that testing in an EST programme is highly significant, and that the testing of EST students requires professional skills, it is still the duty of the individual teacher with little or almost no systematic assistance from any official body at almost all Sudanese universities. A survey conducted by Abdulhalim (2006) at six Sudanese universities reveals the poor quality of EST tests in every aspect. These tests, with few exceptions, lack the *construct validity*, without which any interpretation based on these test scores is meaningless. Although students of science and technology at Sudanese universities need a rigorous ESP programme, the test survey uncovers a '*deformed*' type of English taught, which is, in most cases, subject to the mood and often questionable competence of the teacher.

The need for standardisation in EST testing at Sudanese Universities

Green (1975) observes that it is normal to find a teacher who has no specific training in testing and who has 'evolved his testing procedures through trial and error' (p. 1). Such a teacher often designs poor tests, which consist of 'a series of puzzles designed to fool' the students rather than measuring their proficiency or achievement. Similarly, Sax (1997) argues that:

> *Although anyone can construct a test (and it is frequently done), good test constructors are a rarity. It requires knowledge of test construction, knowledge of one's own subject matter specialty, a willingness to devote the time and energy needed for this type of activity, and a creative spirit that encourages experimentation.* (p. 52)

A second point which calls for setting up a framework for EST testing is that sometimes an ESP test is the rationale for an ESP course or programme. Alderson (1988) pinpoints the fact that:

> *Tests, and particularly pass/fail examinations, are often crucially important within ESP. Indeed, the test is often the only reason why a student is taking an ESP course. When an ESP course is being offered as a service course to other areas of study, as frequently happens, for example, at the university level, often the only reason students have for taking the course is to pass examination in the language required by the academic system, before they are allowed to graduate as engineers, doctors, lawyers or whatever. Here the examination is a hurdle to be overcome by hook or by crook. In this situation, the test serves a strong motivating force and is quite likely to influence teaching.* (p. 88)

However, if the necessity of EST testing via *external proficiency testing* is established, a theoretical construct upon which this system is erected must be clearly defined. This is due to the fact that standardised tests need 'rigorous development, trialing and revision process, determining the measurement properties of the test' (Davies et al., 1999, p. 187).

The theoretical constructs for EST testing at Sudanese universities

Within the context of EST at Sudanese universities, defining the construct ability should build on a *theory-based* rather than a *syllabus-based* model. 'Theory-based construct definitions are different from syllabus-based definitions in that they are based on a theoretical model of language ability rather than the contents of a language teaching syllabus' (Bachman & Palmer, 1996, p. 118). This theoretical-based construct includes both actual language knowledge and topical knowledge in a single construct: the ability to understand and interpret specific relevant information in English related to science and technology. In order to set the practical framework within this context, the model should specify the components outlined below:

EST test takers' characteristics at Sudanese universities

- Personal characteristics
- Level of language proficiency (before instruction)

Target language use (TLU) domain

The broader TLU domain for an EST test is that of English for Science and Technology. However, as Bachman and Palmer (1996, pp. 44–45) put it, there is the need to specify this TLU domain in order to isolate the tasks to be included in a particular test for a specific context. They argue that in the process of test development, the need to specify the 'too broadly' defined TLU domain for the 'purpose' of the test may sometimes emerge. This is carried out by focusing on 'narrowed' and clearly defined areas that include the set of TLU domains relevant to the context of EST at Sudanese universities. Thus, in stating the distinctive nature of ESP, Fiorito (2005) argues that:

> *... ESL and ESP diverge not only in the nature of the learner, but also in the aim of instruction. In fact, as a general rule, while in ESL all four language skills; listening, reading, speaking, and writing, are stressed equally, in ESP it is a needs analysis that determines which language skills are most needed by the students, and the syllabus is designed accordingly.*

Fiorito's (2005) stance seems to be in tune with Dudley-Evans and St. John's (1998) contention that ESP and consequently EST focuses on the 'language appropriate to the activities of the discipline it serves in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre' (p. 297).

In a survey conducted by Abdulhalim (2006) at six Sudanese universities, students of science and technology rank reading and understanding texts relevant to their field study as the sole need which an EST programme must provide for. In accordance with this, Llinares, Leiva, Cartaya and St. Louis (2008, p. 2) argue that for ESP students pursuing engineering and science majors (EST), the acquisition of reading comprehension skills is vital as it will be required by students once they begin to take courses in their majors. In a conference held by the British Council Khartoum in 2000 (two sessions, one at Ahfad University, the other at the British Council office), experts and teachers of EAP/ESP defined the basic needs of students at tertiary level in the Sudan with regard to EAP/ESP as the following:

- reading and understanding relevant texts
- writing short texts and paragraphs using a variety of methods (comparison/contrast, cause/effect, definition, exemplification).

These two needs can be used to work out the core construct for both EST teaching and testing. This does not mean that other skills or sub-skills are totally irrelevant within the EAP/ESP context. But the emphasis should be on the areas that the students really need.

Topical knowledge and authenticity

In the conclusion of a research report on text familiarity, reading tasks, and ESP test performance within the Iranian context, Salmani-Nodoushan (2003, p. 8) argues that when texts are highly 'subject-area-specific', they cease to be ESP tests and take a 'knowledge test identity' for themselves. However, with texts of 'lower degrees of content specificity', language proficiency has such a great influence on test performance that the impact of text familiarity is quite insignificant. He concludes that '... Language testers are, therefore, left with two choices: (a) to redefine LSP tests to include knowledge tests, or (b) to include EGAP tests in the category of LSP tests.'

However, most researchers in the field seem to adopt the first choice. A recent trend in EST is the growing use of *authentic texts* selected from science and technology textbooks that lend themselves perfectly to the reading and comprehension levels. In support of this construct, Douglas (2000) states that:

> *LSP testing is a special case of communicative language testing, since both are based on a theoretical construct of contextualized communicative language ability, and that LSP tests are no different in terms of the qualities of good testing practice from other types of language tests.* (p. 1)

In line with this argument, Barnett (1988) states that:

> *One important part of interactive process theory emphasizes 'schemata', the readers' preexisting concepts about the world and about the text to be read. Into this framework, the reader fits what he or she finds in any passage. If new textual information does not fit into a reader's schemata, the reader misunderstands the new material, or revises the schemata to match the facts within the passage.* (pp. 1–2)

This note scaffolds the pedestal upon which the theoretical construct of reading texts in an EST test stands.

Definition of the test components

The construct to be measured in an EST test within the context of Sudanese universities includes the following components:

1. Reading component

Reading is the core component of any ESP programme. Within the context of EST in Sudan, needs analysis suggests that reading texts should make the core of an EST test:

- grasp the main idea or overall meaning of a text
- decode its particular vocabulary
- analyze how the meaning in a text is built or developed (comparison/contrast, cause/effect, description of a process, etc.)
- evaluate the text as a source of information and new questions.

2. Vocabulary component

In the literature of EST teaching and testing, there is much controversy about the types of vocabulary to be taught and tested. Chandler-Burns (1995) argues that:

> *EST reading comprehension should be based on three corpora: a basic core of language that is universal to all reading, regardless of field or specialization; a fundamental layer that can be called the language of the researcher; and lastly, the specialized layer that is particular to each field and/or specialized area of EST.* (p. 10)

These layers seem to correspond with three areas of vocabulary which, in the literature of EST, are termed: *general vocabulary*, *academic vocabulary* and *technical vocabulary*. However, the question of vocabulary within an EST/ESP context is not as simple as the classification just made. This is also in line with Fraser's (2006) classification of technical vocabulary within the EST context which specifies the same components as the core for both teaching and testing, and further subclassifies the component of technical vocabulary into the following three categories.

Hard technical vocabulary

This type of technical vocabulary is very restricted to a particular discipline. Within the context of EST, most of the items in this type are Greek or Latin terms. Terms such as *'epineurium', 'perineurium'* and *'ganglia'* in the field of medicine belong in this category. This type of technical vocabulary is somewhat equivalent to Fraser's (2006) highly technical vocabulary. They are termed 'hard' because it is quite uncommon to find them outside a particular restricted discipline and thus they are 'hardly' understood by those outside the restricted field of study. However, this category of technical terms is kept to the minimum within an EST/ESP programme/test for two reasons:

- First, most words in this type of technical vocabulary are quite inaccessible for an EST teacher as they need the highest expertise of the particular discipline.
- This type is quite easy for EST students; even when English is not the medium of instruction for the students, these terms are still quite accessible to them.

Pan-technical vocabulary

This is the basic type of technical vocabulary which is not restricted to a particular discipline. This is used across similar disciplines like pharmacy, medicine or medical labs, or in civil, architectural or mechanical domains. This type of technical vocabulary is somewhat equivalent to Fraser's (2006) layperson technical vocabulary. Words such as *bacteria, fever, heart, nucleus* or *atom* are used across several disciplines and appear frequently in any basic science/technology texts.

Soft technical vocabulary
This category includes words with polysemous meaning, such as *force* and *elevation* in physics and engineering, or *bug* in computer science. Within EST, academic and sub-technical vocabulary is far more significant than technical vocabulary.

Thus, *knowledge* and *use* of a wide range of accurately used general purpose and technical and scientific vocabulary items should include the following:

- knowledge of academic English vocabulary in context
- knowledge and use of the pan-technical and soft technical vocabulary; however, highly technical vocabulary (Greek and Latinate vocabulary) is excluded
- knowledge and use of synonyms and anonyms in context
- knowledge of common prefixes, roots and suffixes in scientific and technical English
- knowledge and use of word-building (e.g. deriving the diverse grammatical categories from their roots).

3. Grammatical component

Although grammar in itself is not the ultimate goal of an EST programme, 'nevertheless, certain areas of grammar are rather more important because they have special applications in scientific writing' (Master, 1982, p. 152). These 'certain areas' to be included in an EST test are:

- articles (a/an/the and ∅, the zero article)
- passive voice forms and inanimate subjects
- modal auxiliary verbs
- relative clauses, as post-modifiers of noun phrases
- transitional words used for cause/effect, comparison/contrast
- knowledge (both receptive and productive) of a wide range of syntactic structures.

4. Writing component

Writing is the second important component within an EST test. However, it must be stressed here that within the traditions of communicative language testing, writing should be integrated with reading in order to make communicative tasks realistic. Below are some of the methods or procedures through which writing could be tested:

- summary writing
- writing short paragraphs and texts that describe objects, tools and instruments, describe a process, show cause/effect, compare/contrast, define
- describing tables, charts and graphs.

Concluding remarks

In view of the framework for EST external testing presented above, this paper concludes with the following suggestions:

- Teacher-made tests used at different Sudanese universities cannot measure or monitor student progress of EST learning. In most cases they have a negative effect on the process of EST learning. Thus, *standardised forms* of EST tests should be developed and validated within the context of EST at tertiary level in Sudan.
- Due to the dynamic nature of EST and the diversity of EST curricula and materials taught at Sudanese universities, external standardised proficiency testing rather than achievement testing (which is restricted by the particular content) should be adopted. This will have a positive 'washback effect' on both teaching and learning as it will gear the whole process of EST learning and teaching towards specific set goals.
- Within each university, there should be an official body that monitors the implementation of the two goals above and co-ordinates with similar bodies at other universities in order to produce EST tests that gain acceptance and are valid within the relevant context.

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Time for change: Developing English language teaching at tertiary level in Sudan

Hala Salih Mohammed Nur

Abstract

This presentation is based upon information from the following sources: a study of students studying English as a university requirement at the University of Khartoum; discussions with English language teachers at tertiary level, both in Sudan and abroad; and feedback from leading private sector companies in Sudan about the English language needs of their employees. It will illustrate the need for universities to be able to produce graduates with good English skills, and examine the ways in which this need can be met while working within the existing constraints faced by most Sudanese state universities.

Listening to students' needs

The title of this paper is '*Time for change: Developing English language teaching at tertiary level in Sudan*' but '*Listening to students: A new perspective in ELT at the University of Khartoum'* was the first title of the presentation. Therefore, the paper will start with students' feedback before moving on to talk about change. In the academic year 2008–09, a study was conducted on a sample of 303 students from the different campuses at the University of Khartoum. The main purpose of the study was to discover the real needs and wants of students studying English as a university requirement at the University of Khartoum. The study consisted of many questions, but one of the most crucial questions was whether the students felt they needed English language and for what purpose. The results are shown in Figure 1 below:

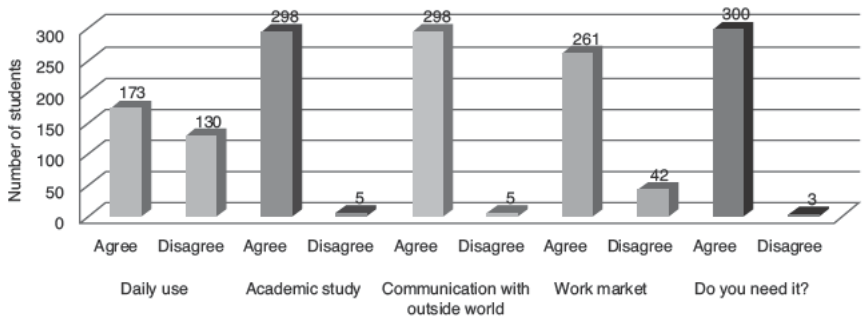

Figure 1: The need for English (Source: Nur & Alsabah, 2008)

It is clear from the results shown in Figure 1 that students are aware of the role of English in their lives and that they need English for their studies, future jobs and for communication with the outside world. Above all, 300 out of the 303 participants agreed that they *need* English language.

Another question was asked about some of the problems that might hinder the students' learning of English. The results are shown in Figure 2 below:

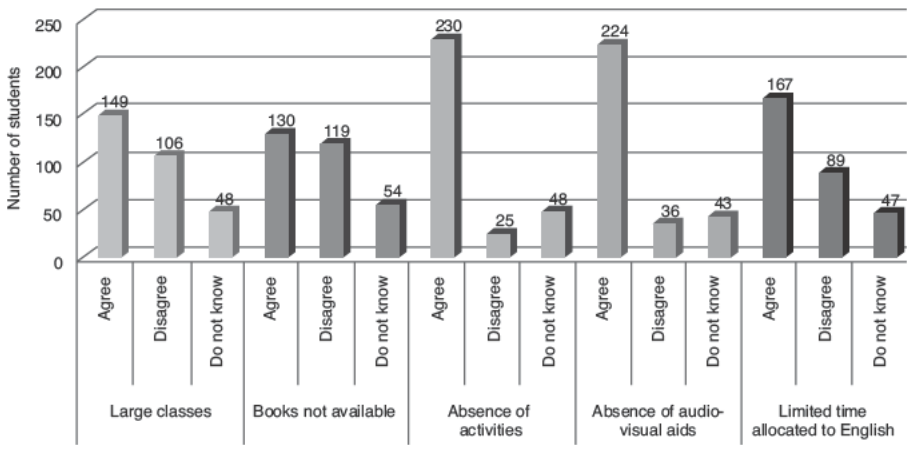

Figure 2: Problems facing students when learning English (Source: Nur & Alsabah, 2008)

It is very clear from the graph results that students are aware of the problems they face when learning English. Some of the problems that hindered their learning of English were absence of activities, absence of audio-visual aids and limited time allocated to English language. In listening to the students, change can be built around their needs.

Many students complain that they are 'victims' because they graduate from university with a very poor level of English language. They cannot compete in the job market and find it very difficult to do higher studies or even use the internet. This poses the question: Who are the real victims – the English language teachers or the students? It is clear that both are victims in a situation that neither has made or created. Sudanese universities did not plan well in providing their English language services, while the outside world demands that graduates must be fluent in English language. The students enter university with very poor levels of English, and teachers cannot do much for them; they are allowing them to graduate with the minimum requirements and skills in English language for the workplace. The teachers are working in a situation that forces them to look for less and produce less competent students, with large classes, limited resources and insufficient time allocated, not to mention many other factors. The results of the study shown above were never published because the researchers did not have the time or the energy to publish them. The teachers are burdened with the current situation. Other teachers around the world are publishing papers, working on projects, attending conferences, collaborating with one another and producing books, but the teachers in Sudan cannot do this because they do not have the time or the energy. Many people lament the deterioration of English language proficiency in Sudan. The Sudanese were known in the past for their eloquence and proficiency in English. Therefore, it is high time that Sudanese teachers of English language strive to achieve change.

The impact of Arabisation on English language learning and teaching

There has long been tension between Arabic and English in Sudan and many people blame the policy of Arabisation that was implemented in 1989 for this decline in the levels of English language. Arabic is very important in Sudan. Arabic is the language of Islam and is the language of the heritage and culture of Sudan. Globalisation is bringing many benefits to developing countries, but it is also stealing culture and identity. Arabic is the safeguard against that theft. Arabisation is not to blame, but the hasty policies that accompanied Arabisation are. On implementing the policy of Arabisation, no plans were made for the present situation. Arabic has also deteriorated significantly in the last few years. In a study conducted in 2009, 100 per cent of the Arabic teachers interviewed believed that the level of Arabic proficiency had declined. This applied to all aspects of life: in education, the media and the workplace. As research has shown time and time again, deterioration in L1 will lead to deterioration in L2.

The policies that accompanied Arabisation, such as the closing down of training centres, change of curriculum, the withdrawal of extensive reading activities from the curriculum and the decrease in contact hours in secondary schools, still exist today. At the time, the policy-makers did not read the future very well and as Winston Churchill put it, '*It is always wise to look ahead*'.

English language has become the language of communication worldwide. It has become an international and a global language. The younger generations have become somewhat 'failed' as the policymakers did not predict that English language would become the number one language in the world. They were not prepared well for today's world.

The need to compete globally

Universities now compete at a more global level. They are being put on scales and are being rated according to many factors, a principal one of which is proficiency in English language. Improving national proficiency in English now forms a key part of the educational strategy in most countries (Graddol, 2006). English language has become the language of technology, science and the internet, and so it is important to ask: Why are Sudanese students left behind?

After listening to students and teachers, it is important to listen to another major stakeholder: future employers. Stakeholders have repeatedly said how difficult it is for them to recruit fresh graduates with a good level of English; how Sudanese graduates lack the basic skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening; and how much money is wasted on training these fresh graduates to make them ready for work. So why are Sudanese students not prepared well in English language before they graduate?

The importance of the English language for communication

The Comprehensive Peace Treaty of 2005 stated that English is an official working language in the government and in higher education. With the referendum on the independence of South Sudan having taken place in 2011 and the break of the South into the Southern Republic of Sudan, English is needed to communicate with the South, where English is the language of education and civil service.

Kachur predicted in 1985 that Sudan is one of the countries of the expanding circles (Elsheikh, 2010). Therefore, the importance of English language will continue in Sudan as the economy is growing; and the country is now exporting natural gas and is seeing more and more foreign investment. It is our belief that the English language will continue to play a major role in Sudan for the next few years.

Finding solutions to a critical situation

At this final stage of this paper, I will talk about three major problems that hinder our work as teachers: limited teaching hours, large classes and inadequate teacher training.

When looking at the 'Common European Framework', readers will find that Sudanese students – after completing their study of English – hover between A1 to A2, which means they are graduating as basic users of English. This is due to many reasons, among which are the limited number of teaching hours and the large classes – which range from 100 to 300, while the international average for a large class is 40 students.

Teacher training is also a major problem. There is a great need to invest more money in in-service training and professional development activities. This need is great at tertiary level but even greater in general education.

Bilingualism and multilingualism are growing international phenomena. The hopes of tertiary-level teachers in the future are that Sudanese universities will be able to graduate bilingual students who are proficient in both Arabic and English.

There are also hopes of forming a body of stakeholders who can work together to find solutions to this critical situation. The solutions have to go from bottom to top, not the other way round. Parents, teachers, students, policy-makers and the private sector need to be involved in finding the way towards a better future. There are also hopes for closer working relationships between the Ministry of General Education and the Ministry of Higher Education in trying to plan for the educational needs of Sudanese students. Finally, there is hope for change for the students and for the teachers.

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Making the short story long: An approach to meeting the academic literacy needs of low-level university students in South Africa

Susan Ntete

Abstract

The University of Western Cape's English Intensive 105 (E105) course is an intensive semester-long first-year course designed to meet the academic needs of students whose level of proficiency in English is low. It adopts a communicative approach to language teaching, and focuses on language and grammar. To demystify the language of the book and help students make sense of the academic context, short stories, among other teaching materials, are used. These help generate a non-threatening environment where students learn to read with understanding, take their ideas for a test drive and develop an academic voice. Personal storytelling, in particular, is an effective tool in learning contexts where students are divided by invisible but concrete walls of race, ethnic-national identity, social and economic class and/or gender. This paper attempts to demonstrate how the short story can be used to forge connections and dismantle barriers, while also giving students access to the 'foreign' language of the academic environment.

Introduction

Pugh, Pawan and Antommarchi (2000) identify as a truism the fact of the 'hyper-literate' 21st century bringing more to read, more ways to read, and more reasons to be effective readers than ever before. Within the English-speaking academic environment, Kasper (2000a) argues for the need for students to be functionally and academically literate. In other words, they should be able to use English to access, understand, articulate and critically analyse conceptual relationships within, between and among a wide variety of content areas. It is probably in recognition of this huge challenge facing them that some of those tasked with teaching academic literacy have been found guilty of producing courses that require the explicit teaching of intricate and academic meta-languages (Katz, 1995). This, Katz argues, is being achieved at the expense of students' actual communication and exploration. One way to address the problem facing struggling low-level ESL students, Kasper (2000b) suggests, would be to use a number of short stories as foundations for content-based units. As key to the success of this instructional model, Kasper suggests teaching the short story and related content-based topics through highly integrated multimedia content-based activities. Citing her earlier study (Kasper, 1999), Kasper (2000b) argues that this classroom-tested multimedia approach not only helps students develop all four basic language skills, but introduces them to content matter through both print and audiovisual instructional material. Not only that, but it is also said to incorporate a number of learning activities that are meaning-driven, student-centred and unintimidating.

This paper attempts to demonstrate how I – as a teacher of the English Intensive 105 (E105) course at the University of the Western Cape (UWC) – use the short story to scaffold foundation students' access to academic literacy. The paper is divided into two main sections, the first providing a brief background into the nature of the E105 course. This short discussion will, inter alia, cover what the course entails, its purpose, and what type of student it is designed for. This is then followed by a demonstration of how I have used Ursula K. Le Guin's short story (entitled 'The Wife's Story') in particular, to bridge the gap between students' pre-existing knowledge and the knowledge they need to acquire.

The E105 course

This is a semester-long foundation course designed to meet the academic needs of students with low proficiency levels in English. Premised on the notion of language as social behaviour, the course adopts a communicative approach to language teaching. It is both intensive (three hours per week) and expensive to run, i.e. it is taught in small tutorial groups so as to enable one-to-one interaction, instead of two big lecture groups normally followed by one smaller tutorial within the UWC context.

Given the kinds of students that E105 caters for, i.e. local students for whom English is a second or even third language, visiting international students for whom English is almost foreign, transitional students who use English only at UWC, students coming from disadvantaged learning backgrounds, and students for whom the notion of reading for pleasure is a foreign concept; one of the important aims of the course is to demystify both the language of the book and academia (Greenleaf, Schoenbach, Cziko & Mueller, 2001). The course attempts to achieve this by presenting reading as fun, and by promoting it as a way of life and lifelong commitment. The E105 teaching environment is a non-threatening one which encourages students to take their ideas for a test drive. Students are helped to formulate opinions, argue convincingly, and to develop an academic voice. I attempt to achieve this by using literature as a vehicle to teaching language and grammar, a technique known as content-based instruction (CBI) (Master, 2000).

To guard against a syllabus that is overcrowded with information and facts to be crammed, as my predecessor (Katz, 1995) advises, I have compiled the teaching–learning material into a course reader which comprises carefully selected

short stories (mainly South African-based), articles of interest and those addressing topical issues, and a few poems. Extra material is presented in the form of handouts and includes cartoons and/or any other material considered relevant (which may or may not be verbal in form). With regards to assessment criteria, students are evaluated on an ongoing basis, the two major forms of assessment being a continuous assessment (CAS) and examination marks (EM). These are weighted at 60 per cent and 40 per cent respectively. The 60 per cent CAS mark is derived from numerous short classroom-based assignments, the participation policy – which demands that students' voices 'be heard' in class, both in their individual and group capacities, while also placing a lot of emphasis on class attendance – and two major assignments.

Who is the E105 student?

Based on their profile, E105 students can be differentiated according to three specific categories. These are in terms of their origins, competence levels and their needs. In as far as origins are concerned, the students include local (SA) and visiting international students from West and East Africa, China and France. Within the local groups are some with rural (and therefore disadvantaged) educational backgrounds, and others with urban educational backgrounds whose level of literacy is definitely much better than that of their rural counterparts, albeit to differing degrees depending on the location of the school in question. South Africa is by its very nature a relatively diverse country. Owing to this fact, institutions of higher learning in this country have become melting pots for students from diverse cultural, educational and linguistic corners.

Regarding students' proficiency levels on the other hand (over and above the information already provided in the preceding section), new enrolments include both older students, some of whom have extensive work experience, and younger students. The fact that the majority of E105 students do not come from a reading culture cannot be overlooked, their lack of familiarity with the language of instruction and the book (i.e. English in the context of UWC) being further complicated by some lecturers' foreign accents. Needless to say, the calibre of student being described here definitely does not meet the expectations of an English 1 student within the SA academic context in general.

Students' needs and expectations are just as wide and varied as their profiles and plans for the future. For some Chinese students, for example, E105 tends to be a springboard intended to catapult them to greener, American pastures. A few visiting French students have taken the course in the past with the aim of enabling themselves to make better sense of their new environment, and also for day-to-day living in South Africa, while some senior students take on E105 simply as a filler course. However, the majority of students depend on the course for academic survival.

Why the short story?

According to the brain-based theory, learning is highly influenced by emotions. School and life experiences that affect physiological function are said to impact upon the capacity to learn. This explains the Krashen-inspired views on L2 teaching expressed in Kasper (2000a), which argue for the creation of natural communicative situations rather than explicit teaching. Krashen considers comprehensible input and a low affective filter to be necessary for L2 learning. Because stories are believable, memorable and entertaining, Rossiter (2002) sees them as meeting the requirements suggested by Krashen. Kasper (2000b) is of the opinion that stories can provide an excellent foundation for introducing content-based topics, and subsequently academic texts themselves, into lower-level ESL courses. Stories have also been described elsewhere as exposing students to real-life English that they can expect to read and hear in mainstream university courses (Song, as cited in Kasper 2000b). In the process, students are said to accumulate vocabulary, enhance fluency in reading and become actively engaged in learning. Because stories involve the reader in the actions and intentions of the characters, it is this very quality that is said to demand active meaning-making on the part of the student. What the process does is compel students to fill in from their own store of knowledge – that which Rossiter (2002) describes as 'unspoken', thereby not only creating but also discovering meaning.

As I introduce the course to my students at the beginning of the semester, I talk about language not being 'innocent', and the importance on the part of the students of being able to detect the difference between what people say and what they actually mean. I then use the analogy of the short story being like an iceberg to communicate the idea about there being more to the short story than meets the eye. The idea behind these introductory comments is to sensitise students to the need for active engagement with the story. They learn about the need to dig beneath the surface, to determine what is left unsaid and/or to read between the lines. How these can be achieved is the subject of the next section of this paper.

Ursula K. Le Guin's 'The Wife's Story' in action

Unlike the majority of short stories in the 2010 E105 course reader, Le Guin's story is not SA-based. It has been incorporated particularly because students generally find it intriguing, confusing and at the same time very interesting. The story is about werewolves, a concept that is foreign to most E105 students. Without some really attentive reading on the students' part, coupled with some understanding of Greek mythology, E105 students generally find the story elusive. It is exactly the kind of learning that is ahead of the students' actual development, i.e. Vygotsky's concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) (Hyland, 2006), which makes this story a good choice for the purposes of this paper. The student is forced into a high-level engagement with the text for understanding to occur. Also, as the story is the first in the series, this not only sets the tone but also the level for student participation. The message is made

clear from the beginning, i.e. that students will have to use every resource available for meaning-making to occur. As the nature of the activities compel students to tap into their own knowledge and personal experiences in an attempt to unravel the story, they soon learn that the learning process in actual fact begins with themselves.

As demonstrated by the following four activities, the story is taught in line with the pedagogic principle of moving from the simple to the complex, from the concrete to the abstract, and from the known to the unknown. With the necessary scaffolding in place, i.e. the gradual reduction of students' freedom with each new task introduced (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10), students are ultimately able to concentrate on the more demanding skills, such as the construction of the personalised major essay referred to in Activity 4, that they are being steered towards acquiring. Leading up to the major essay, the paper will now outline some of the different kinds of exercises that could be teased out of this short story, i.e. a pre-reading or brainstorming session, a close reading of the text involving a partner, and role-play which will lead to members of the different groups collaborating towards the construction of a creative piece of the written kind which they may later on act out. These will then culminate in the writing of the heavily weighted major assignment, to be submitted towards the end of the first term.

Activity 1: The brainstorming session for the individual student

This pre-reading session begins by challenging students in their individual capacities to analyse the title 'The Wife's Story' for clues to possible directions that the storyline could take. The kinds of questions asked during this brainstorming session range from students being asked what they think the significance of a title is, to figuring out from the title who/what the main subject of the story could be, and discussing the kinds of marital issues they expect the story to throw up. As they tap into their own understanding of relationships between married couples, they learn that their ideas, thoughts and experiences (and also those of others around them) can be used as resources and are therefore important.

Activity 2: Close reading in pairs

Students try to identify the tone captured in the first two lines of the story, and ponder the significance of these predictive lines. Next, they analyse the choice of tenses, and say what they consider to be the relevance of the past tense used in telling the story. They ponder how changing the tense could affect the storyline. In terms of language usage, students interrogate what certain words suggest about the identity of the speaker. A discussion of characterisation then enables them to critique and measure themselves against the characters. In terms of accumulating vocabulary, students identify words suggesting mystery in the story, and in the process they come to appreciate the importance of the tools of the trade, such as a good dictionary.

Activity 3: Small groups and role-play

Students are sensitised to the different tones in the opening lines of the story. For more exposure to the concept of tone, this is coupled with a detailed analysis of the confrontational and/or belittling tone depicted in John Donne's poem, '*Death be not proud'.* Imaginary dialogic scenes capturing different tones between the various characters in the story are then created. In groups, students write dialogues capturing these different tones. They assume roles as spokespersons, scribes or timekeepers.

Activity 4: The major assignment

An example of a personalised essay topic based on the story could be:

> *In the given extract, the wife is presented as having buried her head in the sand, with negative consequences. Have you or someone you know ever been in a similar situation before? Describe in detail what your circumstances/those of the other person you know were. What excuses did you use to sugarcoat the bitter truth? What lessons did you learn? What advice would you give to someone who finds themselves in a similar situation? Provide a title that you think aptly captures your experience.*

Conclusion

A few of the benefits associated with the short story technique include students not only becoming engrossed in the storyline, but also seeing a part of themselves in the characters. Because they can relate to some aspects of the storyline, they forget their linguistic shortcomings and anxieties, instead gaining the confidence necessary for participation in class discussions. Talking about personal experiences helps them to view the story beyond the course reader, thereby learning to apply knowledge gained in real-life contexts. Even more important within the academic sphere is the transfer of knowledge across courses and spaces, given the students' tendency to lock up knowledge gained in neat little boxes. Not only does the short story provide students with a foundation on which they may model their own writing, but they learn to use themselves as important resources in the learning process.

Furthermore, students are placed at the centre of the learning experience, with Randall (1996), as cited in Birren, Kenyon, Ruth, Schroots & Srensson (1996) identifying the role of the educator in the restoration process as being fourfold. According to this viewpoint, teachers must assume the roles of characters in the learners' stories, the keepers of these stories, editors and critics of the stories, as well as co-authors who assist students with learning as they fashion a revised self-narrative that is more inclusive of the realities of their own lives.

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Summer pre-sessional courses at Ahfad University for Women (Khartoum, Sudan)

Amna Bedri

Abstract

Sudanese universities are facing the problem of how to upgrade their students' level of English. A possible solution could be to implement a model based on the Ahfad University pre-sessional English course (since renamed University Preparatory Programme), which provides students with the language knowledge and skills to undertake their main university studies in English. This paper will discuss the possibility of implementing this system in place of the current courses provided by Sudanese universities, including the administrative and financial aspects, and will suggest solutions for anticipated problems, such as large classes, with the final aim of reaching a proposal that will work for most universities.

Introduction

This paper aims to propose a solution for improving standards of English in Sudanese universities through investing in a course of English as a university requirement, and proposes a course similar to the Ahfad University for Women (AUW) pre-sessional course (now renamed University Preparatory Programme). The intention of this course is to bridge the gap between weak standards of English in Sudanese schools and the expected level of university graduates, in addition to equipping students with the necessary academic English skills for their university studies and future professional life. This need for English is found to be urgent even in Arabic-medium universities and for future postgraduate studies, but most of all it is necessary in the universities that opted for English as the medium of instruction in all faculties. Shaaban (2009) says:

> *In fact, the abandonment of English has created generations of graduates whose skills were considered deficient on account of the fact that their English language skills were not up to the level required by the job market, especially in the age of globalization and outsourcing. Recently, most Arab governments have reversed their earlier policies, introducing English at an earlier age, mostly in the first grade and going a little further than expected by adopting English as a medium of instruction for science, mathematics, and technology.*

To amend this situation, many universities (especially in the UK) offer a pre-sessional course for the new intake, for example at the Lampeter campus of the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David. The website of the university presents the course as follows:

> *If you have an IELTS (International English Language Testing System) score of 6 or less and wish to improve your English before starting a degree, this is an intensive, 4 week course held in late August – September. You will receive intensive coaching in English, with an emphasis on the reading, writing, and note-taking skills that you will need for a degree programme, as well as join in with trips, orientation, and cultural events. Students who attend this programme will receive on-going language support during the academic year.*

In addition to its pre-sessional English language courses, Manchester Metropolitan University also offers a new course for international students:

> *The Foundation Year International Route is a new route designed for international students who don't meet the entry requirements for direct entry onto an undergraduate degree course at Manchester Metropolitan University. It works in the same way as the standard Foundation Year but provides extra English language and study skills support.*

These courses usually have separate fees, an appointed co-ordinator, a timetable, and are accompanied by varied activities to help students become accustomed to university life in a foreign country.

Students are usually required to have an average of 6.0 in IELTS before enrolling in an English-medium programme. However, it is difficult for learners in Sudanese secondary schools to achieve such a level of English, even in private English-medium schools. Learners and teachers of English face many problems and challenges which make such a course a necessity on the one hand and a challenge on the other.

Challenges

In Sudan at present, universities do not use any specific textbooks; teachers have to design their own materials. A study by Ali (2009) found that in Sudanese universities:

- teachers are demotivated
- most classroom interaction is teacher-centred
- learners' level is below average
- students are not aware of the benefits of studying English (cannot relate it to their needs)
- there is no common base for defining and measuring levels of language proficiency.

Many challenges will have to be faced to change this situation, such as the need for university administrative support to divide students into smaller groups through a reliable placement test, as well as to provide an exit exam for each level and for each skill. Universities also need to recruit more English language teachers and promote a more learner-centred approach alongside the provision of suitable material (divided into levels). Extra-curricular activities should also be organised to help motivate students and deal with the difference in their levels, which range from almost native speakers – such as students who went to school in English-speaking countries or private English-medium schools – to those with no real exposure to English in school.

Proposed solution

It was proposed that a pre-sessional course should be introduced at AUW to help students bridge the gap between the simple language skills and comprehension texts that they used to study in school, and the academic lectures, reference material, texts and assignments that students will encounter during their university studies. A similar course was first introduced at AUW in 1994 and has since been periodically evaluated and upgraded. For example, at one stage it was felt that the material designed by teachers (in-house) was not effective and did not cover all skills and topics. As the course was not credit-bearing, students did not attend classes or do homework regularly.

Components of the programme

The present University Preparatory Programme is now a university requirement and a prerequisite for registering in the first year at AUW. It also comprises three other courses, as shown in the table below.

Name of component	Duration	Credit hours
Orientation	One week	–
English Language course	Ranging between 8–24 weeks	University requirement
Study Skills	15 weeks	3
Talent Development	15 weeks	2
Computer Skills		University requirement

The Computer Skills course is a computer literacy course which is also a prerequisite for another course in the first year, Introduction to Computing.

Course materials

After evaluating the skills levels of the new intake and reviewing a number of textbooks in the market and on English language publishers' websites, it was found that a package like *Skills in English* should be adopted for many reasons. It has three levels (1–3) (and is preceded by *Starting Skills in English*), a separate lesson for each of four skills in every unit (ten units in each book, 40 lessons), academic themes, placement and achievement tests, and a training course for teachers and a teacher's book. It is also accompanied by recorded material. It takes students from Level A1 to B2.

> *Skills in English is a university preparation skills course at four levels … [it] focuses on the real grammar encountered in academic texts and teaches academic skills using accessible, relevant and motivating texts, based on key knowledge areas.* (Phillips & Phillips, 2007)

Students pay fees for the course and materials, depending on their level (and the number of books required).

Course	Duration	For which students?
ENGL (Level 1)	8 weeks	Students who pass (ELPT): 50–60%
ENGL (Level 2)	8 weeks	Students who pass (ELPT): 60–80%
ENGL (Level 3)	8 weeks	Students who pass (ELPT): 80% and above
An intensive English language course (Starting skills / Remedial course)	20 days (80 hours)	Students who fail (ELPT): less than 50%

Administration of the English Language course

The University Preparatory Programme has a full time co-ordinator. As students are divided into about 40 groups, with 30 students in each group, there is a need for extra teaching staff, thus about 40 part-time teachers also contribute in teaching the course.

The course runs for sessions of eight weeks over a six-month period, as follows:

Session	Duration	Level
1	15 October – 30 December	1, 2 and 3
2	7 Jan – 7 March	2 and 3
3	15 March – 15 May	3

The other components of the programme run concurrently with the English Language course.
The students are divided into levels according to their results in the placement test.

Raw score	Students should be placed in
0–20%	Starting skills A
21–40%	Starting skills B
41–60%	Level 1
61–80%	Level 2
81–90%	Level 3

A student's guide was written and is distributed to the students on their arrival at AUW to help them understand the concept of a pre-sessional course and the fact that it is a university requirement, not an optional course as some of them think. In fact, one of the problems faced by the administration of the programme is the students and parents who feel that they do not need to go through a pre-sessional English language course. They do not realise that the course contains components of academic skills that they have not seen in school, even if they studied in an English-speaking country. In 2009, a survey was carried out among pre-sessional students to investigate to what extent they have benefited from the course. More than 90 per cent of the students felt that the course exposed them to new academic language skills, such as using graphs and tables, writing scientific reports, and using reference books which they had not been taught to use at school.

Teaching methodology

A pre-sessional course is a remedial course; therefore, special consideration has to be given to students who have not had proper instruction in the English language at school. In some states in Sudan, a school may not have an English language teacher or textbooks for the students. These students are taught how to answer examination questions in order to pass the Sudan School Certificate in English Language. Therefore, the course is always preceded by a training workshop for the teachers on certain important issues and techniques, such as:

- a more learner-centred approach to teaching
- teaching separate skills – one hour for each skill
- detecting areas of weakness and helping students to overcome them
- prescribing extra work for weak students

- keeping to the timetable; all groups need to keep to the same schedule and allocated time for each unit and avoid introducing extra lessons such as grammar lessons.

These training and orientation workshops are sometimes run by a British trainer provided by the publisher.

Training workshop at AUW for English language teachers

Evaluation

Students at Level 1 and Level 2, and upon completion of the required contact hours, sit for an achievement test, and those who pass the test of all four skills are transferred to the next level until they all reach Level 3. The students who fail in any of the achievement tests are required to repeat the level only once. Of the final mark, 40 per cent is allocated for continuous assessment and 60 per cent for the final examination. All examination regulations of AUW apply to students on the University Preparatory Programme.

Constraints

At the beginning, the implementation of the course was affected by a number of constraints:

- the number of teachers was underestimated
- a number of teachers did not attend the training workshop
- the need for a large number of tape recorders and CD players
- the fact that not all students take the placement test at the same time
- resistance from some teachers to follow the course as instructed and to the change of system
- large numbers of new intakes (around 1,400 students)
- availability of rooms (e.g. for 40 groups studying simultaneously)
- the introduction of a Computer Literacy course
- the cost of materials and part-time teachers.

Some administrative measures were taken to overcome these constraints, such as monthly meetings to monitor the progress of the course; but most of all, the support of the university's administration helped in a number of ways, such as usually purchasing books early on in the academic year and providing fees for part-time teachers. In addition, rooms were provided from 2 p.m. onwards for the University Preparatory Programme.

Additional measures were taken in order to improve the quality of the course and performance of the students, such as:

- evaluation workshops (mid-term and at the end of the course)
- survey of students' opinions
- feedback from university staff, especially subject lecturers.

Feasibility of the course

Having discussed the elements of the University Preparatory Programme as it is applied at AUW, we should pose the question as to whether it would be feasible to implement it in other universities, especially state Arabic-medium universities. The Ministry of Higher Education requires universities to teach 90 hours of English during the first two years, but does not specify a particular syllabus or objectives. In some universities, teachers do not receive support from the English department in choosing the material or writing examinations. Support from the university administration is also minimal, for example, groups are formed of over 100 students.

The proposed pre-sessional course can be implemented as a university required course, with similar materials, methodology and an evaluation system, but with a difference in fees paid for the course and materials. In order to be able to implement the course effectively, the university administration has to give much needed support to the English departments, initially financial support in order to cover the hours of part-time teachers or extra hours for full-time teachers. The department will also need to purchase books for the students – originals not photocopies – and run training courses for the staff involved.

Should all or most universities opt for a similar course, then books may be purchased for a cheaper price in agreement with the publishers. A publisher such as Garnet Education may also provide free teacher's books and training courses for teachers in addition to the placement and achievement tests. This will, of course, help to reduce the cost.

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Shedding light on the blind spots of teaching and teacher development

Aymérou Mbaye

Abstract

This paper starts by reinstating the often forgotten fact that any worthwhile teaching act should be geared towards learning. It then proceeds to show the importance of training and developing staff from the multiple angles of teacher knowledge, teaching skills, and teacher values and attitudes, before highlighting the gains this would make in teaching and learning quality, as well as empowerment of teachers and added value for their institution. Finally, based on the presenter's experience, the paper offers ideas towards raising wider awareness and adoption of practices likely to promote training and professional development for teachers of English in the Sudanese higher education context.

Introduction

In recent years, higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa has witnessed a number of different developments. Students in increasing numbers are enrolling in universities and colleges whose infrastructures and governance modes are strained to the maximum. In the classrooms and lecture halls, teaching staff, even when they have the right academic qualifications, are faced with the challenges of dealing pedagogically with students in large classes and of varying educational backgrounds and linguistic abilities. Not surprisingly, rates of failure are relatively high. For those students who graduate despite the odds, finding employment is difficult because of a gap between the skills their colleges have equipped them with and the expectations of employers and the workplace.

This situation cannot continue and feasible solutions are increasingly required. Generally, the goal of education has been 'to ensure *all* children will develop the knowledge, understandings, and competencies needed to reach their full potential and to contribute to our democratic society' (Whitcomb, Liston & Borko, 2009). In Sub-Saharan Africa, however, the justification of education goes beyond the above-stated general goal; it involves and invokes important issues of human development, nation-building, socio-economic development, and transitions to modernity and to globalisation.

If, as proclaimed above, there is an urgent need for solutions, it must be recognised that there may be challenges involved in this, for the mix of factors determining the problems are complex. They involve resources in terms of infrastructure, finances, personnel, materials and equipment; they involve institutions with leadership and management roles amidst environmental and organisational cultures and climates that have developed over time; and finally, they involve teachers, learners, parents and other stakeholders with ambitions and expectations.

This paper intends to address this latter segment of the above complex of factors, i.e. teachers, and specifically in relation to English Language Teaching (ELT). It will do so on a number of grounds:

- Teachers may not be the only factor in the teaching/training/educational set-up, yet they are a core piece in that they can be acted upon and controlled to a certain extent.
- Appropriate action and leverage on teachers can impact other factors, such as learners, parents and materials.
- Many contemporary practices and/or tendencies in educational reforms and in the hiring of teaching staff suggest a worrying outlook on teachers' roles and what it means to teach.

In the course of the next few pages, I plan to:

- offer a brief critical description of some of the worrying widespread tendencies in matters of teacher preparation (or lack of preparation), teaching practices and underlying teacher beliefs, with tentative explanations of why and how this situation was reached
- provide an introduction to core consideration from mainstream teacher education and training issues literature. I try to show the convergence between these considerations and the emerging notions and concepts of the scholarship of teaching and learning and to teacher professionalisation
- propose examples and ideas of what may be adopted or adapted in an action plan for the effective provision of English language instruction in some of our regions and hopefully, with the hosts of this conference, on changing for the better English language teaching at tertiary level in Sudan.

Tendencies in teacher supply and classroom developments

The combination of factors such as demographic growth and educational policies of the early 1990s which focused on pre-university education has now resulted in the expansion of enrolments in higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa. In general, a great proportion of these new students constitute the first generation from their families or social groups to reach university and thus they may have a higher education readiness and preparedness beyond that of previous smaller waves of students. It is also the case that many of these students were not really considering university studies, but have had to enroll because there was no alternative for them. Moreover, poor planning in these universities and colleges often results in the stop-gap hiring of teachers, who even when they satisfy the academic prerequisites, do not necessarily have the right skills to carry out lecturing and teaching duties. It is not surprising that the above mix becomes a recipe for a situation that is unfavourable, is not in the interests of our institutions, and runs counter to our professed claims in relation to the function of schools and education.

Because of large classes:

- students are merely faces in a crowd instead of individuals
- there is no way to provide them with individual advice and guidance
- class management problems are compounded, making it difficult for the lecturer to deal with actual teaching
- where technological teaching aids (OHP, tape recorders, slides) are available, using them presents insurmountable challenges and leads to their discarding
- constraints in grading large numbers of assignments has an impact on the assessment of learning (and teaching).

Because of teachers without proper training:

- teachers teach the same course year in year out for decades without any change, despite changes everywhere – in subject matter, in their students and in the needs the course is supposed to address
- students receive negligible benefits from the courses as there has been limited learning
- where some teachers do a good job at teaching, there is little chance for them to emulate others because teaching is seen as a private and individual act
- there is massive student failure in the first years of their university experience and loss of faith in the transformational promise of education
- a sizeable section of our promising youth turn to universities and colleges abroad for their degrees and thus contribute to the 'brain-drain' factor.

The downside of the situation described above is not only in relation to problems arising out of large classes or from teachers lacking proper training; it feeds into a pernicious social justification phraseology that is not supported by what the foundational educational sciences have taught. This phraseology comes from belief blurred by the disrupted situations they found themselves working in without prior preparation and often without mentoring. Consider the following lines exemplifying this phraseology; they can often be heard in some teaching circles:

- *If the students fail to learn after the lesson, <u>they</u> are to blame, not the teacher.*
- *I was a very good student, so I should have no problem being a good teacher.*
- *My college English professor was great, so when I was hired as a lecturer, I just taught like he used to teach.*
- *Holding an MA or PhD is all you need to teach in higher education.*
- *I do not need any colleague to observe me; I know that what I am doing in class is good.*

In the depictions above, the teacher appears in a somewhat controversial light. However, this does not suggest in any manner that tertiary-level instructors are responsible for the shortcomings. These instructors work within institutions with a systemic structure for discharging their duties and pursuing their goals. The above shortcomings are then institutional and systemic above anything else, for the neglect or absence of professional pedagogical training in teaching at university level is a historical feature of higher education. In the past, university education was centred on the disciplines and on specialisation. The most important criterion, and often the only one, was scholarship in the discipline they would be teaching. Moreover, the young people who reached the university were often from the social elite, were good and experienced learners, and had a strong motivation for the subjects and disciplines they elected to study. They could thus get by easily with the task of learning even when taught by pedagogically inept instructors.

This, in a way, created the grounds for a tradition for neglecting teacher training at the tertiary level. In the face of the different context, new demands, and challenges of higher education in Sub-Saharan Africa, there is a need for changing direction.

Teaching, learning and the need for teacher development

Today, the demographics of students knocking on the gates of universities and colleges in Sub-Saharan Africa has changed; more and more, these students are from the social strata with less literate and/or educational capital; and any context that more or less justified non-insistence on the pedagogical readiness of tertiary-level instructors is now in the past. Moreover, contemporary developments in higher education call for moves towards giving a substantial place to teacher training, teacher professionalisation, and scholarship of learning in higher education.

Although in lower echelons of education, preparation of teachers in how to teach and ensure learning generally precedes hiring; in higher education many teachers do not walk this path, and find themselves teaching without prior teacher education and preparation (Hess, 2004). Often, the only criterion for recruitment is that of scholarship in the discipline to be taught. In the midst of the now recurrent discourse on the professionalisation of teachers and scholarship of teaching, this depiction constitutes a mismatch that needs to be remedied. According to Lessard (2005), the professionalisation of teachers is dictated by the need for more effective teaching. Professionalisation posits a body of knowledge, practices and values conveyed explicitly during training and not acquired through intuitive and imitative apprenticeship (p. 3).

The necessity for teacher professionalisation is justified by the fact that learning by students is not so much dependent on teachers' individual creativity, but on rational guiding principles evolved and tested by the community of professionals, and whose implementation can be systematically evaluated. Conceived from this angle, real teaching should result in learning, unless strong adverse circumstances prevail. Limm (1991) has proposed a matrix of teacher competency domains that can be adapted to training and developing EFL/ESL teachers (Figure 1). Assuming the ideological and core human domains of proficiency have been taken care of by society and general education, special attention is advocated in developing EFL/ESL teachers professionally, to all components of the action and knowledge base domains, to the possible exception of the content base segment, i.e. language, meta-language, linguistics, discourse and communication. Proficiency in the learning/learner base and in the teaching base segments would help realise the link between the two, to the point of some defining teaching only in reference to a learning outcome (Gage, 1964). In addition, the teaching base segment would show that there are time-tested methods, techniques and activities for achieving specific outcomes in the class, and that there are tips for dealing with large classes. The learning and learner base segment could help instructors understand how their students learn and position them for gearing their teaching to optimum effect.

Figure 1: Teacher competency domains

Ideological domain proficiency

Teacher ethics

Lifelong learning

Broader social and human values

Core human skills domain proficiency

Analysis-perception

Critical-evaluative

Meaning conveyance

Knowledge domain proficiency

Content base: language, meta-language, linguistics, discourse, communication, etc.
Learning and the learner: learning theories, learner characteristics, learning strategies, learner training

Teaching base: teaching methods, teaching activities, lesson planning and delivery, classroom management, testing
Design base: syllabus/curriculum, materials, lesson plans, activities

Institutional base: education, school systems, schooling

Development base: education-literacy capital, professional socialisation, research and scholarship, ICT and special topics

Action domain proficiency
Observe
Practice
Feedback

Taking steps towards the professionalisation of teachers can also help them understand the aspects and dimensions of teaching that are often lost to novice and untrained teachers. It is not uncommon for them to conceive of teaching in a restricted or selective manner, when the reality of the scope of teaching duties and responsibilities is otherwise extensive. Figure 2 is an attempt to exemplify some of these duties and responsibilities.

Figure 2: Scope of teachers' work and responsibilities

Know your subject	Assess teaching/learning
Identify learning needs	Correct homework
Make lesson plans	Provide feedback to students
Reference lesson plans to syllabus objectives	Encourage learners to evaluate you
Diagnose learning problems	Compute grades
Decide on remedies for learning problems	Complete students' reports
Select, adapt or create materials to suit lesson plans	Take part in standardised tests and exams
Teach lesson plans	Communicate with parents
Mentor novice teachers	Implement school policies
Give effective instructions	Attend school meetings
Motivate learners	Do school committee work
Manage classes	Join in-service activities
Engage learners	Advance own education
Handle misconduct	Engage professional organisations
Monitor students	Etc.

If anything, the arguments regarding the domains of teacher competency and the scope of teachers' work and responsibilities underscore the truth ignored by established practices and tendencies in teacher recruitment in Sub-Saharan Africa; that indeed, teaching is an activity that requires training. This training should ensure that:

- teachers are introduced and are proficient with the teaching methods and practices whose effectiveness is proven
- variance in ways of teaching that may affect learning is eliminated or reduced
- a sense of ethics, performance and responsibility is instilled in teachers.

If, in African colleges and universities, there is adherence to these lines of arguments, in due course, it may be possible to see an end to the worrying scene of hosts of first-generation college students dropping out and losing faith in the emancipating potential of education.

Ideas for teacher development and improvement of teaching and learning

After setting the scene, I now wish to turn specifically to the central theme of this conference, which is 'time for change in English language teaching at tertiary level in Sudan'. This paper has depicted a situation common to many locales in Sub-Saharan Africa in which many find themselves in the position of having teachers and instructors without the appropriate training, and has gone on to indicate that there is necessity to change this situation to ensure better quality of teaching and learning. The business of improving instructional performance is a complex and multidimensional one and may involve centralised or decentralised policies and regulations, advanced university training, certification of teachers, standardised assessment, and close supervision and evaluation of teachers.

However, effecting worthwhile change need not wait for comprehensive moves by central authorities; initiatives can take place at the department, school and/or district levels (Bridges, 1993). Since the discussion here is about English language at tertiary level, it may be noted that in higher educational institutions, the conditions for taking up school-based teacher development are riper than anywhere else: colleges and universities often have the critical mass of teaching staff, enjoy administrative autonomy, and command more financial resources.

I propose that teacher development and improvement of learning activities in colleges and universities in Sudan can centre on raising awareness on the five following themes:

- **Communities of practice**: 'Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger, 1998). Exploration of this theme can lead to fruitful teacher development activities such as peer observation, team teaching and materials development. Approaching the act of learning or improving one's teaching in groups offers the additional benefit of reducing threats that one might otherwise face.

- **Learning and the learner**: The paper insisted earlier on the link between learning and teaching. Teachers would benefit from examining insights gained by specialists on issues of learning and the learner: What is learning? How do learners learn best? What can teachers do to enhance learning among learners? This theme can be explored through reading and discussion, small teacher-led enquiry projects, or observation of students in a learning situation.

- **Generic teaching practices**: From the classical method and grammar-translation method, to the direct method, audio-lingual approach and communicative language teaching, teaching methods have evolved and faded. Teachers need to be introduced to these methods, and to their strengths and weaknesses, so they can develop an array of teaching activities they may use as appropriate or with a dose of eclecticism.

- **Teacher characteristics and behaviours**: An important research body, Teacher Effectiveness, holds that a large proportion of the potential benefit of schools and institutions of learning rests on the teacher. This research body has consequently concerned itself with the question of the characteristics embodied by good teachers. It is useful for beginner teachers or instructors who are not sure how to behave in a class situation to have an awareness of these characteristics. Among positive instructor attributes and behaviours, we may list: recall, introspection and observation. Among characteristics of interest in a teacher, we can cite: the teacher creates an atmosphere conducive to learning; the teacher communicates efficiently; the teacher manages the class well, etc.

- **Professional organisations**: These are important and can reflect the concerns of members on the state of their professions. They can lead institutions to pay attention to career issues. When they link up with other organisations outside the country, they can be a source of professional empowerment.

Conclusion

This paper set out to address issues in teacher development and the improvement of teaching outcomes. It has lamented the tendency in many Sub-Saharan contexts to recruit teachers without training under the pressure of expanding demand for education, but also in the midst of scarce budgetary resources to support training. In line with the Khartoum Conference, this paper has called for a change in this tendency by reinstating the fundamental importance of the professionalisation of teachers. It has concluded with ideas on how steps to achieving this can be taken at college or university level.

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Towards ELT-based co-operation between tertiary-level institutes and employers

Leonardo Mack

Abstract

Co-operation between tertiary-level institutes and employers has encountered many obstacles. This article suggests practical ways to improve the situation. First, it attempts to find some reasons why employers have been feeling strongly about tertiary-level English language syllabi in many African countries where English is a foreign language. Then, it suggests ways to surmount obstacles, one of which is to start or improve co-operation. Finally, it provides practical advice to show how such co-operation could work better. I am confident that the suggestions will inspire tertiary-level institute representatives and employers to establish, improve and maintain long-lasting, co-operative relationships.

Introduction

When I was asked to deliver a speech at the English Language Teaching (ELT) conference hosted by the British Council in Sudan in March 2010, I did not initially have any specific topic or subject in mind. But then I immediately thought of a recurring problem that is raised in many African countries where English is a foreign language. In fact, there have always been gaps as regards co-operation between tertiary-level representatives and employers. While the former complain that employers never contact them or show an interest in what they do, the latter argue that tertiary-level English language syllabi do not meet their requirements or needs. As a result, they keep saying that most tertiary-level graduates do not perform better when employed in their companies. To fill the gaps, employers claim to have spent a fortune on retraining tertiary-level graduates. This retraining has helped to endow tertiary-level graduates with good English language communication skills. The situation is real in both Congos (Brazzaville and Kinshasa) where I have worked. It also seems to be the case in Sudan, as well as in Angola where I am currently based and work.

Tackling the problem

The issue of co-operation between tertiary-level institutes and employers can be viewed under two dimensions here.

First, many tertiary-level representatives claim that employers never contact them and do not seem to be interested in their business. Second, employers also say that the tertiary-level English language syllabi do not meet their needs or requirements.

I have taught English in many African countries but have not seen any evidence that underpins the tertiary-level representatives' claim. As for the employers, there exists clear evidence that corroborates their claims. Figure 1 shows the results of a small-scale research survey carried out in Angola. The findings were from a questionnaire (see Appendix) that was sent to oil company representatives to discover how satisfied they were with the public and private tertiary-level English language syllabi. The survey involved four renowned public and private international oil companies working in Angola, all of whom I have worked with. The research findings would help to improve the syllabi so as to satisfy employers.

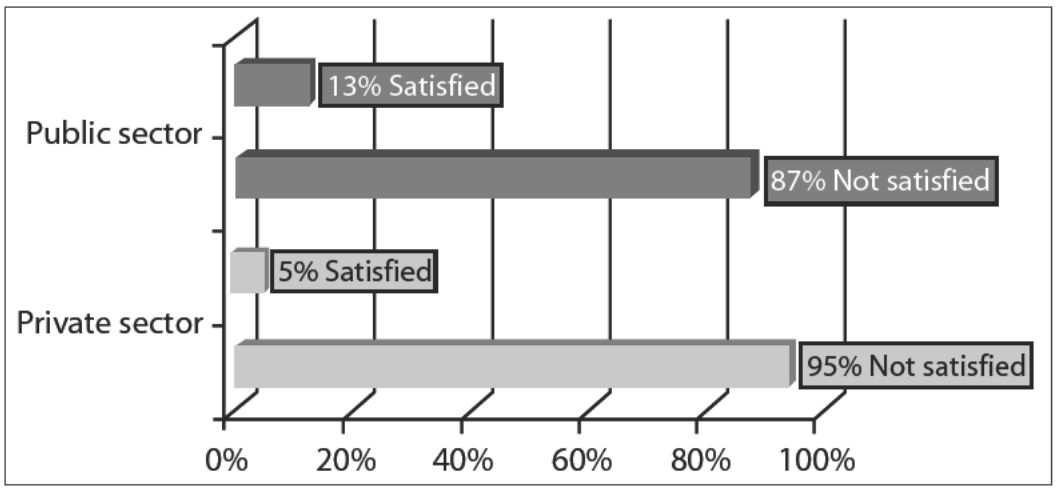

Figure 1: Tertiary-level English language syllabi satisfaction levels.

As can be seen in the graph, in the private sector, only five per cent of the people involved said they were satisfied. The majority (95 per cent) reported that they were not happy with the English language syllabi at tertiary level. As for the public sector, including public or government companies, 13 per cent said they were satisfied and 87 per cent said they were not. Table 1 below provides a synopsis of those findings.

Table 1: Synopsis of questionnaire findings

	Private sector (%)	**Public sector (%)**
Satisfied	5	13
Dissatisfied	95	87
Total	**100**	**100**

After collecting, processing and analysing data from the questionnaire, I found that the proportions of those saying they were dissatisfied with the English language syllabi in both sectors were much larger than those who said they were satisfied. I then decided to turn to some of the tertiary-level representatives for an informal, conversational interview (Cohen et al., 2007), the aim of which was just to compare my data or check if the data obtained from my questionnaire was valid (ibid.). I also wanted to find out the reasons for such a considerable rate of dissatisfaction. The following table shows the main points that were drawn from the informal interview.

Table 2: Interview summary

Interviewee	**Interview main points**
Interviewee 1 University lecturer Works for private and public institutions in Angola	▪ The significant proportion of dissatisfaction with the English language syllabi is justified as far as Angola is concerned. ▪ Most private and public tertiary-level institutes do not teach English to undergraduates. ▪ Only some private tertiary-level institutions teach English to undergraduates, but only in the first two years. ▪ Non-existence of co-operation between companies and tertiary-level institutes.
Interviewee 2 University lecturer Teaches at ISCED in Luanda/Angola	▪ The significant proportion of dissatisfaction with the English language syllabi is justified as far as Angola is concerned. ▪ People have not yet fully grasped the importance of English. That is why they do not teach it to undergraduates. ▪ In Angola, tertiary-level representatives only tend to co-operate with companies if there is something to be gained. ▪ The syllabi are designed by non-specialists.

Personal comments on my findings and recommendations

Findings

The small-scale research survey helped me to pinpoint the root causes of dissatisfaction with the tertiary-level English language syllabi. In short, these causes are as follows:

- A lack of English language provision for undergraduates frequenting public or government tertiary-level institutes. This gap does not prepare prospective employees to have a solid background in English language.
- English language was only taught to first- and second-year undergraduates frequenting private tertiary-level institutes. The gap in their third and fourth years does not provide prospective employees with a solid background in English language.

- Latent or inactive ELT-based co-operation – if this exists – between tertiary-level institutes and employers has been mentioned as a key cause of dissatisfaction.
- Tertiary-level English language syllabi (if any) are often designed by non-specialists.

Recommendations

Having pinpointed some of the causes of dissatisfaction with the tertiary-level English language syllabi, the next step is to provide practical recommendations that could help. In my view, the following points are worth considering:

- Tertiary-level representatives should revise their curriculum. The introduction of English language from the beginning until the end of students' training would help to give them quite a solid background and prepare them for their future jobs.
- Employers should, if possible, get involved in ELT. This involvement should not be looked at as an intrusion, but rather as an effective way to communicate with tertiary-level representatives and pass on their views or needs with pinpoint accuracy. Once employers' needs are understood accurately, tertiary-level institutes are then in a strong position to mould undergraduates so as to meet employers' needs in the future.
- Tertiary-level English syllabi designers should normally be highly qualified and experienced teachers who are used to selecting, grading and integrating the various elements of a language course in order to meet specific needs (Nunan, 2000, p. 79).
- Tertiary-level institute representatives should actively co-operate with employers as they both need or use the same people on the one hand for training and on the other hand for work. In fact, the undergraduates who are taught are the ones who are going to be needed for work in the future.

How should this collaboration work?

Veugelers and Cassiman (2005) suggest drawing up a kind of collaboration contract between both parties – tertiary-level institute representatives and employers – to avoid obstacles. The contract should state in clear terms the type of activities that will be involved, as well as the kind of backing each party will provide. Each party should strive to 'religiously' follow the agreements.

The contract could, for example, include the following:

- Guest speaker programmes: company representatives could visit tertiary-level institutes in order to talk about the company. These talks will help students to get a better picture of the company's requirements and how they would strive to meet those requirements.
- Students' planned visits to company facilities or premises (libraries, labs, plants) to help them to familiarise themselves with the concepts or language needed before they graduate.
- Employers could encourage and finance language research projects. These projects should be related to what employers do (Hall et al., 2001).
- Employers could provide tertiary-level institutes with specific materials and tools in order to promote ELT. BP Amoco and Chevron in Angola are two good examples of companies who have made such an offer to promote ELT.
- Employers could encourage teacher development or possibly sponsor teacher training should they need a teacher or a group of teachers to be able to teach special courses. This funding will help teachers to get specific training so they are in a better position to help undergraduates meet employers' needs in the future.

The last point worth mentioning is communication. Employers and tertiary-level institutes should always communicate. This is the secret of success in this kind of collaboration. Impey and Underhill (1994) recommend the use of all means of communication to avoid misunderstanding or gaps. Additionally, this communication should use simple and clear terms to better help each other.

Conclusion

This article has made an attempt to suggest practical hints and propose a model of co-operation between employers and tertiary-level institutes. A small-scale research survey has been carried out to verify the hypothesis of a lack of or latent co-operation between employers and tertiary-level institutes in Angola. As the findings have shown the veracity of the original hypothesis, a number of recommendations have been put forward to help both employers and tertiary-level institutes.

However, the ideas given here are just suggestions which could serve as a springboard for tertiary-level institutes and employers. They should not be followed literally or copied unquestioningly. They should, if possible, be adapted or improved.

To conclude, it is universally agreed that we have entered the era of globalisation. No institution can claim to be successful or can successfully survive without the help or presence of others. Collaboration between existing institutions is vital and can bring about a great number of benefits.

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Appendix

Questionnaire on tertiary-level English language syllabi

I am undertaking some research on tertiary-level English language syllabi in Angola.

Your answers will tell me whether you are satisfied with them or not. The overall results of this research may help to improve the syllabi or highlight areas that need to undergo drastic change in ELT.

Please answer the following questions by either marking the appropriate box or writing a response in the space provided. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential; therefore you do not need to put your name on the questionnaire.

Section I: YOUR COMPANY AND ELT

Your answers to the questions in this section will tell me about your company and how you view ELT. Please feel free to tick the box that most applies to your particular case, or write your answer in the space provided.

1. Which company do you work for? (Please provide company name.)

   Is it a public or private company?

   Public ☐ Private ☐ Other ☐

   If 'Other', please provide details here: _____

   Does your company need English to run the business successfully?

   Yes ☐ No ☐ Other ☐

   If 'Other', please provide details here:

2. Is your company interested in English Language Teaching?

   Yes ☐ No ☐ Other ☐

   If 'Other', please provide details here: _____

Section II: OUR VIEWS ABOUT ELT AND THE SYLLABI

1. Does your company have an in-house English language training programme?

   Yes ☐

   No. We hire the services of a training company. ☐

   Other ☐

   Please specify: _____

2. Why did you decide to run an in-house training programme or hire the services of a training service provider?

   Because we wanted our employees' English to be up to our standards. ☐

   Because our employees were not able to communicate in English. ☐

   Because we wanted to improve our employees' performance through English. ☐

   Other ☐

   Please specify: _____

3. Please choose the approximate proportion of university graduates that are employed by your company.

   100% ☐ 80% ☐ 60% ☐ 40% ☐ 20% ☐

   Other ☐

   Please specify: _____

4. Are all those university graduates able to communicate in spoken and written English?

   Yes, all of them. ☐

   No, none of them. ☐

   Other ☐

   Please specify: _____

5. How satisfied are you with the English language background of those graduates working for you?

   Very ☐ Quite ☐ Fairly ☐ Not ☐

6. If you chose one of the last three options in Question 5, who or what do you think is the root cause of those graduates' weak English language background?

   The infrastructure ☐

   The teaching staff ☐

   The syllabi ☐

   Other ☐

   Please specify: _____

7. If you have any other comment(s) about your company, ELT or your tertiary-level graduates, please write in the box below.

Thank you very much for your time. Your interest and co-operation are very much appreciated.

Leonardo Mack

What English do university students really need?

Terry Phillips

Abstract

We must consider the needs of our students before we decide what curriculum items to include in any course. University students may need English to continue their studies in an English-medium faculty. They may need English to pass a credit course. In either case, the materials provided by an average English as a Foreign Language (EFL) course book may not meet their needs. First, EFL course books largely set out to teach the skills and vocabulary required for travel and tourism. Second, they teach tense-based grammar which is appropriate for general English but is not the key area of complexity in academic English. Third, they do not normally contain much useful knowledge about the world, featuring instead ephemeral subjects such as celebrities or 'teen' topics. Finally, they do not develop analytical and critical thinking skills which are at the base of university study in any language. In this session, I look at the curriculum items which should be contained in an English course for university-level students. I also show some examples of the kind of classroom materials which these curriculum items can lead to.

Introduction

Students who are studying English at university should be students of English for Academic Purposes (EAP). The university should be preparing them to use English within the institution or the wider world of academia. It should not normally be providing them with general English (GE) with its focus on interactional and transactional language use, reading for pleasure and writing in social situations. But what is EAP? And how does it differ significantly from GE?

Language as code

Language is a code, and successful language learning involves switching codes, from first language (L1) to target language (L2). At one time, it was believed that there was just one code which underlies all language. This idea, the Universal Competence Theory, postulated that if a student could acquire this universal competence, he or she would be able to cope in any genre in all skills. In practice, this meant learning a series of grammar rules and, as it seems now, a relatively small amount of vocabulary.

This idea now seems strange. We understand that there are a number of codes, not just one. These include:

▪ the orthographic code and/or the phonological code	knowing how language is put into written or spoken symbols in the language
▪ the schema code	understanding the kinds of language that will occur in different situations
▪ the real-world knowledge code	sharing the assumed background knowledge in a genre
▪ the discourse structure code	recognising how information is structured in the texts in a genre
▪ the syntax code and/or the morphology code	knowing how the language encodes part of speech and role in a clause

It is further understood that these codes vary, to a greater or lesser extent between genre, such as conversation, fiction or academic use.

It is useful to look at each code in a little more detail.

Students of EAP should already have a reasonable grasp of the orthographic code of English. They should also know the phonological code to some extent, although they will probably need a lot of practice during an EAP course in hearing key words in context, because of the complexities of assimilation, regression or co-articulation. There is little difference across genres in the rules of these codes.

The schema and real-world knowledge codes are genre-specific. When learning language for tourism, for example, students need to recognise what happens in a railway station when buying a ticket. They need to have the necessary vocabulary and structures to cope with the situation. Conversely, EAP students need to know what happens in a lecture hall and a tutorial room, and the vocabulary and grammar they will need to understand or produce.

It is easy to see that the discourse structure code will differ across genres. The ordering of information in an informal letter may not need to be learnt, but how an academic will order information in an argument essay certainly needs to be understood. It could, for example, be Nestorian – arguing from weakest point to strongest, reverse Nestorian – strongest to weakest, or 'strawman' – setting up an opposing point of view then demolishing it.

With regard to the syntax and morphology codes, two main types of language can be distinguished. Some languages, such as Latin, are largely morphological. In other words, the form of a word tells the listener or the reader its part of speech – noun, verb or adjective – and its role in the clause – subject (S), verb (V) or object (O). However, in English, morphology is of very little value in determining these points. The inflectional rules in English are very limited. The verb *to be* has a full set of forms to show person and number, present and 'pastness', but other verbs do not. Where there *are* morphological rules, they are not productive – in other words, it is not always obvious how to apply them or decode them. For example, students are taught early in their learning that a final *s* marks plurality, but final *s* also marks third person singular present simple and possession. In addition, words can end in *s*, but the letter does not mark a meaningful point. It is simply the way the word is spelt, e.g. *gas*. The point about English is that it is large syntactic, which means that the position of a word in a sentence or a phrase determines its part of speech and its role in the sentence or phrase.

When native speakers communicate in English, in speech or writing, they are constantly decoding sentences and phrases into the syntactic structure, based on SVO. It is subconscious, but psycholinguistic experiments can prove that it is happening (see, inter alia, Calvin's writings). People also know experientially that it is true. It is often possible to finish other people's sentences for them, in many cases with the exact word, and always with the kind of content. Students must be taught this same skill if they are to be able to decode speech and writing in real time, i.e. as a speaker is speaking or while they are reading.

As mentioned above, codes differ between genres but there is a specific issue with syntax in academic English. Corpus research (inter alia, Biber et al., 1999) shows clearly that, while general conversation and fiction employ a wide range of tenses, academic English does not. Therefore, in general English, it is important to teach students to discriminate between some or all of the 13 or so tenses in common usage. However, the situation in academic English is very different. In fact, around 80 per cent to 85 per cent of academic and technical English is in the present, including passive forms, because it is stating facts or presenting theories as possible facts. Only around ten per cent is in the past and around 5 per cent in every other tense. In addition, 90 per cent of EAP is the simple aspect, with only 0.5 per cent of verbs in the genre in the perfect progressive aspect. How much time is spent trying to teach the general English student to understand and produce the present perfect continuous? The EAP student really does not need to produce this form and may never even encounter it.

Consequently, complexity in academic English does not lie in the verb phrase. Research suggests, conversely, that the following items are particularly complex in the genre:

- **the noun phrase**, which sometimes comprises 10 or 15 words, e.g. *The difficulties which are experienced by children from families in which at least one of the parents is abusive …*
- **clause joining and embedding**, e.g. *A significant number of insecurely attached boys and girls brought up by a violent mother or father show signs of violence as adults, passing on their aggression to their own children*.
- **leading prepositional and adverbial phrases**, e.g. *According to research at several universities in the north of England into the problems that are experienced by students in their first year of an undergraduate degree course, …*
- **the use of stance expressions**, e.g. *clearly, it is unlikely that*.

These are not areas that typically feature in the grammar syllabus, even of supposedly EAP course books. They are certainly not areas that the average EFL teacher is experienced at teaching.

Concluding remarks

What English do university students need, then? In fact, it is easier to answer this question for this group than for many other groups of language learners. University students, by definition, need to be able to:

- understand lectures in English and take effective notes in real time, i.e. not recording it and listening again and again at home
- prepare and present extended turns at seminars and tutorials
- carry out reading research in an efficient way – i.e. not reading and rereading again and again because the meaning escapes them in real time
- produce written assignments.

Such needs analyses, however, should inevitably lead to a re-examination of syllabus design for EAP course books, and the production of course materials which will genuinely teach students real-time receptive skills in listening and reading skills, and effective productive skills in academic speaking and writing.

EAP vs GE

There is one final key issue. It is necessary to ensure that teachers timetabled to teach EAP understand that academic English is at the other end of most of the clines by which language can be analysed, as Table 1 (Clanchy & Ballard, 1992, cited in Jordan, 1997, p. 244) makes clear.

Table 1: EAP vs GE

EAP	GE
analytical	impressionistic
objective	subjective
intellectual	emotional
serious	conversational
impersonal	personal
formal	colloquial

This is a big leap for the average language teacher who probably sees his or her job as fostering a communicative situation in which, ideally, students will give their own subjective personal opinions in ad-hoc conversational, even colloquial, language. EAP, on the other hand, is about researched information of other people's ideas and opinions, put into planned and rehearsed/redrafted language. It is not necessary to train teachers in different techniques of classroom management, but we do need to ensure that they recognise the real learning tasks of the EAP student, as opposed to those of the general English student, and understand why good EAP course books focus on particular items.

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ICT in the classroom: Driving up results without breaking the bank

Andrew Stokes

Abstract

In a single generation, Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has moved from the periphery of education to centre stage. Once the preserve of the maths room, it now drives learning forward in all subject areas. This presents significant challenges, both to teachers who have not been trained in exploiting the new technologies, and to educational institutions which do not have the resources to implement them effectively. In this paper, I will look at the extent to which ICT supports learning in developed countries, and at the issues it raises in developing countries, with particular reference to projects in India, Libya and Ethiopia as at 2010.

Introduction

'Software should be available not just at university, but also students at secondary school should have the opportunity to use it.' These are the words of Melkamu Hailu, a journalism student at Mekelle University, Ethiopia. Albert P'Rayan, an instructor at Kigali Institute of Science and Technology in Rwanda, concludes as follows: 'There is a big appetite for integrating technology into teaching. Teachers as well as students are eager for access to ICT materials.' These personal reflections by students and teachers are echoed in a 2009 paper compiled at the University of London following a survey of 147 eLearning practitioners from 34 countries in Africa. The report's first conclusion is that, 'The three most significant consequences of introducing eLearning are perceived to be the possibility for higher student motivation, improved student attainment, and increased value of education amongst the community.' (Hollow & ICWE, 2009 p. 9).

There are two messages here. The first is a recognition that technology is now so central to education that students who are denied it are being actively disadvantaged. Not only will their ICT skills be lower, but their language skills and academic performance will suffer relative to their counterparts who do have access to technology. The second is more pragmatic: once a student has left university, no professional employer is going to consider employing them unless they have basic ICT skills – *at least*. Or, to frame it more positively, a high level of ICT competence enables young people to compete with their global counterparts on a level playing field, and this is as true in Africa as it is in India, China and the Philippines.

Local ICT solutions

We should, therefore, examine why ICT resources are not more widely available in schools and universities across the continent. Contrary to popular perception, it is not cost – or at least, cost need not be a major factor. It is the failure to provide a solution adapted to local conditions and backed up with appropriate training and support.

Example 1

First we will consider an ambitious, expensive project set up by Cisco Systems in 2006. The project's objectives include the following:

> *Crucially, the project will enable simple village schools to receive streamed internet and TV-based educational content, creating a strong foundation for e-learning. Many students are already making significant strides, as quality education content is transmitted via satellite and shown on flat-panel plasma screens in remote rural classrooms – some situated three days' travel from the nearest town.* (Cisco Systems, Inc., 2006, p. 3)

Although the project was handsomely funded, it only takes a moment's thought to realise that:

- the technology is designed for a much higher-tech environment which has, for example, a stable and consistent power supply
- when something does go wrong, it is highly unlikely that there will be anyone in a remote village with the knowledge and expertise to fix it. It is simply not a sustainable solution.

Paradoxically, the more complex and expensive a solution, the more likely it is to fail, and bottom-up, lower-tech initiatives have a much higher chance of success.

Example 2

It is therefore useful to contrast this with a different project with a different budget and a very different approach. This initiative, which began in 2009, is to integrate ICT materials for English at Aksum University[1] in northern Ethiopia. The project was set up by Clarity[2], a publisher of ICT materials for English, in conjunction with Voluntary Service Overseas[3] (VSO), who fund an English co-ordinator at the university, and was spearheaded by Aksum University itself. The objective was to integrate five interactive learning resources[4] into the teaching of English:

- Tense Buster – a grammar program
- Active Reading
- Study Skills Success
- Road to IELTS
- Author Plus – an authoring program enabling teachers to make their own activities.

The key to the success of this project was to base it on the technology and expertise that was already established within the university. This, in turn, made it much more likely that the training – an essential part of the integration process – would be both comprehensible and useful to the instructors involved in exploiting the learning resources. Next, project objectives could be modified as fresh challenges and opportunities arose, ensuring this remained a bottom-up initiative rather than a space-age solution dropped in from above with no ongoing involvement. Finally, a practical and affordable pricing model was devised to protect the sustainability of the project.

In practice, this meant using 20 stand-alone computers, and gearing the interactive resources to that technology, as opposed to persuading the university to exploit the full technical capability of the resources (such as networking them or introducing online components). The computers were already being used by students and teachers and maintained by an Aksum University technician.

Once the learning materials had been selected, the next step was to draw up a schedule for implementation. The first phase of the project was centred on a training visit to Aksum by Clarity staff. It is almost always true that without training, a school or university – or any organisation for that matter – will find it difficult to get the best results out of a new technology. Bringing in a trainer who can quickly and efficiently highlight the key benefits a system can bring, as well as the pitfalls to avoid, is often the best way of protecting the investment put into acquiring the technologies, and of ensuring maximum benefit for the end users.

The training visit was scheduled for mid-October 2009, so a deadline for installation of the learning resources was set at the end of August. This allowed plenty of time for delays, and for any installation problems to be ironed out, in the first instance by local staff, and – only if this failed – remotely by Clarity. As it turned out, installation ran smoothly and the university was able to move immediately to stage two. This involved giving preliminary access to the programs to targeted teachers. The purpose of this stage was to highlight any practical, pedagogical or technical issues that could be usefully tackled in the training session. Again, a deadline was set well in advance of the training, giving time for the Aksum-based project leader to report to Clarity, and for the Clarity trainers to integrate these issues into the training schedule.

When the training took place, it dealt with three main areas: developing a rationale for using ICT; learning how to use the programs themselves; and learning how to exploit the programs in class and for homework and self-study. These sessions were so successful that at the end of the first hour, 60 people applied to join future classes. The final stage of this phase, once the trainers left, was for the teachers to integrate the five programs into their teaching. This is ongoing.

Challenges and benefits

The system has been up and running for six months and initial findings have been documented by project leaders Cathy Newman and Tsegay Girmay. The first challenge was that the ICT skills of the students were surprisingly weak: 'Generally, lack of computer skills is a big problem as it makes the users slower to learn about and use the software.'[5] This has been addressed in semester two by setting up optional classes in computer skills. This is an excellent example of a challenge being turned into an opportunity; not only do students have new and effective tools for learning English, but the tools themselves are motivating them to improve their general ICT abilities.

1 http://aksumuniversity.com
2 http://www.clarityenglish.com
3 http://www.vso.org.uk
4 For more details, see www.ClarityEnglish.com
5 All statements quoted relating to the Clarity project are from in-house reports written by Cathy Newman and Tsegay Girmay.

The next challenge is common to self-access centres the world over: a lack of focus on the part of students. They come to the computer room, look at the resources available, and are unable to make informed decisions about the most productive way of spending their time. At Aksum University, this was solved by setting up 'one Clarity training afternoon each week where the centre is manned by one or two staff members who give advice on appropriate programs and levels for individual users.'

The final significant problem is technical. Students come into the centre with their flash drives, perhaps to work on a Word document, and infect the computers with viruses. This problem is common to all institutions worldwide which do not have a sophisticated network support team – Clarity has seen it in Sri Lanka, Libya, Thailand and elsewhere – and it has the potential to bring the whole system grinding to a halt. However, at Aksum University, a solution was quickly found and implemented through a tool called Deep Freeze[6], costing around US$47 for ten workstations. Deep Freeze takes an image of the hard disk and restores it on a daily basis, so any viruses that have infected the system by day are eliminated overnight, ensuring that downtime is kept to a minimum.

Turning to the benefits, the project leaders have identified two categories: general educational and class management benefits, and those specifically related to language. The three most important general educational benefits focus on motivation, differentiation and resources, while the language benefits include exam skills, listening skills and enhanced language accuracy.

First, the project leaders identified a noticeable increase in motivation, stating that, 'The software motivates learners to spend more time learning English.' There is a wealth of literature testifying to the positive effects of ICT on student motivation. To give just one citation, a World Bank report conducted by *info*Dev found that, 'There appears to be general consensus that both teachers and students feel ICT use greatly contributes to student motivation for learning' (Trucano, 2005).

Second, 'The software enables differentiation within a group. This is invaluable in the Aksum context where there is a very wide ability range in groups.' Students are able to work on the software at their own pace, with more able learners completing set tasks and moving on to other interactive activities. Because of the way the software is designed, as they work they continue to receive feedback on their answers, independently of the teacher. This enables instructors to spend more time with less able learners, helping to bring them up to the level of the rest of the group.

A third finding is that, 'The software has proved a vital resource as the university is very limited in paper resources.' Provided there is electricity, ICT activities can be used again and again, reducing costs and eliminating the need for photocopying – or even books. It is worth noting in passing that other institutions in the region are considering putting their learning materials online for this very reason.

Turning to the language benefits, the project leaders found, *inter alia*, that, 'Road to IELTS is the most popular program in helping preparation and motivating them to take the test.' This product, developed by the British Council and Clarity, is especially useful in demystifying what can be quite an intimidating test for students based in a rural part of Ethiopia. The Speaking section of the program, for example, includes videos of the Speaking test, enabling students to see exactly what kind of set-up they will be facing, and providing practice activities to help them prepare.

In terms of specific language skills, 'The opportunity for listening is particularly valued and perceived in providing significant improvements in learners' listening skills.' At Aksum University, opportunities to interact with native speakers are limited, and access to authentic listening materials is restricted to websites such as CNN or the BBC, which are useful only for more advanced learners. The learning resources provide graded audio at all levels, from Elementary to Advanced, with the added advantage that learners have control and can listen again and again. Finally, because of the motivational aspects of the software, students are prepared to spend more time addressing language accuracy. Grammar from a book is often perceived to be pretty dull stuff, but transfer it to an interactive multimedia format and it suddenly becomes appealing to learners: 'Tense Buster has enabled them to address gaps in their grammatical knowledge. They find the instant feedback particularly useful.'

The project is only in its initial stages as at 2010, but preliminary findings are particularly encouraging, and the project is looking forward to phase two. This will involve migrating the materials online. The technology is not yet there to implement this – it is estimated that only about five per cent of students have access to the internet outside the university[7] – but an online solution will be in many ways superior. The problem of viruses will be largely eliminated, students will have access to the resources 24 hours a day, whenever they can get onto a computer, and the cost will be brought down even further. Online access to 'Road to IELTS' for a student for an entire year, for example, costs as little as $6, the price of two packets of cigarettes. However, it is important to note that in keeping with the bottom-up approach of the project, migration online will not occur until local capacity allows.

6 http://www.faronics.com/en/Products/DeepFreeze/DeepFreezeCorporate.aspx

7 The figures are from Mekelle University, Northern Ethiopia.

Concluding remarks

The online approach illustrates how projects such as the one described above can become self-funding. As each student is set up with their own account, they pay an affordable charge on an annual basis. Where the number of students is sufficiently high – and this will be thousands rather than tens of thousands – the revenue generated pays not just for the resource, but also for the training visits, so that the university can reach a point where it has no financial outlay at all. And as the money comes from the students, it is not subject to the uncertainties of institutional budgets. The whole system therefore becomes sustainable.

The bottom-up approach delivers much more for much less; and what it delivers is much more likely to be both appropriate and sustainable for end users. It relies on local infrastructure and local expertise, and provides a useful model for the integration of ICT materials – not just for English but for all subjects – as technology is increasingly adopted across the region. As Melkamu Hailu said, 'Software should be available not just at university, but also students at secondary school should have the opportunity to use it.' The success of the project at Aksum University shows this to be more than a dream: if the will is there, it is a practical and achievable aspiration.

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Effective testing: An essential requirement for English programmes

Eric Ngea Ntam

Abstract

For any learning situation and school efficiency to be considered satisfactory, there must be proof of students' progress from a low to a high achievement level. As long as teachers carry out teaching, verification of change in learners becomes important in the evaluation of not only learning, but also teaching. Since testing is the standard means of verifying the effect of teaching on the learner and the efficiency of the school, the question posed in this paper is: how can testing be effectively planned to indicate effective learning and school efficiency? Paying due attention to testing in African education systems with possible implications for Sudan, this paper considers the harmonisation of teaching syllabi and tests standardisation as an effective means of verifying school efficiency.

Introduction

State-enforced testing systems

Educational objectives are better determined by testing systems that are enforced by the state. A good testing system not only indicates learners' progress and the output of a school, but it also enhances political stability. William Jefferson Clinton, in his February 4, 1997 address entitled 'The bold new world of the 21st century', stresses quality education as the key to the development of any society. According to him, there are four main goals that Americans have to achieve through working together in the education sector:

- Every 8 year-old must be able to read.
- Every 12 year-old must be able to log onto the internet.
- Every 18 year-old must be able to go to college.
- Every adult American must be able to keep on learning for a lifetime.

Explaining how these goals could be attained, President Clinton focused on aspects that are vital to teaching and testing. According to him, there should be:

> *... a national crusade for education standards, ... representing what all our students must know to succeed in the knowledge economy of the 21st century. Every state and school must shape the curriculum to reflect these standards and train teachers to make the students reach these standards. To help schools meet the standards and measure their progress, we will lead an effort over the next 2 years to develop national tests of student achievement in reading and in maths ... Every state should adopt high national standards ... every state should test every fourth grader in reading and every eighth grader in maths to make sure these standards are met.* (Noll, 1999, p. 144)

President Clinton is eloquent on the necessity of raising and setting national standards and testing those standards. He later explained that it does not mean putting the children down, but lifting them up. This, according to him, is because:

> *Good tests will show us who needs help, what changes in teaching to make, and which schools need to improve. They can help us to end social promotion, for no child should move from one grade school to junior high or junior high to high school until he or she is ready.* (ibid.)

In order to attain national standards in our schools, there should be test acceptability since accepted credentials for excellence must be upheld through the standardised testing of all skills.

As a reaction to such a positive view towards harmonising testing uttered by President Clinton, the Republican Chester E. Finn, Jr. called on the republicans to support the endeavour because, in his opinion, the idea of standardising the testing system in the United States was not only the 'boldest idea', but equally a 'long-overdue step toward true accountability' (as cited in Noll, 1999). This emphasis on standards and effective testing evidently proves how important it is for governments and educational authorities to shift maximum attention to the testing systems used in their schools. Incidentally enough, President Clinton cites some of the major benefits of standardised testing; factors which are highlighted in the paragraphs below.

Context: A test and its characteristics

A test, according to Lefrancois (1988), is 'a collection of tasks (items or questions) assumed to be a representative sample of the behaviours that the tester wishes to assess' (p. 346). Teachers who have taught students must therefore endeavour to assess students' knowledge of what they have learnt. By doing this, they should ensure that the test covers the syllabus and that results obtained are objective, valid, reliable, unbiased and credible.

Test validity: A test is considered valid when the results measure some aspect of learning consistently over time. In other words, it is the quality of being true and rigorous. This implies that if a student passes a test given and marked by Teacher A, the student should perform similarly in that same test given and marked by Teacher B. It is necessary to mention that valid test results measure some aspect of learning consistently over time and that test results can be consistent over time without measuring what it intended to measure. Thus, to achieve test validity, teachers need to ensure that assessment tasks 'accurately measure the particular skills and proficiencies [they] set out to measure' (Davidson & Dalton, 2003, p. 128).

Test reliability: Once test results are consistent, they can be regarded as reliable; that is, they can be depended upon to decide the student's ability and/or vocational orientation.

Test bias: Test results could be considered biased when there is partiality or subjectivity in the results. Biased tests prevent objective consideration and judgement of the real level of learners. If tests remain biased, there will be little school accountability.

What are standardised tests?

Lefrancois states that standardised tests are tests which provide standards or norms by which individual learners' performance is judged. Unlike non-standardised tests which are based on teachers' discretion, standardised tests are uniform in content, administration and scoring. Tests are standardised in order to allow for the comparison of results beyond the confines of a particular classroom or school. They are typically constructed by experts in curriculum and measurement to provide accurate and meaningful information not only on a student's level of performance/vocational orientation and the objectivity of test results and comprehensible grading, but also for the improvement of the educational system in general. According to Grove (1997), a good testing system facilitates teacher assessment as it shows the need for recycling or even removing teachers who do not measure up.

Some of the major aspects of standardised tests include the student's level, the school's output and its grading system.

Student's level

Standardised tests are primarily used for selection and placement. They facilitate the selection of students for entry or placement in specific programmes like the Standard Assessment Task (SAT) used in the UK or the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) taken in the US.

In addition, this testing system aids educational authorities in deciding which students to place in specific academic tracks such as college preparation or vocational orientation. They equally promote the evaluation of the progress of students in particular subject areas.

Formal measurement of students' performance is important because it provides feedback, information and incentive. To be useful as feedback, evaluations should be as specific as possible. Evaluation can motivate students to give or improve a certain level of performance.

Improvement of educational system

A well-standardised testing system helps ministerial officials to diagnose, evaluate, account for and improve the school system. They generally reveal learning problems and strengths, indicating where modes of remediation are needed. They can greatly help ministerial and school authorities to improve the academic staff situation, and to foster the accountability of schools. Questions such as, 'Why do students in School A perform better than those in School B?' could be triggered by standard testing. Finally, the tests given to students are well designed since a panel of curriculum and measurement experts ensure their credibility and that marking/scoring follows set standards.

Grading system

The standardisation of tests influences a comprehensible grading system. In Cameroonian universities, for example, the grading of students is harmonised as follows[1]:

Marks	GPA (Grade Point Average)	Grades	Honours	Grade (*Mention*)
16–20	4.0	A, A+	1st Class	Very Good (*TB = Très Bien*)
14–15.99	3.0–3.5	B, B+	2nd Class (Lower to Upper)	Good (*B = Bien*)
12–13.99	2.5	C+	3rd Class	Fair (*AB = Assez Bien*)
10–11.99	2.0	C	Pass	Pass (P = *Passable*)

From this grading scale, it is easier to decide the admission of students from one cycle to another. For example, to qualify for Master's 2, Master's 1 students are supposed to attain a GPA of 2.5 (3rd Class or 'Assez Bien'). Decision-making is thus simple and almost automatic as a result of the well-defined testing and grading system.

Some disadvantages of standardised testing

Although standardised testing facilitates educational evaluation and accountability, such a system must be checked carefully to prevent undesirable consequences. Some educators hold the view that while standardised tests are intended to yield valid and reliable results, several problems exist:

- They give false information about the status of learning in schools. This is owing to the fact that the pressure the public puts on the school to produce good scores causes teaching to be geared towards testing; in other words, the 'teach to test' phenomenon becomes common.
- Also, school administrators may resort to selecting high-achieving students to take some tests in order to attain high overall scores. This unethical procedure makes the school appear better than it might actually be, and some students who could benefit from some of the exams are not given the opportunity to take them.
- Standardised testing could also be seen as unfair or biased against some kinds of students, such as those with limited proficiency in English, female students, and students from low-income families.
- Standardised tests tend to corrupt the process of teaching and learning, often reducing teaching to mere preparation for testing.
- Standardised tests focus time, energy and attention on the simpler skills that are easily tested, and away from higher-order thinking skills and creative endeavour.
- Grove (1997) asserts that while co-operative group grades encourage students to work as a team toward the success of all, 'high achieving students are penalised if individual grades are averaged. Criterion-referenced grading allows students to work toward some standard that is determined ahead of time, but, at the same time, sets a goal that might not be reached by anyone.' (p. 54).

To guard against these problems, educational authorities must make use of:

- assessments that are tied to the real application of learning skills
- alternative or authentic assessment systems, such as performance tests and portfolios (samples of students' compositions, projects, or other high-order thinking activities) to serve as evidence of progress
- a variety of tests; that is, a combination of systematic, objective standardised tests and authentic assessment systems that best reveal how a student is progressing.

The implementation of these and many other strategies to check some of the problems that may result from test standardisation will certainly enhance test credibility.

1 Since Cameroon uses English and French as official languages and has both bilingual and uniquely Anglo-Saxon universities, certificates from the bilingual universities carry grading rates, which appear in the last column as follows: '*mention* for grade', '*très bien* for very good', '*bien* for good', '*assez bien* for fair', and '*passable* for pass'. The third and fourth columns show the grading system used by the Anglo-Saxon universities in Cameroon.

Conclusion

A standardised testing system contributes significantly to every educational set-up. Its application not only makes the assessment of learners valid and credible, but also such a testing method facilitates school accountability and fosters a comprehensive grading system.

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The importance of continuing professional development training for teachers: The role of professional associations

Eric Ngea Ntam

Abstract

It is commonly said that teachers who cease to learn should stop teaching as continuous research and in-service training are crucial to professional development. Drawing inspiration from the Cameroon English Language and Literature Teachers Association (CAMELTA), this paper emphasises the undoubted place of in-service training in the lives of teachers. It advances the creation of teacher associations, vibrancy/sustenance strategies and some of the activities necessary for the professional development training of teachers within teacher associations. It further highlights the need for government and ministerial officials to ensure continuous teacher development through the empowerment of teacher associations.

What do practising teachers need?

In most countries in the world today, a number of government-run teacher-training colleges can be found. The training received in these colleges does not depend on the would-be teacher, but on the teacher–trainers and administration. Teacher development, on the other hand, depends on the individual practising teacher. This point of view hints at the fact that there is a fine line dividing teacher training as an *external* factor which is not influenced by the would-be teacher's ability, and teacher development which depends on the *individual* teacher. As such, to become a member of a teacher association, although optional, is a necessity for the conscientious teacher who wishes to continue to develop after training.

Peyton (1997) describes the professional state of foreign language teaching as follows:

> *The foreign language teaching profession today is faced with increasing enrolment and a shortage of qualified teachers. At the same time, a rapidly changing student population, nationwide education reform, and the development of national standards for foreign language learning are placing a number of new demands on foreign language teachers.* (no page)

Faced with this situation, Peyton quotes Curtain and Pesola (1994) who suggest that foreign-language teachers today require a combination of competencies and background that may be unprecedented in the preparation of language teachers. Peyton recommends that strong professional development is critical for the alleviation of the shortage of qualified foreign language teachers.

Based on pronouncements such as that of Peyton, and taking the case of CAMELTA as an illustration, this paper highlights the indubitable position occupied by in-service training in the enhancement of teachers' professional careers. It recommends the creation of teacher associations as a possible solution to the problem of unqualified foreign language teachers. Quoting from the works of many writers, Peyton (1997) goes further to describe the competencies that good teachers need, not only in the general area of education, but also in interpersonal skills and professional education. These are:

- the ability to comprehend contemporary media in a foreign language, both oral and written, and to interact successfully with native speakers
- pedagogical knowledge and skills, including knowledge about human growth and development, learning theory and second-language acquisition theory, and a repertoire of strategies for developing proficiency and cultural understanding in students
- knowledge of the various technologies and how to integrate them into their instruction, experiences needed for developing competencies, and resources to aid professional development
- maintaining proficiency in the target language and having up-to-date knowledge of current issues related to the target culture
- continuing to acquire new teaching skills and accumulating academic credits in order to keep their teaching licences up to date.

How and where can teachers get what they need?

As far as the above-cited needs of practising teachers are concerned, Peyton proposes a number of ways through which such needs can be fulfilled. He notes that teachers can improve their language proficiency and cultural knowledge through both formal and informal methods, such as:

- evening courses
- summer institutes and seminars
- lectures
- workshops offered by professional associations or universities
- participation in study and travel abroad programmes
- immersion weekends or monthly dinners where current events and other issues are discussed in the target language.

Creating a teacher association

One way for teachers to get what they need is to create a teacher association. According to Falcão and Szesztay (2006), there are two crucial questions to explore when setting up a new association or when thinking of ways of sustaining and revitalising an already existing one: include the issues of establishing an active membership; and find people who are ready to do voluntary work for the association.

Based on the above suggestion, it is important to emphasise that the formation of a teacher association requires the endeavour of just two or three professionals with a common vision to harness forces and encourage their colleagues to join them. Once a handful of others share their vision of creating an association, it becomes a worthwhile venture. Membership could then grow through making a list of potential members, and finding out the names of already existing associations to contact. Through the help of school heads, inspectors of pedagogy, the Ministry of Education, publishers, the British Council and other educational institutions, the initiative could be extended to all schools. The founders of the association should put in place a constitution and by-laws for members with the help of a legal adviser. Drawing up an action plan to guide and direct the activities of the term or year should be another major step for the executive board to embark upon.

What should a teacher association set out to do?

A teacher association, as established above, should be a forum for professionals who have common experiences within the teaching/learning situation in different areas of their society. Members should feel the need to meet others for comparative reasons. As such, the aims and objectives of the teacher association should be, among others, similar to the following which are upheld by CAMELTA:

- Improve the practice of language teaching and learning.
- Promote high standards of in-service training through regular seminars and workshops.
- Foster and promote scholarships relating to language teaching.
- Foster high academic and professional standards.
- Break down the isolation that teachers experience both in their classrooms and schools.
- Encourage co-operation and mutual support.
- Foster the exchange of ideas and information, resources, materials and experiences.
- Offer a regular forum for the introduction and exchange of new ideas, practices, materials and other resources.
- Provide opportunities for personal language development.
- Encourage the development of foreign language teacher identity and collegiality.
- Create a forum for the promotion of ever more teacher-friendly ELT.
- Generate networking and sharing of examples of best practice and new approaches in ELT.
- The association should be trade union-free and focus on the professionalisation of ELT in their country, through the in-service training of members.

Why will members continue to be part of the association?

Most associations that fail to respect their aims and objectives end up falling apart because members become dissatisfied and so withdraw from such groups. However, members will remain committed to an association if the following factors are met:

- The task of the association is very clear to everyone.
- The programme of activities is respected and meetings organised at the convenience of all members; and the time and duration of meetings remain as planned.
- Members discover skilfulness in the leaders and presenters.
- The topics handled are interesting and relevant to members.
- There is team spirit.
- There are possibilities of receiving visiting speakers.
- Members are able to benefit from scholarships and similar training opportunities.

What is the driving force of a teacher association?

Leadership

Leadership in a teacher association is not always the responsibility of the organisation's founding members. Rather, as Allwright, cited in Falcão and Szesztay (2006), asserts, an association's leadership requires 'people of energy, drive or influence.' These should be educators who are committed to the professions, as well as having the enthusiasm to make a difference and change things. Among other qualities, good leaders should:

- have a sense of achievement, by using the association's action plan to set goals and striving to attain them
- acknowledge, recognise and reward the hard work of volunteers
- delegate functions and work with committees when the need arises
- sacrifice and devote some of their time to problems concerning the association; sensitise and provide clarification for new members on matters of the profession.

Where can a teacher association get support?

For a teacher association to grow, the members must aim at obtaining or achieving a national status. The association should endeavour to follow an annual action plan and should operate in the course of the academic year through regional branches, while they should in turn carry out activities in their local branches.

At the individual level

Leaders of teacher associations must seek the support of all members. They must convince members to believe that everyone is indispensable if the group is to continue functioning. In other words, effort should be made by the association's leadership to discourage any form of inequality within the group. All members of the association should have an equal membership status without consideration of whether members teach at primary or secondary level, or in a rural or urban area. Furthermore, the older and more experienced teachers must embrace their younger and more junior colleagues because contributions from both age groups are beneficial to the association. That is, the young graduates are fresh from school with an up-to-date knowledge of current teaching issues/ideas on the subject, while the older generation has a wealth of teaching expertise and experience to pass on.

At the national level

The association's leaders should ideally operate as a partner with the Ministries of Education by signing a memorandum of understanding, a '*protocol d'accord*' (such as that which exists between CAMELTA and the Ministry of Secondary Education (MINESEC) in Cameroon), so that the association can enjoy privileges such as having the minister open and close their congresses each year, receiving official invitations to take part in ministerial events, and benefiting from financial and material support from the ministries.

International institutions and organisations
The national body should convene at international-level conferences during the summer holidays, with three main objectives: to share best pedagogic practices; assess/evaluate the functioning of the association through the regional or local branch presidents; and receive international keynote speakers on current trends.

To aim for greater achievement, a vibrant teacher association should enter into partnerships and affiliations with international institutions and associations, such as the British Council, the US Embassy, Macmillan, Oxford, Cambridge, International House, IATEFL, TESOL, and a host of others. As a result of forging such relationships, the association will not only benefit from receiving their affiliates' keynote speakers at their annual congresses each year, gaining grants and scholarships for their members from their partners and reaping financial and material support from them, but above all, it will also achieve the goal of improving ELT in all parts of their country.

How can a teacher association remain vibrant and grow from strength to strength?

A teacher association will remain vibrant when:

- regular seminars and workshops are organised
- members remain committed
- tasks are made clear
- networking opportunities with other associations are fostered
- topics discussed meet the expectations of members
- financial contributions remain at a minimum level
- scholarships are granted to members
- divisional branches are created
- work is carried out by committees
- partnerships with teacher-training colleges are formed
- recognition/rewards are given to hard-working members
- a simple and effective method for keeping membership records is established
- membership cards are issued
- evaluation or feedback forms are completed by participants after workshops or congresses.

How is teacher empowerment assured in a teacher association?

Teacher empowerment is assured when:

- teachers run/lead their affairs and activities
- teachers present talks, workshops and plenary sessions
- teachers produce newsletters, journals, magazines
- leaders often delegate power and assign tasks to non-executive members.

A teacher association thus becomes a forum where teachers share best practice and become assured that they belong to not only a profitable association, but also to a rewarding profession in general. A teacher association is therefore a forum where teachers keep abreast of new ideas and are given the opportunity to share, revise and recycle their methodology. Finally, a teacher association is the best and most reliable forum for in-service training, personal empowerment and development.

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Developing a comprehensive language testing system in tertiary education in Sudan

Ishraga Bashir

Abstract

This paper illustrates the challenges of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) testing, showing an example of a successful proficiency test. The studies reviewed in this article suggest that a unified English language testing system should be particularly developed as an assessment framework for universities and the workplace. It is also an attempt to raise the awareness of academics and policy-makers of the importance of developing a unified standardised test for general English and English for Specific Purposes at tertiary level. For this purpose, a workshop was held and representatives from seven universities participated in a panel discussion, with further investigation carried out based on the workshop discussion. The data was analysed statistically and the results showed that the system of testing in Sudanese universities is inadequate. Based on these findings, recommendations are drawn. First, an authorised consortium should be established. Second, a comprehensive proficiency test should be developed for different levels and different functions. Third, instead of depending on individual effort in devising and constructing such a test, a team effort is likely to yield better results.

Introduction

From the viewpoint of the relationship between language testing and language teaching, this paper presents an analytical study of the necessity for a standardised and unified English language testing system for universities in Sudan. Language assessment serves many purposes in society by enabling government to enforce its language policy; for example, the Sudanese government could make a credit pass in a Sudanese language a criterion for admission of candidates into institutions of higher learning. Language assessment, as an aspect of a language teaching programme, is important in education and is a means of equipping the workforce for effective communication. In this regard, recent developments in Sudan put the credibility of many examinations into question, as universities and organisations no longer rely solely on results from relevant examining bodies and educational institutions to make final decisions on admissions or job appointment offers, respectively. It is observed that assessment can be used to correct or minimise social problems in the allocation of opportunities, as well as to upgrade the performance of academic institutions. Testing language and evaluation act as a gate-keeping mechanism and a dynamic instrument for implementing educational policies. This is because educational targets are intricately linked with sociocultural and economic development goals, and assessment is the means of measuring and evaluating attainment by individuals and groups. In line with this summation, Cheng and Curtis (2004) outline the crucial roles that assessments played in educational reforms in the second half of the last century, including tracking and selection, programme accountability, minimum competency testing, school and district accountability, and standards-based accountability. It is believed that the standardised and unified testing system will provide beneficial backwash effects on ELT in general and universities' undergraduate and postgraduate students in particular. It also helps the policy-makers and academics, who are concerned with educational evaluation, to work together in an authorised body – such as a consortium, panel or an advisory committee – to adopt modern and scientific approaches to designing tests in a professional manner. The focus of this paper is on the rationale that a standardised and unified testing system should be developed as an assessment framework for quality ELT programmes at universities. In using the term 'standardised and unified English language testing', this paper refers to a systematic evaluation which is based on agreed testing standards of English language proficiency.

Theoretical framework of this paper

Amalgamation between competence and performance is the key factor of language testing. The acquisition of language by learners who are non-native speakers is associated with special concerns that are sometimes overlooked. A more recent view of language competence and performance suggests that, rather than being simply a front for underlying language competence, language performance is what a person really knows about language. According to this view, what the person knows is actually different in different contexts, when different modalities are used for input and output, and when different levels of support are available from the environment. Implications are considered for assessing and fostering development in the domains of phonology, lexicon, syntax, morphology, speech acts, conversation and discourse. The 'domain model' is combined with Snow's (1988) 'task model' of communicative competence, which encompasses the dimensions of audience, background and message. The combined models may be used for designing systematic assessment and intervention activities to help learners develop into competent, literate and mature communicators who can perform a variety of communicative tasks with multiple partners in variable contexts. Designers of proficiency tests should consider the amalgamation between competence and performance, as the degree of amalgamation determines the level of the learner. The following diagrams illustrate the amalgamation between competence and performance.

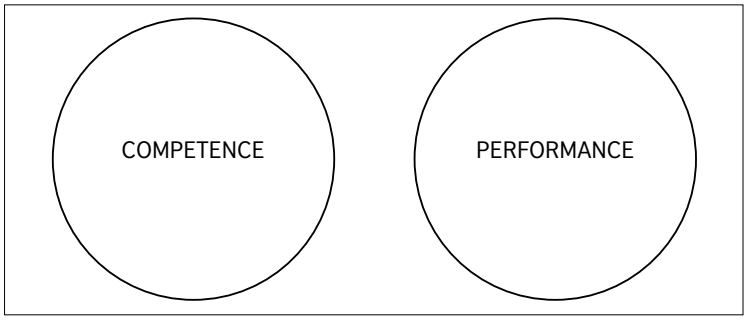


Figure 1

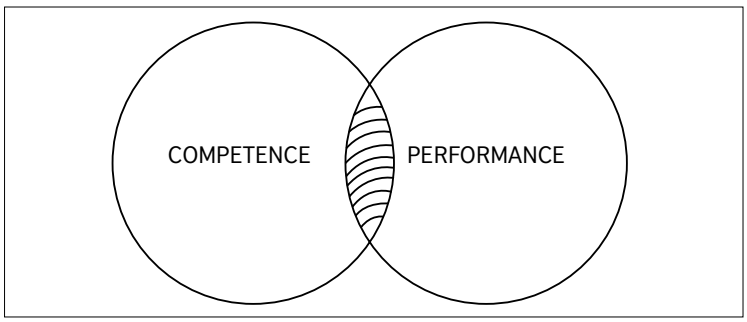
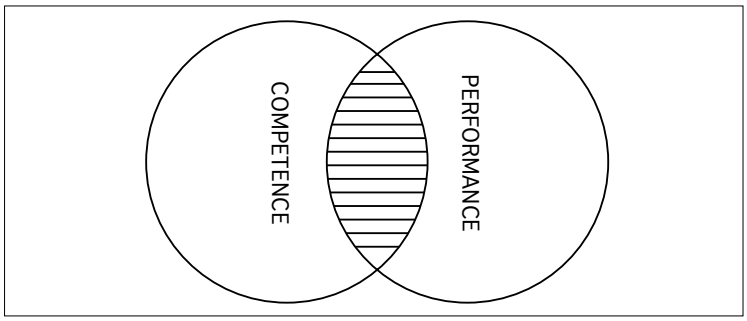


Figure 2



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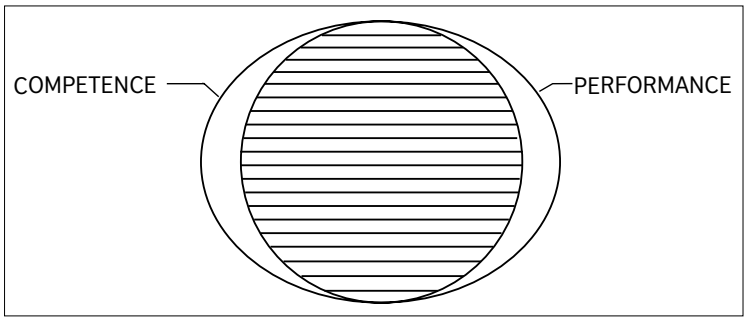

Figure 4

After considerable planning and communication across education levels, all of the above-mentioned studies have, thus far, indicated positive results in the implementation of a foreign language requirement based on tested competence. Perhaps the next question to be addressed is how students can use this newly developed language competence. From philosophy to economics, second language study complements and enriches education by offering a different key to knowledge and discovery (Brinton, Snow & Wesche, 1989). In this way, language competence is usable across the curriculum.

Standardised tests and evaluation

Standardised tests can be used to measure participant aptitudes, abilities and skills. They are so named because their administration, format, content, language and scoring procedures are the same for all participants, as these features have been 'standardised'. Standardised tests, according to Anderson (1975), attempt to provide for the measurement of individual differences in as unambiguous ways as possible (p. 384). Hogan (2007), in a paper presented at the CamTESOL Conference on English Language Teaching, defines the standardised test as: '... a public policy strategy to establish stronger accountability measures for public education. A standard test is a test designed in such a way that the questions, conditions for administering, scoring procedures and interpretations are consistent and administered and scored in a predetermined manner' (p. 1). Thus, the process of standardisation permeates all aspects of testing:

construction, administration, scoring, reporting and interpretation of results. These examinations are sometimes locally developed and sometimes commercially available – created for most achievement areas and for some aspects of language proficiency, such as the international American test of English, known all over the world as TOEFL, and the British English IELTS. When considering the definition of 'standardised test', it is clear that all high-stakes tests should be standardised. These tests are useful when selecting people for a particular programme because they are designed to differentiate amongst the test takers. In addition, norm-referenced tests can provide general information that will help with the selection of students according to overall achievement levels before placing them on a particular programme or in a particular class.

The term 'standardised test' originally meant – and still means when used precisely – a test that:

- has been carefully, expertly constructed with analysis and revision
- has explicit instructions for uniform (standard) administration
- has a table of norms (standard) for score interpretation derived from the administration of the test to a defined sample of students.

In addition, 'loosely, the term can refer to almost any published test or inventory, whether standardized in the manner just described or not' (Ebel, 1972, p. 465).

There are three categories of standardised tests:

Proficiency tests
These are designed to measure a person's ability in a language regardless of any prior training they may have had in that language. The content of a proficiency test, therefore, is not based on the content or the objectives of language courses, but on the people taking the test. Hogan (2007) defines proficiency tests as tests that 'measure what a candidate can do and cannot do at a point in time regardless of training. They are not linked to a curriculum or course but are based on a scale that describes abilities at different levels. The candidates are matched to the scale. The best known are the international proficiency tests including IELTS and TOEFL' (p. 1).

Achievement tests
These tests are directly related to language courses. Their purpose is to establish how successful individual students, groups of students or the courses themselves are. Scholastic tests, which students take at the end of the school year, represent the greatest part of these tests. These tests are designed to help place students in school classes or colleges and universities.

Diagnostic tests
As the name suggests, it is this type of test that is used to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a student in certain language elements, such as sounds, intonation, stresses, morphemes, and skills such as writing and reading. There are other types of tests, such as *placement tests*, which are intended to give information and to help place students at a certain stage or in a particular part of a teaching programme that is most appropriate to their abilities; and the *promotion test* that may be used in educational experiment. Hughes (1995) believes that if we want to compare between two methods and determine which one will lead to better results, a *pre-test* should be given to a control group and an experimental group. The last one is the *remedy test*, which is used to help select those students who need special help and treatment so as to do remedial work on the weaker areas of their knowledge. It goes without saying that the functions of such tests can apply to all subjects, including foreign languages. According to Al-Khuli (1999), the same test may perform several functions simultaneously (p. 95). A test that measures student achievement may also be used by the teacher in self-evaluation; or as a criterion to provide information on patterns and trends in syllabus success.

Current practice of ELT evaluation in Sudanese universities

English language assessment in Sudan is more judgemental than developmental; summative rather than formative. Learners do not perceive any value of such assessment. It is a mere verdict of pass or failure. Do such examinations motivate learners to perform better, or do they suffocate them? Examinations do have a powerful effect on teaching and learning. Their washback effect on both teachers and learners is no doubt profound. However, it has become obvious that language teaching and assessment are not meeting the academic, workplace and development needs of contemporary Sudan. Although curricula are regularly revised, there is no indication that language assessment is part of the consideration for revision or that revisions have impacted on language assessment and learning.

Based on the workshop, it can be said that the present English testing systems at Sudanese universities have a number of defects, which is an indication that there are problems with the criteria used for the evaluation system. If this testing system is based on proper criteria, it should lead to better results. These problems are as follows:

- A lack of logistical strategies, such as sampling of instructional objectives for the courses tested within the English setting. This reflects a situation of testing English for no good reason, apart from the fact that it is a university requirement.
- A lack of practical parameters set for the norms used for the scoring system.
- A need for more validation procedures within testing formats.
- The lack of a general framework planned by a formal academic body to co-ordinate the testing programme effectively.

Justifications for the adaptation of the proficiency test

1. After graduation, students go to private language centres and institutions in order to gain formal qualifications in English, particularly in the hope that this will improve their prospects in the job market. Comments such as 'It might help me to get a job' are common. Most students seem keen to continue taking English language proficiency tests, particularly if they are part of the curriculum and have good preparation classes with adequate teacher support and back-up materials.

   It is likely that many private institutions and centres in Sudan will go down the route of offering examination classes in the curriculum, and that there will be a movement away from English language classes with no specific goals, to those that are more goal-oriented. With an increasingly competitive job market, this kind of shift will become more widespread. Examinations that incorporate speaking, listening, reading and writing components will continue to attract students to obtain formal qualifications in English, particularly in the light of a very competitive job market for graduates.

2. Fairness is the key word in testing – a point that leads to a discussion about the moral code of testing. Each test should be fair to all candidates, regardless of their gender, language background and race. Kunnan (1998) emphasises that the most important challenge in large-scale assessment is the issue of fairness. He defines fairness in terms of the use of fair content and test methods in assessing language ability and the fair use of the scores obtained from the test. Whether test users rely on international or locally developed tests, they have a responsibility to ensure that adequate evidence exists to support the interpretations and use of the scores from the test. In cases where there is a lack of evidence available in the public domain for a high-stakes EFL measure, test score users should be cautious about the inferences they make on the basis of the scores.

3. Meeting the need for English language competency evaluation for Sudan's business community. In the age of globalisation, the use of English as the primary language for business communication has become the worldwide standard. As companies expand internationally, the ability to communicate in English has become a strategic factor for successful business planning. Multinational corporations in particular have a pressing need for tools that accurately evaluate the workplace English communication skills of current and prospective employees. The constraints of non-existent business tests at tertiary level are very real. Centralised and large-scale business English tests such as TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication), BULATS and BEC (Business English Certificate) are run at designated times, are charged on a per-head basis, have a turnaround time of a minimum of two weeks, give a one-point-in-time score that is not diagnostic, and are controlled by trained language assessors calibrated by the centralised examination body. A per-head cost, typical of the commercial business testing model, is prohibitively expensive. Universities need to know the communications demands of their students and they need to provide tests that help them to succeed in the workplace and to meet contractual obligations. No commercial testing organisation can provide this breadth of service, nor can any one-point-in-time proficiency test meet their needs.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that academics and policy-makers should consider improving the current assessment framework for graduating university students and discusses the possible impact of such a test on English language teaching and learning. Also, an authorised consortium should be established. Instead of depending on one individual's effort in devising and constructing the proficiency test, a team effort will yield better results. A consortium approach to testing enables test developers to work collaboratively on issues to be decided, such as test content, appropriate item formats, specific test objectives, writing test items, revising test items and administering the test. The consortium should be dedicated to the design and implementation of high standards and equitable proficiency tests of all levels and specifications for English language learners. Services and assignments should fall into three main categories: standards and assessments, professional development for educators, and research. The consortium's research agenda should address many hot topics from the world of English language testing. These include the implementation of standards and washback effects of assessment, and policy guidance for decision-makers. Finally, it should offer alignment studies aimed at understanding the relationship between standards and assessments, as well as the relationship between English language proficiency standard tests and academic content standards.

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Changing teachers' views about teaching and learning: A pre-requisite for improving ELT and student proficiency in English in Sudanese universities

Michael Baffoka Alexander Baffoka

Abstract

In recent years, the standard of English language in Sudanese universities has significantly decreased, with the results of internal and external examinations revealing an increasingly poor performance by students. This paper argues that our teaching–learning practices, class size and the physical classroom setting are some of the factors contributing to this decline and that teachers' classroom approaches, driven by their views about teaching and learning, are not providing the students with appropriate opportunities to improve their proficiency. The paper then proposes an alternative approach in order to teach English effectively. However, implementing this requires raising teachers' awareness of the weaknesses of their approaches and changing their views on teaching and learning. The paper concludes by suggesting ways of changing these views appropriately.

Introduction

In recent years, the standard of English language in Sudanese universities in general and at the University of Juba in particular has greatly declined. Given the increasingly poor standard of English language proficiency, it is important for teachers to re-evaluate their views about teaching and learning, and for a review of teaching–learning practices, class sizes and the physical classroom setting to take place in order that students are provided with opportunities to become proficient. This paper objectively establishes this through an analysis of classroom English language teaching and learning extracts at the University of Juba. It then proposes alternative pedagogies for effective English language teaching and learning in Sudanese institutions. However, implementing these pedagogies requires raising teachers' awareness about the weakness of didactic pedagogy which could ultimately result in a change of the views on teaching and learning. Finally, the paper suggests ways to change teachers' views about teaching and learning and bring about change in ELT in Sudanese universities.

The context

English language teaching at the University of Juba

The University of Juba was established in 1977. Since its establishment, the university has expanded from the initial 5 colleges to 13 colleges and centres of higher learning, with the total population of about 15,000 students. The medium of instruction used to be English. However, following the introduction of the Arabicisation policy in 1999, Arabic language was introduced as the medium of instruction in some of the colleges of the university, operating side by side with English language.

The educational policy introduced together with Arabicisation in 1999 has led to an increase in class size. There are classes of up to 350 students, mainly in common courses like general English. English at the university is taught for two purposes:

- as a specialised course of study at the College of Arts and Humanities and the College of Education for those specialising in TEFL
- for academic purposes in the rest of the colleges, in addition to skills for communication in the real word.

Although there is an English language syllabus for every college and specialisation which stipulates the contents/topics to be covered, there are no special coursebooks for teaching the language. Teachers are left to choose materials for teaching the topics.

Typical English language classroom teaching and learning

Classroom teaching and learning in general is governed by a number of factors, such as social, cultural, political and professional factors (Mercer, 2001). However, the views of both the teacher and the learners about teaching and learning and their own assumed roles (Wright, 1987) influence how they interact in the teaching and learning process. The way we teach is governed by our views about teaching and learning as a result of our previous experience through observation (while as a student), reading literature about teaching and learning, or as a result of training. As Tsui (2003), cited in Wright (2005), asserts:

> *Teachers have their own personal conceptions of teaching and learning which are influenced by their personal life experience, beliefs and values, their disciplinary training [subjects], their teaching and learning experiences, and their professional training if they have any.* (p. 266)

The following two extracts are taken from English language lessons that I attend as an observer for developmental purposes. My interest is in the teaching–learning dynamic in the classroom. The wording in each extract is from transcripts of an audio recording. In each extract, **T** represents the teacher, **S** represents student (singular), **SS** represent students (plural) and my own personal comments are shown in parentheses. In analysing these extracts, I hope to identify the weaknesses of the university's teaching–learning process which I believe could explain why Sudanese students' proficiency levels never improve, despite the tutors' best efforts in teaching.

Extract 1

This is a general English lesson given to first-year students at the College of Natural Resources and Environmental Studies at the University of Juba. The lecturer is a senior lecturer at the College of Education.

This is a class of about 350 students seated in nine or ten rows at fixed benches behind desks arranged in three columns facing the blackboard, in a large lecture theatre. The teacher enters and takes his place on the podium at the centre front of the classroom with the blackboard behind him. The lesson begins.

T: Good morning class.

SS: Good morning, Sir. (*There is some noise as students prepare to take notes.*)

T: Well, my name is M.S. I am your English teacher for this semester. Before we start, I would like to give you the course outline. (*He writes the outline on the board. Students copy the outline.*)

T: OK. When we speak or write, what do we use? (*There is silence.*) Can anyone tell me? (*Again, there is silence.*)

T: OK. When we speak or write, we use words to express our ideas. These words are connected in a special way to express a full meaning. These groups of words form a sentence. (*He writes 'sentence' on the board.*)

T: Now, what is a sentence?

S1: A sentence is a group of words.

T: Well, you are right, but … (*He writes the following on the board: 'friend is my best Ali'.*) This is a group of words. Is it a sentence?

SS: No.

T: What, then, is a sentence? (*There is silence.*)

T: OK. A sentence is a group of words grammatically connected that gives a complete meaning/sense. For example: Oxygen is a gas. Plants need water, sunlight and warmth in order to grow. Oxygen combines with hydrogen to form water.

T: Can you give me more examples? (*Students contribute a number of examples.*)

T: A sentence of this type is called a simple sentence. There are three types of sentences: simple, compound and complex.

T: Now, compound sentences. (*He writes on the board.*) These are two simple sentences joined together by words such as *and*, *or* and *but*. What do we call words like *and* and *but*?

SS: Conjunctions …

Extract 2

This is a grammar lesson given to second-year students at the College of Education. The teacher is a senior lecturer at the college.

This is a class of about 75 students seated in four or five rows in fixed benches behind desks arranged in three columns in a large lecture theatre facing the blackboard. The teacher enters, takes his place on the podium and starts to arrange his lecture papers. There follows a lot of noise as the students flip sheets of paper in their notebooks to prepare for the lecture.

1 **T:** (*The teacher raises his head and looks at the class. Dead silence descends on the room.*) OK. Today we are going to look at the English tenses of the verb. (*He writes the topic in the centre of the board.*) 'Tense' refers to verb form with respect to the time of action. English tenses are broadly classified into three, with sub-classifications. These include the present tense (*draws a line from the topic at the centre and*
5 *writes 'present tense'*), the past tense (*draws another line and writes 'past tense'*) and the future tense (*the same action is repeated*). These broad categories are further classified into the simple present tense, the present continuous tense and the present perfect tense. (*Again, he draws lines to connect to present tense.*) The past is classified into the past simple tense, the past continuous (progressive) tense and the past perfect tense. (*These are also connected to past tense.*) The future tense is classified into the future
10 simple, the future progressive and the future perfect. (*He draws lines to connect the three classifications to future tense, while students busy themselves with taking note*s.)

OK. Now we have to look at each tense in detail. We will begin with the simple present tense. (*He writes 'simple present tense' at the top left corner of the board.*)

The simple present tense is used for permanent truths, habitual actions and states. It is used with adverbs
15 of time such as *always*, *usually*, *frequently*, *rarely*, *seldom*, *every day*, *every week*, *month*, *season*, *year*, etc. For example: *It rarely rains in Khartoum*. (*He writes two examples on the board.*)

T: Now, who can give me another example of these types? Ali? Yes, Mary?

S: I always go to bed at ten o'clock.

19 **T:** Yes, because you are a lazy student. (*There is an uproar of laughter.*)

The lesson continues for two hours.

Analysis

Let us examine the extracts above and look at what the transcripts reveal about the way the teachers teach; what roles both the teacher and the learners assume in the learning process and what the implications are for the learning process.

Extract 1

What is immediately striking from Extract 1 is the dominance of teacher talk. Apart from the students' response to the teacher's greeting in line 2, the teacher dominates the talk until line 9, where student participation begins. This is only a response to the teacher's question. This response is repeated in line 12 (**SS**: *No*) in chorus to the teacher's question. The teacher then dominates the talk until line 21. We see the students' contribution again in line 22 (**SS**: *Conjunctions*) in the form of an answer to a question.

What is clear here is that the teacher explicitly conveys the facts about the language to the students instead of helping the students to work out the facts for themselves. The teacher here plays the role of an instructor and explainer. For example, he instructs the students about what a sentence is: *OK. A sentence is a group of words grammatically constructed that gives a complete meaning/sense (line 14)* and *A sentence of this type is called a simple sentence … (line 18).* He is the source of knowledge and students are passive receivers of knowledge. The teacher's questions, as Van Lier (2001) puts it, 'require students merely to recite previously learned items [or] to see if students know certain words or linguistic items' (p. 94). This is clearly demonstrated in lines 8, 9, 10, 11, 20 and 21. For example, **T**: *Now, what is a sentence?* (*line 8, question*). **S**: *A sentence is a group of words* (*line 9, answer*). This pattern of talk is what Van Lier (2001) refers to as 'IRF' – initiation, response and feedback – and points out that it restricts student opportunities to exercise initiative or develop a sense of control and self-regulation (p. 96). Students' interaction among themselves or with the teacher is absent in the extract. The pattern of interaction is teacher to whole class. This is clearly demonstrated by the way he asks questions. The questions are addressed to the whole class.

Extract 2
Like Extract 1, teacher dominance is immediately apparent in Extract 2. There is a one-way flow of information. The teacher does all the talking and students receive the information passively. Here, the role of the teacher is clearly that of lecturing, while the students are passive listeners. If learning is viewed as actively constructed by the learner, it could be argued that the sense of the learner, learning need and indeed of learning itself, is lost. 'Learning is [therefore] reduced to a function of instruction, explanation and understanding' (Griffin, 2002, p. 62). The student's participation in line 18, like the pattern in Extract 1, is just a response to the teacher's question. Hence, the pattern is also an IRF. For example, **T**: *Now, who can give me an example of these types? Ali? Yes, Mary?* (*line 17, initiation*). **S**: *I always go to bed at ten o'clock* (*line 18, response*). **T**: *Yes, because you are a lazy student* (*line 18, feedback*). What is also striking here is that the teacher's response in line 19 (**T**: *Yes, because you are a lazy student*) is sarcastic instead of giving praise. The amount of information the students have to absorb is nevertheless enormous; the teacher here uses a mind map to ease the students' note-taking. The degree of the teacher's authority and control is seen right at the beginning of the lesson when his look at the class (*line 1*) immediately brings complete silence.

From this analysis, the views about teaching and learning seem to be as follows:

- Teaching is viewed as transmission of knowledge and learning as accumulation of knowledge.
- Learning language means learning the grammar of the target language. If students master the grammar of the language, they will be able to communicate.
- Learning and teaching require complete order. Learning happens when conditions are controlled in a way that teachers can instruct and students do as they are instructed (Doyle, 1986, as cited in Wright, 2005, p. 123).
- Good teaching entails transmitting explicit facts to the learner, and learners are 'empty vessels' to be filled with knowledge.

It could be argued here that these driving views about teaching and learning could have a negative influence on learning; teacher dominance and authority, class size and the physical classroom setting deprive the students of opportunities to take an active role in constructing their learning (Wright, 2005). For if learning is viewed as actively constructed by the learner, the teaching–learning processes exemplified by the two extracts do not help.

Generally in institutionalised education, learning is viewed as an activity engaged and driven by teaching, with the belief that 'if we get teaching right, learning will happen as a fairly straightforward consequence' (Claxton, 1991, p. 31). If learning is a consequence of 'good' teaching, the questions that need to be asked are: What form of teaching is good teaching that ultimately results in learning? Which methods, approaches and modes of teaching enhance language learning? Answering these questions requires a brief examination of various theories of learning that have been developed to account for how people learn.

Brief review of the various theories of learning

The *behaviourist* theory of learning

The behaviourist approach to learning views learning as 'any more or less permanent change in behaviour which is a result of experience' (Sotto, 1994, p. 21). In education, the behaviourist approach to learning believes that learning could be improved by making explicit what to learn and tasks should be broken down into small sequential steps (Williams & Burden 1997, pp. 7–9). This view about learning is limited and inefficient because it does not encourage learners to think but only to conform to the accepted position (Sotto, 1994, pp. 25–27). The weakness of this view led to the cognitive or constructivist theory of learning.

The *cognitive* or *constructivist* theory of learning

The cognitive or constructivist theory of learning sees learning as mentally constructed by the child and is governed by age (Williams & Burden, 1997; Sotto, 1994). In education, the constructivists' view, as Williams and Burden (1997) point out, is that 'The teacher cannot tell students what concept to construct or how to construct but by judicious use of language they can be prevented from constructing in directions which the teacher considers futile but which as he knows from experience are likely to be tried' (p. 49).

This view is also proved to be weak because it considers learning as an entirely individual mental process. Criticism of this led to the social constructivist theory of learning.

The *social constructivist* theory of learning

The social constructivists believe that learning has a social dimension. They believe that one learns through contact with others and that successful learning is dependent on the type of social contacts between people with diverse 'levels of skills and knowledge' (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 43).

This approach, therefore, recognises both the mental and social aspects of learning and emphasises the importance of interaction in a social context through communication with others.

In the teaching–learning extracts analysed above, learning is viewed as transmission of knowledge; in this case, knowledge about language and learning is accumulation of this knowledge. The teacher's role is to transfer facts about language and the student's role is to receive, store and digest the information about language (Van Lier, 2001, p. 309). Learning, then, seems to be viewed as an increase in knowledge through the absorption and assimilation of information by the teacher rather than the learner.

Learning anything demands more than just receiving, storing and mentally analysing the language data. It requires the active participation of the learner. The view about learning and teaching as exemplified by the transmission mode in the two extracts is a narrow view which could result in ineffective learning. As Howe (1998) explains, learning 'refers not only to one kind of activity, but a whole family of process and mental event that … allow people to add to their knowledge, increase their skills and capabilities' (p. 10).

What Howe describes here is not a passive process as demonstrated by the two extracts above, but a process that requires the active participation of the learner in a social interaction. Simply telling students the right concept cannot work because change involves an active working upon and interaction between the old way of thinking and the new (Ramsden, 1999, p. 21).

Teaching therefore becomes a matter of availing opportunities for learners so that learners may find opportunities for learning that are significant to them. As Jarvis (2002) further puts it, 'Teaching is an intentional activity in which opportunities to learn are provided' (p. 23). However, the notion of opportunity for learners is directly linked to the type of classroom management. Wright (2005, pp. 122–125) comments on opportunity and classroom management. He points out that in the opportunity view of classroom management, the emphasis is on creating learning opportunity, and control is seen simply as one aspect of procedure to promote and encourage learning and self-control and reduce lockstep classroom activity and direct teaching.

Hence, in a classroom situation where the teacher has complete control, learners are very unlikely to have opportunities to learn effectively. Furthermore, situations where teachers and learners are used to an order regime, as Wright (2005) further points out: 'Opportunity-oriented management strategy is likely to prove more risky … [yet] it is also likely to lead to more contingent patterns of classroom discourse … [which] provide learners with more opportunities to engage in more conversational talk' (pp. 125–126).

The transmission mode exemplified in the two extracts above does not create opportunities for the students to practise language in more creative ways, such as experimenting with new types of language construction (Mercer, 2001, p. 245). Reliance on one mode of teaching has the consequence that students are not introduced to a variety of learning modes which would connect to the learning styles of most students and enlarge their repertoire of learning styles to enable them to flourish in a greater range of settings outside academic life (Brookfield, 1990, p. 70). Hence, it could be argued here that this mode of teaching does not increase the capability of students to learn more effectively since it does not provide a supportive learning environment in the classroom.

Transfer of learning

The view that students will transfer classroom learning into the real world is one of the driving forces behind teaching. This view of learning as transfer could not be enhanced by the type of teaching illustrated in the two extracts above. Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000), in discussing learning and transfer, state that the transfer of learning is dependent on initial learning (learning that is not merely an accumulation of facts) and that learning that is not overtly contextualised can reduce transfer. They believe that transfer should be viewed as an active, dynamic process rather than just a passive end product of a particular set of learning experiences:

> *Transfer is affected by the degree to which people learn with understanding rather than merely memorize sets of facts or follow a fixed set of procedures … (and that) students who only memorize facts [about language] have little basis for approaching this kind of problem solving task.* (pp. 53–54).

Learning, on the other hand, need not to be rushed. It takes time (Claxton, 1999) to develop pattern-recognition skills that support the fluent identification of meaningful patterns of information plus knowledge of their future outcomes (Bransford, Brown & Cocking, 2000, p. 52). For students to learn with understanding, they need time to explore, digest and see connections between the language information they have. Attempts to cover many topics too quickly within a short period, as seen in the two extracts, could inhibit learning and ultimately transfer due to the fact, as stated by Bransford, Brown and Cocking (2000, p. 53), that students:

- may learn only isolated sets of facts that are not organised and connected
- are introduced to organising principles that they cannot grasp because they lack enough specific knowledge to make them meaningful.

If it is viewed that students will transfer classroom learning into the real world, then such practices as illustrated by the two extracts cannot help. There is a need to incorporate real-world language use (authentic language) into our teaching–learning process rather than giving them isolated sets of facts. Students ought to be helped and encouraged to practise the language.

The physical classroom setting and its impact on learning

Research and specialist literature on the physical classroom setting (Breen, 2001a; Shamim, 1996; Wright, 2005; Van Lier, 2001, inter alia) indicates that the physical classroom setting affects the type of interaction between teachers and learners. In the two extracts above, the seating arrangement determines the pattern of interaction, which in both extracts is teacher to whole class. This pattern of interaction deprives the students of the chance to interact among themselves which could have resulted in more active roles being played by the students. For Mercer (1995, p. 94) shows that when learners engage in open extended talk, they take both an active role and independent ownership of knowledge.

The classroom setting must regularly provide learners with opportunities to engage in symmetrical interaction since such interaction immerses learners in contextualised and contingent talk, and is intrinsically motivating and attention-focusing (Breen, 2001a; Van Lier, 2001). Although this pattern of interaction is possible in a traditional classroom depending on how the teacher involves the learners (Holliday, 1997), it is missing in the two extracts analysed above. The result of this could be that students do not develop ways of using language. For as Mercer (1995) argues:

> *Education ought to be a means of helping learners develop ways of using language as a social mode of thinking and this is hardly likely to be successful if their opportunities for using language are limited to a narrow slot with conversation with teachers* (p. 61).

Symmetrical interaction is, therefore, important in education for the construction of knowledge. For through interaction with the teacher, students can engage in constructive discussion (Mercer, 1995, p. 104). The interaction pattern shown in the two extracts above does not enhance active participation of the learners in the construction of learning.

Class size and its influence on learning

The size of class is another influential factor in the pattern of classroom interaction. It also determines participation of the students in classroom activities. Class size further determines the amount of follow-up of the learners' learning by the teacher. Shamim (1996, p. 128), commenting on the interaction pattern in large class sizes, points out that the degree of participation in any classroom activities is greatly related to student location: only those in the front rows actively participate in the lesson. Furthermore, as Wright (2005) remarks, 'the crowdedness of classrooms, combined with shortage of material and time, forces teachers to adopt particular management practices to make the task easier' (p. 68). Moreover, the adoption of a particular management practice could also affect the type of participation which could influence learning positively or negatively. In the two extracts analysed above, there is therefore the possibility that only students in the front rows have an active involvement in the lesson. Even so, the type of participation, as demonstrated by the extracts, could not enhance language learning, since learning requires the learner to actively engage in the learning process.

Alternative pedagogies

In the analysis above, I have shown that the transmission mode of teaching reduces students to passive recipients of knowledge; hence, it falls short of enhancing effective learning. In this section of the paper, I will try to search for alternative pedagogies that could effectively maximise student involvement in the learning process. However, I should state here that this does not mean that didactic methods, particularly lectures, do not have their place in classroom language teaching and learning. What I am emphasising is that this method should be reduced to a supportive role mainly for conveying facts. Lectures have to be adapted more closely to students' learning needs and styles and should be confined to conveying information, but they should incorporate a variety of interactive learning activities (Griffin, 2002, p. 67).

Interactive pedagogy

In interactive teaching and learning, a variety of modes of input are used rather than reliance on direct instruction as demonstrated by the two extracts above. In this kind of pedagogy, learners are allowed to make their own decisions and the teacher takes the role of facilitator. The focus is not only on the 'how' and 'what' of the learning; hence, the facilitator's role is to make the purpose of the learning process explicit rather than the learning itself and to provide 'a safe and challenging environment where learners can take risks' (Askew & Carnell, 1998, p. 76). Jones (1988) defines this type of pedagogy as:

> *… a wide range of activities in which participants [learners] in an event interact with each other for the purpose of [learning]. The events include discussion, exercises, role-play, simulation and games … the teacher either abandons or reduces the amount of direct instruction and takes the role of facilitator …* (p. 7)

One thing that can be grasped immediately from this definition of interactive pedagogy is the reduction of the teacher's role and an increase in the students' active participation. The learning organisations and the types of learning events allow both symmetrical (student–student, student–teacher) and asymmetrical (teacher–student) interaction patterns. Learners are encouraged to work in groups, interacting among themselves and with the teacher. Hence, this type of pedagogy has the potential to enhance effective learning. This is because working in groups, as Askew and Carnell (1998) point out, is more likely to bring about change in individuals, since change in an individual is aided 'by the support of the group' (p. 46).

Exploratory pedagogy

Like interactive pedagogy, exploratory pedagogy, as explained in Rowland (1993), emphasises active involvement of the learner in the construction of their learning. It rejects the explicit instruction of isolated information and gives great responsibility to learners to formulate their own hypotheses. It is characterised by an inductive approach to learning in which learners do not only have access to the content to be learnt, but are also provided with structured opportunities to work out rules, principles and applications for themselves. This enables learners to deeply process and store information instead of being given rules and principles to follow. In language learning, learners are given opportunities to develop their own understanding of the grammatical principles of English by progressively structuring and restructuring the language through inductive learning experiences that encourage them to explore in context. Over time, learners encounter target language items in an increasingly diverse and complex range of linguistic and experiential environments. Through their involvement in activities like role-play and practice simulations, they develop the ability to carry out creative learning projects outside the classroom. Hence, in the case of language learning, learners develop independence, learn how to function as communicators themselves, and learn to use language outside the classroom.

Interactive and exploratory pedagogies as discussed above stand out as better alternatives for language teaching and learning pedagogies as compared to didactic pedagogy. Second language acquisition (SLA) theories recognise that learning does occur in practice and that the 'more frequently individuals practise certain skills, procedures or behaviours, the more likely they are to habitualise their process, internalise their knowledge' (Jarvis, 2002, p. 124) and that learning (in this case language learning) 'always takes place in a social context' (Wright, 2005, p. 201).

Learning a second language requires the learner to actively engage in the learning process. This entails that there should be a connection between didactic and conversational forms of interaction. For as Van Lier (2001) points out:

> *If the view of the relation between language learning and social interaction has merit, then the dynamic connection between more didactic (asymmetrical, less contingent) and more conversational (asymmetrical, more contingent) forms of interaction are of crucial importance in language learning.* (p. 103)

Through a reduction in the didactic form of interaction, students will actively participate in constructing language, thereby practising the language. The need for active participation by the language learner has been raised by Breen (2001b, p. 309). He argues that language learners need to participate actively within the discourse of the learning context in which they find themselves, in addition to being interpretive, accommodating and strategic. This is because being accommodating as a language learner does not necessarily result in competence and fluency. How these two pedagogies are actually used in language teaching is beyond the scope of this paper.

Summary of advantages of interactive and exploratory language teaching pedagogies

As previously stated, interactive and exploratory language pedagogies stand out as better alternatives in English language teaching and learning as compared to didactic pedagogy. In contexts like Sudan, where the chance for students to practise English language is limited to the classroom since the wider social context does not provide them with the opportunities to use the language, increasing the opportunities for the students to practise in the classroom is vital. However, these pedagogies require a reduction of teacher-fronted activities to increase learner–learner interaction, which provides learners with opportunities to practise language. This could only be possible if the classroom settings in Sudan undergo change to permit increased learner–learner interaction and a reduction in class sizes. The advantages of these two pedagogies in ELT can be briefly summarised as follows:

- These approaches to language teaching and learning actively involve learners in their learning process through the use of a variety of tasks and activities.
- Both involve collaborative learning, which is an effective means of enhancing leaning. For as Askew and Carnell (1998) point out, 'collaborative groups contain the potential for support, challenges and feedback for learners to co-operate and collaborate' (p. 46). Through group work, learners develop the ability to communicate through classroom tasks which enables them to 'approximate real-life things they will need to be able to do' to communicate in the real world (Nunan, 1999, p. 84).
- Learner–learner interaction is increased; hence there is an increase in comprehensive input, through the establishment of 'social interaction for language procession' (Van Lier, 1996, p. 54).

- Exposing learners to authentic samples of language and allowing them to construct their own grammatical rules or principles enables them to note how different linguistic items operate in different contexts, thus enabling them to develop communicative competence.
- Through the use of a variety of activities, attention is paid to all the language skills.

Suggestions for bringing about change in ELT in Sudanese universities

First, in order to effect changes in ELT at tertiary level as proposed by this paper, teachers' views about teaching and learning, and subsequently their classroom teaching practices, need to change. This is because teachers can hardly be expected to create the conditions in their classrooms in which students can develop if they themselves have not had such similar experiences. Similarly, students cannot be expected to develop confidence in their own knowledge and judgement if their teachers are trained to merely implement the decision of distant and authoritative experts without being encouraged to assume an 'agentive role' (Wells, 2002, p. 204).

There are a number of ways to bring about change in English language teaching and subsequently raise the standard of English language in Sudanese universities. These include the following:

- Raise teachers' awareness of the weakness of didactic pedagogy, and change their views about teaching and learning and their classroom practices. This could be through:

    1. Extensive reading of contemporary literature about teaching and learning, and implementing what they have learnt about teaching and learning in their classroom practice.
    2. Encouragement of peer observation practices for developmental purposes. In such observation, the observer will pick up new ideas and teaching skills, and through reflection and discussion with a peer, the observer's awareness about alternative pedagogies will be raised.
    3. Reflection on their own teaching practices through action research, i.e. by conducting classroom research to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching methods, and making their research findings public, to be shared with colleagues.
    4. Educational intervention through in-service training in the form of short courses, which will provide teachers with the opportunities to experience the strengths of alternative pedagogies.

- In addition to changing teachers' views and classroom practices which are crucial for bringing about change in ELT in Sudanese universities, there is a need to consider a change in classroom settings and a reduction in class sizes. Once this is achieved, I believe there will finally be a change in ELT, with raised standards of English in Sudanese universities.

Summary

In this paper, I have tried to show – through an analysis of classroom English language teaching and learning extracts – that the transmission mode of teaching does not involve learners effectively in the learning process. The reliance on didactic pedagogy and other factors like classroom settings and class sizes are some of the factors contributing to students' low proficiency levels. I have also suggested alternative pedagogies which I believe would enhance English language teaching and learning in Sudanese universities. However, implementing these pedagogies requires changing the views of teachers about teaching and learning. Finally, I have suggested how this could be achieved.

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English for the workplace: Giving students language skills for future employment

Tohmoh Joseph Yong

Abstract

Graduates from Sudanese universities are likely to face difficulties coping with communication in positions in which the working language is English. This is not only because the amount of time they spend learning English and their exposure to English are insufficient, but also because the courses offered do not prepare them adequately for the job market. This paper will present three steps for conceiving an acceptable curriculum that would enable Sudanese students to use English appropriately at work after graduating, namely: identifying specific workplaces in which the language of communication is English; designing language modules based on the way English is used in these workplaces; and inserting the modules into the relevant curricula.

Introduction

After leaving higher education, most graduates – especially in non-English speaking countries – are usually embarrassed that they do not possess the required competences in English to meet the needs of a complicated globalised English-oriented job market (Car, 2007). This statement may be true of graduates from Sudanese business schools as well as those from the faculties of the various universities where exposure to English is limited (Bishop, 2004). It is also most likely that the English taught does not provide the students with the necessary entry-level skills needed for English-oriented jobs (Al-Maghrabi, 2009). While this scenario exposes the shortcomings of the tertiary education sector, it equally indicates the complicated nature of workplaces that are always undergoing changes and thus are difficult to cater for. At the end of the day, an atmosphere of suspicion reigns between society and the higher education sector because parents, having invested greatly in the education of their children as a way of saving for the future in the hope that they will get lucrative jobs after graduation, and subsequently take care of them when they retire (Caucutt & Lochner, 2011), cannot understand why their children are not employed after graduation, especially when lack of English communicative competence is the reason (Friedenberg et al., 2003).

To bridge this gap, a complete change of orientation for curricula design in the tertiary sector is recommended. Competency-based English for the workplace curricula would very aptly respond to the needs of the entire education community in the higher education sector. A person can be declared competent only when faced with a specific situation which he is expected to resolve; he is able to mobilise all necessary resources; and he can complexly organise and integrate them to successfully solve it (Jonnaert, 2007; Roegiers, 2006; Lasnier, 2000). Since, in the workplace, workers are constantly faced with language situations which they need to deal with, it is imperative that in training, they should be taught in such a way that they can successfully handle language situations appropriately at work. This paper will present three steps for a conceivable curriculum that would provide Sudanese students with an acceptable command of English appropriate for use in the workplace. These steps are:

- identifying specific workplaces in which the language of communication is English
- designing language modules based on the way English is used in these workplaces
- inserting the modules into the relevant curricula.

Identifying specific workplaces in which the language of communication is English

Context

The first step is to define the specific context in which the English learnt in the universities is to be used in real life. 'Context' refers to a large or restricted spatial, temporal, cultural, religious, social or economic setting within which one finds oneself at a particular time in history (Jonnaert, 2007). In this paper, we will consider first the Sudanese context, second the regional context, third the African context, and finally the general world context. Language learning without a proper integration of context is said to be de-contextualised (Jonnaert, ibid.) and thus learnt for its own sake and not to be used to solve pertinent problems in society. A clear definition of context is thus recommended as a starting point for putting in place suitable English language curricula for Sudanese universities.

Once the context has been defined, the next step is to identify the various kinds of workplaces in which English is indispensable for work to be carried out successfully. Here, an exhaustive inventory of such workplaces both in Sudan and outside of Sudan is required, such as banks, hospitals, the hospitality (tourism) industry, airports or business establishments. In doing so, the following questions need to be answered: What types of services are offered in these places? Who are the clients for these workplaces and what is likely to be their linguistic backgrounds – are they mostly foreigners, nationals, or both? Who works in the various departments of each workplace? What academic and

professional backgrounds do they require? Can they be university graduates or must they be graduates from business schools? These and many more considerations will give an idea of the types of workplaces for which English taught in universities is meant to be used.

Situation

It should be borne in mind that work in each workplace begins at a particular time and ends at a particular time. Within this timeline, workers and their clients are actively involved in performing one activity after another. This means that an entire working day can be divided into moments or situations within which 'things are being done'. The effectiveness of the use of language is judged by the ability of those involved within each situation to use the right language to deal successfully with each situation (Jonnaert, 2007). Any viable English programme will need to take into consideration the various situations in each type of workplace. Does the role involve welcoming and orientating a customer, or writing memos, dealing with queries, giving directives, commands and/or chairing meetings? What types of skills are needed for each situation: listening and/or speaking, reading and/or writing skills? What is the proportion of each skill vis-à-vis the other? What is the nature of the activities in the situation? Do they entail accuracy and precision as in the medical and civil aviation industries, or elegance and creativity as in journalism and politics? For English to be meaningful in Sudanese universities, we must have a comprehensive inventory of all possible situations in each workplace.

Actions and their categories

A proper definition of the situations will lead to the identification of the categories of actions, as well as the actions, that learners would need to undertake in order to deal with the situations (Jonnaert, 2007). For example, to work at the reception desk of a hotel in Khartoum, oral skills are needed in order to interact with customers on a day-to-day basis. This represents a category of actions that can be subdivided into very specific actions representing exactly what a receptionist does every day; for example, receiving and welcoming a customer, finding out personal information about a customer, informing a customer about the price of rooms, and informing a customer about services offered in the hotel. It will therefore be necessary to spend time preparing an exhaustive list of the categories of actions, as well as their related actions, for each workplace.

Designing language modules based on the English used in the workplaces

Identification of resources

When the context has been clearly defined, the situations properly identified and the actions necessary to deal with such situations adequately isolated, it can be concluded that the foundation for English language teaching and learning has been laid because there is now a very clear idea of the nature of the Sudanese workplace. What is left to be done is to design the language modules needed for each workplace. Each module will need to consist of the resources necessary to solve a language problem within a given situation. Such resources have been classified by Jonnaert (2007) and Lasnier (2000) as:

- knowledge
- attitudes
- human and social resources
- material and financial resources.

Knowledge

Knowledge of English is the main resource necessary to deal effectively with situations that require communication in English. It should be noted here that English knowledge is only one of the many resources. It is not thus used for its own sake, but for the purpose of dealing with specific situations. English language knowledge here would include: language functions, language strategies, vocabulary, phonology and linguistic conventions. Grognet (1996) has classified specific language needs for workplaces under six broad categories, namely:

- workplace communication expectations
- following directions and instructions
- job-specific terminology
- cross-cultural factors
- company organisation and culture
- upgrading and training.

Attitudes
To successfully manage a situation, not only is linguistic competence needed, but equally attitudes such as politeness, respect, tolerance and patience. It should be noted that business transactions sometimes fail because those involved do not usually possess the right attitudes in dealing with situations that occur. It is therefore important for an inventory of attitudes necessary for Sudanese situations to be identified and integrated into the teaching of English in universities.

Resources
A person's ability to manage a situation sometimes depends on his capacity to make use of the people around him. For each situation, it is therefore necessary to identify the type of human resources that are likely to be useful in managing that situation. These may be colleagues, customers and/or service providers.

In addition to human resources, material resources also need to be made available in order to deal successfully with a situation. This means that in designing an English programme, care must be taken to include all material resources that may be required for any possible situation. These include instructional materials such as textbooks, pens, pencils, papers, computers, telephones, CDs and cassettes, and dictionaries.

Evaluation
Here, the various indicators for the evaluation of learning need to be identified. This can be done under two main headings; namely outcomes and criteria. It will be necessary to monitor any clear indicators of specific behaviour changes observed in the learners after going through a particular situation; for example, interacting orally with peers and the teacher during role-play, group work and simulations, and writing specified business letters and reports. Similarly, clear-cut criteria for assessing learner achievement should be established for each outcome; for example, comprehensibility in oral communication, appropriate use of linguistic conventions in writing, and the adequate use of vocabulary related to specific workplace situations.

Needs analysis and intervention procedures
Before discussing the inclusion of the modules in the faculties' curricula, the following questions need to be answered: *Who* is going to do *what*, *when*, *where*, *how* and *with what*? In other words, who is going to identify the workplaces and who is going to design the language modules? When is the work going to be done? Where is it going to be done? How is the work going to be done? What are the resources necessary to do the work? Who, how and when is the programme going to be evaluated?

Grognet (1996) and Utechte (2005) agree that a tripartite approach is necessary to arrive at the needs of a specific workplace. In other words, the views of the employees and students, those of managers and employers, as well as those of educators, should be analysed and synthesised. These views themselves can be achieved through a variety of data-collection strategies such as interviews/surveys, observations, and ideas emerging from the classroom in the course of teaching. Experts from various universities, and perhaps with the assistance of technical structures like the British Council, can analyse and interpret the data. Once the data is collected, Grognet (1996) proposes five steps necessary to establish a programme. To begin with, those concerned need to organise or prioritise the data according to the needs of each specific workplace situation. Second, the educators should design learning tasks and activities. Third, they have to define the roles of instructors and learners, as well as produce the instructional material. Furthermore, the designers need to indicate how they are going to assess performance outcomes, understanding and progress. Finally, the educators should suggest how the programme is going to be evaluated on both a formative and a summative base. In brief, proper needs analysis will lead to the establishment of two lists:

- a list of the workplaces and their contextualised situations
- a prioritised list of the language needs of each workplace.

The questions as to *when*, *where* and *with what?* can best be answered by the relevant university authorities in Sudan. This is because political support is indispensable for reforms to go through. The extent of the reform-piloting and implementation would depend on the timeframe and on the material, financial and human resources available. In addition to the various types of materials that require some investment, much of the expense will be incurred bringing in foreign experts, hiring national experts and training all those who would be involved in the entire process. In order to be able to mobilise such funds to invest in workplace-related English in the tertiary education sector, the relevant authorities need to be convinced of the importance of the scheme. This is what this paper sets out to do. I believe, as do Platzer and Verdonk (2003), that for workplace English to thrive, the state has to step in to systematically spread its teaching over a considerable length of time, especially in the tertiary education sector. This is because few individual workplaces 'bother' to finance lifelong learning skills of foreign languages (Platzer & Verdonk, ibid.).

Inserting the modules into the relevant curricula

At this particular juncture, we require two lists, as already discussed: a list of related workplaces and their various contexts and situations; and a list of language needs for each workplace.

The list of related workplaces can be matched with the list of language needs for the workplace to form a workplace language package. Since each faculty orientates learners towards particular workplaces, all packages related to a particular faculty need to be introduced into the faculty. The number of packages found in each faculty will be equivalent to the number of workplaces represented by that faculty and consequently, each workplace will represent a language course. For example, in the faculty of Law and Economics, there could be: English for banking, English for marketing, English for accounting and English for business studies. In the Sciences faculty, there could be English for nursing, English for medicine and English for pharmacists. The various situations making up each workplace will become modules for each course. When enrolling in a faculty, the student is given the option to choose one or two English courses (depending on the disciplines of the university). The duration of a course and its modules will depend on the organisation of the faculty.

Conclusion

A competency-based workplace English language programme in which language learning is situation-based within the Sudanese context is the best approach to guarantee success at English-related workplaces for students graduating from Sudanese higher educational institutions. Guarantees of success from this programme stem from the fact that it can be collaboratively conceived and designed by all the parties involved, and that learners have to make choices regarding what English they want to learn.

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Forms of in-service teacher development

Paul Fean

Abstract

The quality of teaching is a key determinant of student learning, and teachers are required to have knowledge of both subject matter and effective approaches to teaching and learning. This dual knowledge and skill base is particularly important in the Sudanese tertiary sector in which teachers need advanced academic expertise and also face particular contextual challenges. This paper discusses the forms of in-service teacher development currently available in Sudan, and concludes by calling for the development of integrated practice-based professional development programmes for teachers in Sudanese universities.

Introduction

The quality of teaching has been identified as potentially the greatest school-based determinant of student learning (Dembélé & Lefoka, 2007). In the drive to improve the quality of education in African countries, the professional development of teachers is fundamental. This has been recognised in research and policies regarding primary-level schooling following the introduction of the Education for All agenda at the World Conference for Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990, and re-affirmed at the World Education Forum in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 (UNESCO, 2000). In addition to quantitative change, this international agenda includes a commitment to raising the quality of education. However, discourse on the role of teachers in the tertiary sector in Africa, and the concomitant provision of professional development programmes, has been lacking. Yet this sector is playing an increasingly important role in the socio-economic development of African countries (World Bank, 2002). In Sudan, having 'qualified and motivated faculty' has been recognised as a prerequisite for achieving quality higher education (El Tom, 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to put the quality of university education and the professional development of teachers onto the research and policy agenda.

Socio-political changes in Sudan, particularly following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, have increased the domestic importance of the English language as one of the official national languages and as a key professional skill that is in demand in the growing commercial and development-based sectors in Khartoum and across the country. This has focused attention on English language as a key element in accessing employment in the formal sector (Mann, personal communication, 2009), in addition to the language's international role. The Sudanese tertiary sector is in a key position in strategies to develop English language skills in the country.

In this paper, I reflect on the current provision of professional development for teachers of English language in Sudanese universities, and other potential approaches. In doing so, I bridge issues I observed while working over a four-year period in the education sector in Khartoum, including in various universities and the British Council Sudan, with my academic and professional interest in teacher development in such contexts. There is a limited amount of research into the professional development of university teachers in Africa, as indicated in an e-mail response from a faculty member at a British university when I was preparing to write a literature review:

> *Dear Paul,*
>
> *My suspicion is that literature on INSET for African university teachers is very hard to find because people don't tend to write about non-existent phenomena!* (personal communication, February 19, 2010)

Although this extreme comment requires some tempering, the dearth of academic literature implies that this topic is under-researched and indicates a potentially rich area for empirical investigation.

I will begin this paper by discussing what is meant by 'quality education' in the context of English language teaching (ELT) in Sudanese universities. This is followed by consideration of the skills and knowledge that teachers require to deliver quality teaching and then the forms in which teachers can be supported to develop the quality of their teaching. I conclude by calling for needs-led and contextually relevant continuous in-service professional development programmes for university teachers. While not providing a blueprint for action, I intend this paper to raise questions and ideas which could be used by university teachers and their partners in other organisations to plan integrated steps towards professional development, thereby enhancing the quality of ELT in Sudanese universities.

Quality in ELT in Sudanese universities

Before considering the type of professional development which is required at Sudanese universities, it is necessary to ask what is meant by 'quality education' in ELT in Sudanese universities. Doing so makes the objectives explicit and therefore identifies the most relevant and effective approaches to teaching and teacher development.

The majority of ELT in Sudanese universities is provided as a university requirement to students of different academic disciplines. In ELT as a university requirement, first- and second-year students receive a few hours of English lessons each week and generally follow thematic courses which aim to develop their competencies in the four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). This form of ELT places the teacher as a language teacher, rather than as, for example, a lecturer, as may be expected in other university disciplines. They mainly have similar roles in some private universities, such as Ahfad University for Women, which use English as the medium of instruction. This contrasts with teachers of certain courses to English language majors, who deliver lecturers in topics such as linguistics, phonetics and phonology, and literature. In this paper, I will focus contextual discussion on teaching English as a university requirement; however, the thematic points raised which relate to teacher professional development can be applied to all contexts of Sudanese tertiary-sector ELT.

In considering the context of ELT in Sudanese universities, the fundamental question arises – what is the purpose of English as a university requirement? The response could contain numerous options, broadly relating to the students' academic studies, post-graduation professional development and personal interests. More specifically, in terms of learning outcomes, is the aim for students to achieve good grades in exams? Or English for academic or career development? Or other skills? Or for their own personal expression? The ways in which teachers respond to these questions indicate different models of teaching, and therefore different professional development requirements. This is indicated in recent debates within the ELT community in Khartoum surrounding teaching general English, English for Specific Purposes, English for Academic Purposes and English for the workplace (ASTEL, 2009a). As a key step in identifying and undertaking relevant professional development approaches, it would be of great value for university teachers to engage in reflection and discussion with colleagues, university management and policy-makers to clarify or articulate their objectives in delivering ELT.

The context teachers operate within has been shown to impact on their practice. This includes both contextual and perceptual factors (Guthrie, 1990). At a conference organised by the Association of Sudanese Teachers of English Language (ASTEL) with Omdurman Islamic University in 2009, the particular contextual challenges in university-level ELT were discussed. These include large class sizes, limited resources and library facilities, combined with examination-focused teaching practices and lack of ESP curricula (Busairy, 2009). In addition, the limited supply of qualified ELT teachers and the low level of ELT in basic and secondary schools was highlighted as a causal factor in the low language skills of university students (ibid.). In addition to the views of the teachers, those of the students also shape the teaching and learning experience (Guthrie, 1990). Students have different objectives in learning English, including their institutions, levels, academic disciplines, individual interests and ambitions. There is a perception among some teachers that 'the students' obsession is how to pass the examination, not how to achieve any development in the language field' (Ibrahim, 2009), although the compulsory nature of ELT as a university requirement means classes are likely to include a range of levels of interest and motivation in learning the subject. ELT teachers negotiate their practice within this range of intersecting contextual factors, which are of direct relevance to planning and implementing effective professional development programmes.

Developing ELT subject and teaching knowledge

Discussion of the aims and contexts of English language teachers in Sudanese universities leads onto consideration of the type of knowledge that they require to teach effectively. The forms of knowledge can be divided simplistically into two forms: 'know that' and 'know how' (see Moreno, 2005, for detailed discussion). For example, 'know that' includes subject knowledge, curriculum content, and effective competency in the use of the English language; and 'know how', which is also known as 'procedural knowledge', includes effective teaching approaches. To illustrate, 'know that' may include English grammar and vocabulary, and 'know how' consists of effective methods of teaching this.

Both 'know that' and 'know how' are required by teachers in order for them to practise effectively – but in what proportion? While the requirement of an adequate level of content knowledge – namely fluent and accurate English language ability – the combination of the low academic level of English taught in English as a university requirement and the contextual challenge of large class sizes, mixed ability groups and limited resources, leads to the greater need for teaching skills – professional 'know how'. Furthermore, I do not intend to imply that the simple learning of 'knowledge' is enough, whether related to English language or pedagogy. Rather, other teaching skills are essential elements of a teachers' effective practice. These, drawing on Schön's (1983) concept of the 'reflective practitioner', include reflectivity and self-awareness, and creativity to be responsive to students' needs and contextual challenges. Such skills are generally more innate in nature, and can be developed through reflection, discussion and analysis of practice (Wallace, 1998).

The prevalent approach to professional development of university teachers is academic qualification, which favours teachers' 'know that' or subject matter over 'know how'. In Sudan, as elsewhere, university teachers should have completed postgraduate studies to master's or doctoral level. However, it should be noted that only 41.3 per cent of academic staff across all disciplines in Sudanese public universities hold doctorates (2000–2001 figures, El Tom, 2006). Academic qualification as an approach to professional development may be more suited to other disciplines than to ELT at university level; for example, a PhD holder in Economics has developed the content knowledge to teach the subject

in a university, although they may still require training in effective lecturing or assessment. The same could be said for a PhD holder in Linguistics who teaches phonetics and phonology to English language majors. However, would this academic qualification be of relevance to teaching English as a university requirement? I suggest this would only be the case if the academic qualification is closely related to teaching methods, rather than to the academic subject of English. That is not to undermine the value and knowledge of academically qualified ELT educators in Sudanese universities, rather that any academic qualification must be supported by education in effective teaching methods. The perception of the need for greater pedagogy-related professional development by members of the tertiary-level ELT community was indicated in the recommendations of the ASTEL conference, which called for 'training ESP teachers on the different teaching techniques and methods of ELT' (ASTEL, 2009b).

Approaches to the professional development of teachers

Therefore, if university teachers do not specialise in the study of education, how do they learn to teach? The process of learning to teach is complex. Teachers' classroom practice is not simply the replication of practices learnt through teacher education programmes, but, rather, is shaped by their 'personal socio-historical past, beliefs and values' (Akyeampong & Stephens, 2002, p. 261). Teachers develop these views, which act as 'filters' to implementing change initiatives in practice (Dembélé & Lafoka, 2007), through their own experience as students. Additionally, most university teachers become teaching assistants following their bachelor's degrees, a form of on-the-job training. This lack of pedagogic training generally results in teaching practice which follows the patterns experienced during the practitioner's 'apprenticeship of observation' (Lortie, 1975, p. 67), namely during their experience of being a student of English at university or in school. Teachers' views, or 'living theories' (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), guide their practice, and the methods and approaches they adopt are negotiated between multiple factors, including their students' expectations, university management and the form of knowledge that will be assessed through examination. Therefore, any attempt to improve teachers' practice must begin with engagement with their views of the purposes and practices of teaching and the context within which they operate. Both pre-service and in-service teacher development programmes are designed and delivered across education levels and are intended to provide the teaching cadres with the skills and knowledge required for their professional practice (Moreno, 2005). Fundamentally, teachers require exposure to new ideas and the opportunity to identify and experiment with those they perceive as being of potential use in their own practice. Effective continuous professional development includes training, practice, feedback and follow-up (ibid.), which facilitates the identification and subsequent implementation of contextually relevant teaching practices.

Current approaches to teacher development

Despite the earlier quote about the lack of provision of professional development for university teachers, there are existent and potential opportunities in Sudan, mostly in Khartoum. Sudanese universities and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research provide some academic training opportunities, as mentioned earlier, such as supporting master's and doctoral degrees for staff. In addition, practical teaching-related programmes include those organised by the Capacity Building Centre at the University of Khartoum and workshops hosted by institutions including Ahfad University for Women and Neelein University, to name a few. Furthermore, academic and professional ELT associations, such as ASTEL and TESOL Sudan, provide some professional development opportunities through organising workshops and conferences. Foreign cultural organisations also provide training opportunities. For example, the British Council offers the CELTA course, which provides an opportunity for Sudanese teachers of English to gain an internationally recognised teaching qualification. The British Council also supports an ELT Forum, a regular seminar with guest speakers, which aims to facilitate innovative professional development of English teachers at schools and universities. In addition, the United States Embassy offers professional development for educators through online workshops, digital video conferences and scholarships for graduate courses. ELT teachers also participate in other forms of academic development, such as research, publications, and attendance and presentations at conferences.

These examples, which are intended to be indicative rather than an exhaustive list, show that the current methods of pedagogy-related professional development for English language university teachers in Sudan are primarily delivered in the form of workshops, provided by particular universities, associations and foreign cultural organisations. This approach to continuous professional development, following a traditional pattern which 'is organized around discrete units of knowledge or skills, is given by experts, takes place outside the schools, and has a limited duration, with little follow-up and practical application, has *no chance of changing teachers' beliefs or teaching habits*' (Moreno, 2005, p. 23, emphasis added).

In particular, the following questions have been raised to problematise this approach to the professional development of university ELT teachers:

1. Is it relevant to the context?

Is the content of the workshops relevant to the context of ELT in Sudanese universities? This point includes the students (their levels, ages, interests, objectives), available resources (time, financial, material) and the curriculum, among other factors.

2. Is it led by the needs of the teachers?
Who sets the agenda of the professional development? Is the focus on providing the teachers with the form of training they require, or is this decided by what the trainer can offer? This point is particularly pertinent to workshops and presentations with guest presenters, as the topic of the event is likely to be set by the presenter's own interests or experience.

3. Is it part of an overall strategy?
Are the workshops part of an overall plan, tailored to the professional development needs of the teachers? Or are they provided on an ad-hoc basis?

4. Does it include measures to support and monitor implementation?
The purpose of professional development is to facilitate improvements in practice, which requires support, such as through mentoring, observations and follow-up reflective discussions.

These points are not intended to mean that there should be no place for occasional events in the professional development of teachers; in fact, the sharing of diverse ideas and experiences is very valuable. However, these events should not form the core of a professional development strategy. Rather, what is required is pedagogy-related professional development, consisting of 'modest yet strategic plans that meet real needs, draw on the interests, experiences, and ideas of the academic staff themselves, and build both capacity and colleagueship' (Austin, 2002, p. 246).

The activities of the ELT community in Khartoum, which includes academic associations, occasional conferences and other networking opportunities, provide an effective arena for discussion of the teaching context and professional development needs of the teachers. Such endeavours would also be supported by official recognition – by university management and policy-makers – of the important role of in-service professional training.

Action research approach

The action research approach, which responds to the four points outlined above, is one form through which in-service teacher training could be developed. Action research, which has been defined as 'the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of an action within it' (Elliott, 1991, p. 9), can be undertaken by educators as an approach to both professional development and researching educational practice. (For more in-depth discussion on the process of undertaking action research in ELT, see Wallace, 1998.) Action research is increasingly viewed as an effective tool for both teacher professional development and education research in Africa (see, for example, Pryor, 1998; Stuart & Kunje, 1998; Walker, 1994). A range of models of action research have been put forward by researchers, which generally include a cyclical process of inquiry, evaluation and implementation (Pryor, 1998). A simplified model of the action research cycle, as shown in Figure 1, could be used in the design of in-service development programmes for teachers.

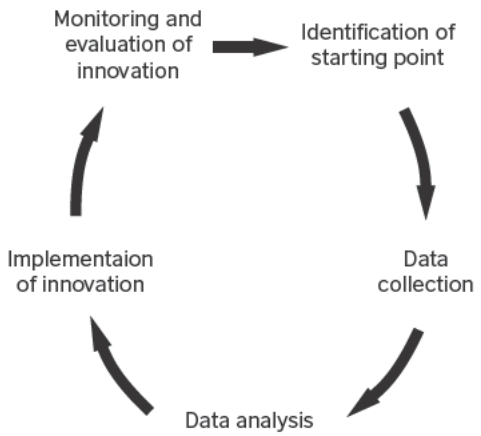

Figure 1: Action research cycle for in-service teacher development (based on Fean & Abu Zaid, 2009)

The first stages, which are based on discussion, reflection and data collection by the teacher–researcher, act as a form of needs analysis, through uncovering and making explicit the priorities of ELT set within the realities of the classroom.

The introduction and monitoring of innovations (including direct pedagogic strategies or broader teacher-training initiatives) facilitate greater creativity in teaching and the implementation of contextually relevant pedagogic initiatives. As research, the process and findings of the action research projects can be shared with colleagues and publicly disseminated for use by other educators working in similar contexts (Wallace, 1998). Action research can be undertaken by individuals, departmentally or at policy level, and would respond to the four points that professional development should be relevant to the context, needs-led, part of an overall strategy, and include steps to monitor implementation.

Summary

In this paper, I have briefly introduced the nature and context of university-level ELT in Sudan, as the effective professional development of teachers must be located within the realities of their practice. The role of teachers' 'living theories' on their practice was discussed, in order to highlight the importance of engaging with these views in professional development programmes. I then outlined and critiqued the forms of professional development currently available in Sudan, calling for a strategically planned approach to training, which is needs-led, contextually relevant and includes follow-up monitoring and support. Finally, I introduced action research as a model which could guide the development of a contextually relevant ongoing in-service teacher development, which is vital to improving the quality of education provision in Sudanese universities.

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Developing an academic English curriculum for Sudanese universities: Parameters and context

Yasir Hassan Hussein

Abstract

This paper reports on a socio-cultural survey conducted with the intention of identifying the current operational context in which academic English is needed in Sudanese universities, and then offering a framework within which informed decisions can be made to develop effective academic English syllabi. Actual situations of using academic English are explored through a target situation analysis tool, in addition to analysing the learners' needs. The study presents a number of recommendations to alleviate two main problems: large classes and insufficiency of contact hours. Throughout the study, the Chinese National College English Teaching Syllabus (NCETS) will be referred to as a relevant successful model.

Introduction

Over the last decade, due to economic growth and increasing contact with the outside world, Sudanese institutes of higher education have begun to realise the role that English language now plays as the language of science and technology. Therefore, English is being re-established as a medium of instruction in many schools which, because of Arabicisation, had been using Arabic as a medium of instruction since 1991.

However, Sudanese universities have experienced a sharp increase in the number of students who are not sufficiently proficient in English to fully access academic content. One reason is probably that the current situation in the higher education institutes is quite different from 20 years ago when English was the medium of instruction in many schools. Unfortunately, apart from some fragmented-approach efforts and individual linguistic attempts, there have been no planned efforts to re-accommodate English as a medium of instruction in tertiary education at a nationwide level. According to Nunan (1988), this 'rather fragmented approach has been criticised, and there have been calls for a more comprehensive approach to language curriculum design' (p. 12).

In similar situations where socio-cultural surveys are carried out to heuristically survey the target situations to design the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) curriculum, there have been many attempts by practitioners aiming to find ways to design curricula in which two main objectives could be achieved: first, realising the necessity for developing literacy processes and practices that would enable students to respond to English-saturated situations; and second, the proposed curricula would respond appropriately to a set of needs of the target situations where the students would be using English (Johns, 1995, p. 1). These needs might drive and shape ESP pedagogies to respond to and serve particular skills like general language skills or specific contents like introducing learners to the terms of a specific discipline, and sometimes merging the two realms might be dictated by the needs of the target situation. Responding to the needs of a specific situation does not only mean selecting some skills against others, it might also mean prioritising certain language elements and skills needed in the target situation. With all these things in mind, I carried out a survey to outline the specific background context in which English is used for academic purposes in Sudanese universities. In addition to interviewing teachers and students, I was able to call upon my 12 years' experience in teaching academic English at six Sudanese universities, which I found to be relevant and useful for this study.

EAP: A working definition

In order to help readers gain a better understanding of some of the subsequent discussions in this paper, a working definition of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is provided here. Aside from this, the term is used in its broader sense.

EAP is a sub-class of ESP, and both terms are used interchangeably in this paper. There are two divisions in relation to material contents: 'common core and subject specific' (Coffey, 1984, as cited in Jordan, 1997, p. 4). The main proportion of the 'common core' element is what is known as 'study skills', while 'subject specific' stands for the need for language for particular academic subjects, e.g. medicine, together with its disciplinary structure, language structures, vocabulary, and the particular skills needed for the subject (Jordan, 1997, p. 5). These 'particular skills' might be reading or writing, or any others within the range of skills according to the target situation of the students.

As for ESP, in addition to being 'related in content to particular disciplines', it may be 'restricted as to the language skills to be learned (e.g., reading only)' (Strevens, 1988, as cited in Gatehouse, 2001). Therefore, prescriptions for pedagogy dictated by a needs analysis of a group of ESP learners might result in deciding the genre to be exploited (the subject-specific language), along with a particular skill, for example reading.

In general, EAP 'is concerned with those communication skills in English which are required for study purposes in formal educational systems' (ETIC, 1975, as cited in Jordan, 1997, p. 1).

Needs analysis

As mentioned earlier, the proponents of the fragmented approach that used to be followed in Sudan cared only for the language items to be selected and taught. However, non-linguistic developments in ESP have paved the way for the involvement of a socio-cultural analysis on a wider level. Current practices in ESP are based on what is known as 'needs analysis' and 'target situation analysis'. In fact, nothing new has been added to the knowledge range relevant to ESP, i.e. the linguistic level, rather it is the non-linguistic level that has evolved to offer new insights into ESP, as Clare (1997) outlines: 'What makes ESP different is not the approach, not the language in general, not the texts in particular, not the methodology – none of which needs to be specific – but the awareness of a target situation' (p. 30).

The main objective of target situation analysis is to place the existing knowledge within a more scientific framework, and this can be achieved by setting up procedures to closely relate patterns of language analysis to the learners' purposes for learning. This purpose is always taken to mean enabling learners to function in an adequate way in the target situation where they are expected to use the language to be learnt. From here, the process of designing ESP material should commence with identifying the target situation and carrying out a rigorous language analysis in response to that situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, p. 12).

Language setting

A basic element of the socio-cultural context in Sudanese universities to be considered is 'language setting'. In syllabus design, language setting means defining the exact communicative functions the target language fulfills in the target situation where there might be other languages used for some communicative activities (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986, p.7). Therefore, it is necessary for syllabus designers to know the exact role English language plays as the target language in the academic settings of Sudanese universities and to examine roles fulfilled by other languages as well, mainly Arabic. This is crucial to challenge misconceptions held about English as a medium of instruction in Sudanese universities. It is a widely held belief by teachers that, in science colleges and in some private universities, the medium of instruction is English. This suggests that English is dominant, excluding other languages within the same context. Such a misunderstanding will mislead syllabus designers who need to know the exact position of English in these contexts and they will fail to estimate the support learners get from the immediate environment. Swales (1990), for example, who taught ESP at the University of Khartoum between 1973 and 1978, emphasises that the medium of instruction was 'largely English'. In other words, the EAP syllabus would not include language functions that the students do not need in order to succeed in their departments.

A profile of learners' needs

Academic English is taught to non-English majors at all Sudan universities as a mandatory requirement in the first and second years of study.

There are three levels at which academic English is directly involved in subject-specific learning in Sudanese universities. These levels are apparent when factors such as students' specialisation and instruction traditions are accounted for. In medical and pharmacological studies (largely English-medium faculties), for example, where the intent of study is to enable students to access subject-specific texts, English is of deciding importance to the students as without it they cannot gain access to the extensive specialist literature that they have to read during their periods of study. In some studies like engineering and medical science, without the appropriate level of English, students will be excluded from a great deal of the specialised literature, in addition to being deprived of keeping abreast with developments in that scientific field. Effectively, English language has become of great importance in the humanities and related studies.

As a subject, instead of being an auxiliary tool, academic English language has become a real hindrance for some students, since they fail their English courses, and as a result do not think that studying English will help them to any great extent with their academic subjects. In their early years of study, students experience difficulty understanding English reference books, for example, on botany and histology. In later years, some students cannot carry out simple academic tasks in English like reporting on experiments or presenting short seminars. Subject-specific teachers have always complained that their students are unable to construct simple sentences in writing or even orally. In less English-involved specialisations, students tend to avoid English reference books altogether since they feel that they do not have the relevant skills to access them. Moreover, some have developed a negative attitude towards English since they have failed it as a requirement course and it has caused delays in their studies.

The Sudanese university learners' needs for academic English can be summarised as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: A summary of Sudanese university learners' needs for academic English

Needs urgency	Time	Purpose	Medium	Stakeholders
Immediate learning needs	First and second year	Access to knowledge	Reading (mainly)	Learners, teachers, school
Late learning needs	Third year onwards	Field work and training	Productive Skills	Learners, teachers, school
Very late needs	Postgraduation	Functioning efficiently in employment setting	Four skills	Employer

Reading: The most needed skill

Sudanese students certainly need to develop all four skills in academic English courses. However, insufficient contact hours makes it necessary to prioritise.

As shown in Table 1, it can be assumed that developing reading skills is a basic and immediate need for university students in Sudan. Actually, there is nothing surprising or new about this. Among the four basic skills of language, reading is constantly defined as the most important ability that a non-English-speaking university student needs to develop and use. In some EFL study situations, such as in ESP and EAP where the intent of study is traditionally defined as to enable students to access subject-specific texts, as in the case of Sudan for example, reading will be most needed. Likewise, in EAP settings, the ability to read ranks highest among learning priorities. In a general needs assessment, Jordan (1997) states that 'the greatest need of students is the ability to read text books' (p. 50). He adds that in 'most EFL university situations, reading academic texts will be the biggest requirement for students' (ibid.). For students studying applied science at a Sudanese university, reading academic texts is seen as a priority when compared to those studying humanities. Abdul Ghani (1993), for example, maintains that reading for students of science is 'a crucial tool that aids the learning process, as without it the student cannot deal with the enormous bulk of literature he has to read during his period of study in an English medium faculty' (p. 1). One of the important stated aims of English language teaching at tertiary level in China, which has a situation similar to that of Sudan with regard to EFL, is to 'improve access to scientific and technical literature through reading in English' (Weir et al., 2000, pp. 1–2). Therefore, it is recommended that, when planning an academic English curriculum for Sudanese universities, such a curriculum should have a reading skills base.

Adopting ICT to the Sudanese situation

Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are being increasingly utilised in English Language Training (ELT). However, because of some limitations and challenges within the context of Sudanese tertiary education, many teachers are not confident as to whether ICT should be incorporated into ELT in Sudan or not. The most important of these challenges is that supporting equipment like computers is not widely available or used. Moreover, many students are not trained to use ICT tools properly. However, relative self-access and independent learning brought about by the Chinese ICT model and its implementation to assist English teaching inside the classroom could be of great use if introduced into the Sudanese context, and would certainly address the two resisting problems of large classes and insufficiency of contact hours. The Chinese ICT model has been designed to help students achieve the requirements of College English Teaching (Naizhao & Dongfu, 2004). However, the advantages of encouraging the adoption of this model in Sudan, besides its design, lies in the way the model is exploited for the classroom's practical ends. As for the design, the model is not 'teacherless'; in other words, it does not depend entirely on the learners, which makes it safe for use in the Sudanese context. Besides, according to Naizhao and Dongfu (ibid.):

> *... teachers are able to give guidance during contact time when students are engaged in small group [sic] or, during whole class activities teachers can pass on knowledge and techniques for reading, writing, and translating. Thus the approach generally allows students to engage in learning according to their own learning preferences and characteristics, level of learning and timing, with the teacher's guidance and with the help of the computer.* (p. 12)

Moreover, teaching of the four skills is possible within this model.

Testing

The problems with testing EAP courses in Sudan begins with the formulation of course objectives. In looking closer into the objectives of courses in some main universities in Sudan, many of them seem rather vague and tentative and are of no use to any testing end, especially if teachers wish to align their tests to course objectives. Moreover, in many Sudanese universities, designing a test remains the teacher's sole responsibility.

The first step towards an effective testing system is to inculcate in the minds of policy-makers in Sudan that assessment should be considered among their direct interests, and not only those of the teachers or syllabus designers; and that no change should be expected to take place unless assessment is reformed significantly (Torrance, 1996, p. i).

In planning any syllabus, it should be borne in mind that there will be no guarantee that the syllabus objectives are met unless, along with the syllabus, a parallel testing system – as suggested by the Chinese model – is developed. In China, because of the unified policy governing the teaching of English in tertiary education all over the country, as here in Sudan, the Ministry of Education developed a complete testing system, the product of which is the College English Test (CET), which is defined by Guo (2006) as 'a nationwide standardized test, aimed at an objective assessment of English proficiency of Chinese college students and a source of effective feedback for college teachers to use in improving their classroom teaching' (p. 14). From this definition, it is clear that the functions of CET have been extended to include the evaluation of the curriculum as a whole.

Other objectives of CET are introduced to 1. motivate fulfillment of the national curriculum, and 2. evaluate college students' English ability (Li, 2009). Moreover, CET's designers claim that one of the expected results of their model was to 'drive students to learn English in a qualitative way' (Ying, 2008).

Conclusion

Designing a proper EAP curriculum for Sudanese universities needs to be achieved in the face of two main obstacles: large classes and insufficient contact hours. Therefore, the first step will be to consider the immediate needs of the learners in their first and second years of study, which is to develop their reading skills – a requisite ability to properly access and understand subject-specific texts.

Adopting ICT as a supplementary tool and resource seems to be a sound choice to minimise the effect of large classes and lack of student–teacher contact.

Finally, Sudanese decision-makers should take advantage of the unified policy by which EAP is run in all Sudanese universities to set up a separate body that will be responsible for developing well-designed tests for EAP courses.

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