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# CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY: The Nigerian Experience

PAPERS IN HONOUR

OF

**PROFESSOR EBO UBAHAKWE**

*B.A. (LOND), M.A. TESL (UCLA) Ph.d. (IBADAN), MNAL, LFIBC,*

EDITED BY:

**ABDUL MANSARAY  
and  
ISRAEL OLU OSOKOYA**

HO Oshokoya  
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## Language Education As A Means Of Educational Accountability

A.O. Umoru-Onuka

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### Introduction

In this era of awareness of the usefulness of and the promoting of accountability in Nigeria, there is no gainsaying the fact that educational accountability cannot be overemphasized. This is moreso, in view of the fact that efforts must be made by all and sundry Nigerians to rescue our educational system from the doldrums into which the system has been thrown by decades of lip service and utter neglect.

A recent research into the Labour Market Prospects of University Graduates in Nigeria, reveals that employees are afraid to employ Nigerian Graduates because, among other reasons, the Nigerian Graduate is ill-prepared to communicate effectively (Dabalen and Oni, 2000)

This revelation calls to question: the accountability of the system and especially Language Education in the entire Educational System.

Therefore, there is the need to check the degree to which language education had been particularly responsible (accountable) for educational results as depicted by the ability/inability of our graduates to perform effectively.



It is not also an overstatement to say that Language as a medium of communication will to a very large extent determine the success or otherwise of an educational programme, and thus its level of accountability. The effective teaching of language affects not only the taught but many others who will relate with him in the future especially at workplace, and since the graduate is a senior level worker, he is soon saddled with responsibility of communicating with the outside world, on behalf of his establishment; as well as impart knowledge to his subordinate at work.

In attempting to determine how accountable language education has been for the success or failure of our education industry, we need to find answers to the following questions:

1. What is Language?
2. What is communication?
3. How does Language relate to communication?
4. What is accountability with particular reference to education?
5. How do we determine accountability in education?
6. Has Language Education been positively accountable?

## Language

It is stating the obvious to say that Language is the major vehicle of Human Interaction and Relationship. Without Language, human existence would have been meaningless and perhaps a phantom mirage. The results would be the prevalence of animalistic behavior among human beings. In chapter eleven of the book of Genesis, the Bible tells us that the whole human race spoke one language (verse 1). Continuing, it tells that Language is a vehicle of unity and togetherness; verses 2 through 4. These scriptural verses show the importance of Language as a means of interaction among the human creatures of God's creation.

The Oxford English Dictionary, volume III (1989) defines Language as "the whole body of words and methods of combination of words used by a nation, people or race". Language is used to put into words or to express feelings, ideas etc. Language is so important that every profession has its own language for all its programmes or packages. Each organization also has its own computer languages that must be learnt in order to understand its operation very effectively and with ease (Davis, 1997).

Thus Language can be viewed as the systematic way in which words are put together to effectively put one's idea or thinking across to other people. It can be understood by a certain group of people either through birth in a certain environment or through training in a particular way. We may therefore ask: What is Language Education?

Language Education is the teaching and learning of Language so that the learners may understand it sufficiently to enable them undertake a course of study of any field in that Language or teach others to sufficiently understand that language for effective communication.

## **Communication**

Communication results from the ability of Human Beings to put words together in order to express an idea, feeling, or a message, from one individual to the other. Thus communication arises from the existence of language, so one dovetails into the other. The former a consequence and an advanced stage of the latter. Every human interaction becomes possible only because of the existence of communication and language. Language is a tool for communication, which may either be expressive or active. Thus, we communicate through expressions and actions. Language facilitates communication. Language is used to order communication, because language can be formatted even as in the Information Technology world.

The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical principles defines communication as 'impart, share, give to



another as a partake, confer, transmit or give information. It also implies the action of imparting, conveying or exchange of ideas, knowledge'. It is also the act of conversing, intercourse or interchange of speech.

Obviously, communication can be regarded as the act of giving information, imparting knowledge, exchanging ideas, conversing and acting in a form in order to give a message to someone else.

Communication involves not just an individual but at least two persons (Folarin, 1998). In other words, for communication to be real and effective, there must be a sender and a receiver, and of course there must be processing – which is the use of Language. In the case of Education for instance, the teacher is the sender, in a communicating system while the student(s) is/are the receiver(s). But a message is useful only to the extent to which it elicits the right response. This is again dependent on the appropriate use of Language in communicating ideas (i.e. educating) to the learner.

### **The Link Between Language And Communication**

Communication can either be verbal i.e. oral and written communication or active i.e. communication by action Steinke (1991) categorized communication as follows:

- Oral Communication
- Written Communication
- Electronic Communication

All three fall within the realm of verbal communication because electronic communication is either oral or written as in broadcast media or e-mail message. According to Steinke, Oral communication has historically been heavily used but seldom documented for communicating information. It is the most basic form of communication for personal interaction, because it is informal.

Written communication is a means of transferring information in certain aspects of human interaction like providing scientific information. There are many methods of doing this: informal written communication. Even though in today's world it is not regarded as a means of communicating research efforts, several scientists/scholars devote much time to studying personal letters left behind by great scientists. It could be through popular news, though it is not within the purview of scientific review. And we have formal written means communication which is the most accepted form of imparting knowledge or reporting research Steinke (1991).

Electronic media, Computer and Telecommunications have opened up new methods of scientific/educative communication whereby more people are reached and educated by modern communication because it is no longer limited by space. But whatever form of communication is employed, language is the means of the transfer of the information being communicated. Thus the link between communication and language is that the latter is the tool for the former in other words the existence of the former is dependent on the latter. If for instance bad language is used to communicate, the communication will be ineffective as the intended response may not be elicited as the communication means is unclear and thus misunderstood, as with a paper without a pen, computer, printer, and typewriter etc., one cannot write to another, so it is that without language, communication will be but a phantom mirage.

### **What Is Educational Accountability?**

The American Dictionary (1980) defines it as being an obligation to give a reckoning or explanation for one's actions. Educational Accountability implies that education is a public service entrusted into the hands of certain individuals by the public and as such there must be reckoning in the sense that the public, whose service it is, would want to know from those whose hands, it has been entrusted, what they have done with the trust. This means that the various people connected with



the education industry including the pupil will request some to give account of what they have done with what was entrusted to them or the investment on them. The interference that can be made from the report of Darbalen and Oni (2000) on Labour Market Prospects for University Graduates in Nigeria is that our University has not been accountable sufficiently for the objective for which it has been set up. The system is expected to meet certain objectives. Chief among which is the production of high-level manpower for the Nigeria economy, but if the economy rejects University products on the basis of not adequately able to handle jobs and for ineffectiveness in communication, then the system has failed and its accountability to stake holders is a far cry.

Stuffle beam (1971) sees it as the ability to account for past actions in relationships and decisions which precipitated the actions, wisdom of those decisions, the extent to which they were adequately, efficiently implemented and the value of their effects.

Jonathan-Ibeagha (1986), Babarinde (1992) and Umoru-Onuka (1996) variously see "accountability" as "responsibility", "answerability", "explicability" or "responsiveness to demand on the system" for the achievement of its objective. It is, therefore, a concept that education can be responsive to the needs of the people and adapt to it immediately or be responsible for effectively and efficiently accomplishing its goals and objectives. All stakeholders are thus expected to play their individual roles appropriately – be they teachers, government, parents, entrepreneurs, managers or pupils, Educational accountability, therefore, is in addition to causing judicious use of funds, goes on to say funds must not only be properly used but the system must produce expected results promptly. It thus keeps everyone involved in education on his toes and puts the system on track at all times.

This is achieved through employing of one of the following types of accountability:

- i. **System Accountability:** takes global look at the system to ensure that all segments of the system are performing efficiently, not only in application of funds but in accomplishing the intended goals of the system.
- ii. **Goal Accountability** which means accountability from the perspective of goal attainment.
- iii. **Programme Accountability** which considers a particular programme within the system with a view to determining the attainment of its expected impact on the system.
- iv. **Product Accountability** which follows up the product to determine whether or not they are performing at the standard expected of that level of education, at their various work places as in the report aforementioned.
- v. **Process Accountability:** deals with the on going processing at the period of education/training. It is an on going process of education i.e. the current transaction expected to effect educating to see whether or not they create the necessary immediate impact.

Accountability can thus be described as a mechanism for ensuring minimal deviation from set goals of education so that what is intended is what is realized ultimately. Smith-Sreen (1995) agrees that accountability can be viewed as one of the important variables for accessing performance. She also agrees that accountability should not be restricted to financial/fiscal accountability.

### **Accountability: Evaluation The Tool**

Having said that fiscal accountability may not actually determine educational accountability, then, there must be,



therefore a means or tools with which to determine accountability in education.

Smith-Sreen (1995) reports that accountability of some cooperatives in women's organizations in parts of India was determined through evaluation.

The title of an article: **The Relevance of CIPP Evaluation Model for Educational Accountability** by Stufflebeam (1971) portends that the means of determining educational accountability is evaluation. This is also in consonance with the position held by Umoru-Onuka (2000) that the appropriate means of determining education accountability is evaluation. Educational evaluation models such as Stufflebeam's (1971) context, inputs, process, products (CIPP) model; Provus' (1971) Discrepancy model and Stake's (1967) Model as inferred by Umoru Onuka are all meant to determine the degree of a programme's accountability. This is true as fiscal or financial accountability cannot determine the efficiency of a programme, as it can only report judicious use of funds or misapplication of funds with little or nothing to do with efficiency of a programme.

### **Language Education As A Means Of Educational Accountability**

From the foregoing, we can infer that the tool for measuring accountability of programmes such as language education is evaluation. To do this effectively, we need to ask ourselves: What is the objective of language education? To my mind, the essence of language education is to ensure that students understand and use language effectively as well as efficiently in all forms of communication. This is so because every other form of knowledge is imparted through the effective use of language.

Thus, Obanya (1981) in his book "*Evaluation In Modern Language Teaching*" states as follows:



Educational evaluation these days deals with input (everything that goes into teaching and learning process), the evaluation of processes or transactions (what happens to the input in the course of education) and the evaluation of outcomes (the end result of education)

If evaluation is to ensure accountability and as can be inferred from the above is an on going process then accountability is an on going process involving all stakeholders if they ensure that everybody does his part as and when due if he is not to hold the process back.

Obanya further states that:

evaluation can be diagnostic (when it takes place before the exposure of learners to instruction) formative (when it takes place as schooling or instruction progresses) and summative (when it involves the evaluation of terminal behaviour).

Accountability of education can be determined by evaluating the quality of the product of the system. Dabalén and Oni (2000) seem to suggest that the University Education system of Nigeria has not been thoroughly accountable, because employers complained about the quality of the language of the University products as they could not communicate effectively, and thus proved inadequately prepared for the level of duty they are expected to perform.

Obanya asserts that communicative competence represents the general goal of the language instruction (education). Education through language, which is the main tool of education (since it is the means with which knowledge is imparted from one person to another no matter the discipline can determine the level of educational accountability). If at the end of a course the graduate could effectively communicate

ideas about his discipline to others or could effectively apply the knowledge he had acquired appropriately to whatever relevant job he does, the education is accountable. The way and manner he converses with the language of instruction would also determine the accountability of education. Language education will ensure educational accountability if:

1. The graduate can transmit his knowledge effectively to a learner without hardship.
2. The graduate communicates ideas about his discipline effectively to someone else.
3. Does what is expected of him competently and efficiently.
4. Can easily adapt new techniques to suit his environmental requirements.

In Church Service for instance, the educative aspect of it is accountable for results if and only if at the end, an altar call is made and the necessary response is elicited. In other words, the educative work of the Pastor is determined by the evaluation result of the extent to which the audience understood his language and respond positively.

Thus, it is safe to state unambiguously that without language accountability there can be no educational accountability because language is the major means of education.

## **Conclusion**

We have invariably discovered from the above discourse that language education, because of its importance in helping to educate the populace, is a means of educational accountability.

A properly educated person, no matter his field of learning must be able to communicate ideas, principles, and information about his discipline to the outside world of that discipline. If he had properly grasped the language of instruction, there is no doubting the fact that he will appropriately apply the acquired

knowledge as the need arises. He will also be able to adapt new ideas and information about his discipline to his own environmental needs.

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