

# EDUCATION

*A Communication Channel For National Development*

*A Book of Readings in Honour of*

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# THE GENERAL STUDIES ENGLISH PROGRAMME AND ITS IMPACT ON PRESERVICE TEACHERS OF UBE

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## **Abstract**

*The paper evaluated the General Studies English (GSE) programme from the perspectives of pre-service teachers. Based on the conceptual framework of the curriculum conceived in its historic dominant concept as subject matter, it reflects the theory relating to principles of selection, sequence and grade placement. One hundred and forty pre-service teachers were randomly selected as subjects for the study. A questionnaire was designed to measure students' assessment of the aims and objectives, content, resource persons and materials, relevance and general aspects of the programme. The pedagogic implications of findings for the effective implementation of the UBE programme were highlighted.*

## **Introduction**

The commitment of the Federal Government to the success of the Universal Basic Education Scheme (UBE) is illustrated in paragraphs 23 – 27 of the implementation guideline. It is clearly stated that government is committed to ensuring the success of the Ube and therefore teachers will be an integral part of the process of its conceptualization, planning and execution.

It goes on to say that efforts will be made to raise the general education of teachers as well as raise the level of their initial professional preparation. The government recognizes the fact that the teachers is at the heart of school curriculum implementation. His expertise is made to bear on the teaching-learning process. He holds the key to the success of what goes on in the classroom. Therefore she/he has-to be professionally prepared for his job. This indeed is the essence of teacher training.

Three main avenues presently exist for preparing teachers to perform this job. These are a state of personal education, followed by pre-service training and in-service training, which provides increase opportunities for the continued education and training of teachers (Balogun, 1991).

For pre-service education which is the focus of this study, the following institutions are assigned the responsibility of providing the required professional training

- Colleges of Education
- National Teachers Institute
- Teachers' Centres
- Institutes of Faculties of Education

Each institution has its special programme to which trainees are to be exposed. The structure of one programme differs from the other in terms of admission requirements/entry qualification, duration of course, curriculum content and quality of training staff. In spite of the differences in the structure of the respective programmes, they obviously share certain common features. For instance, all the programmes consist of the major components of teacher education namely:

- General education (General English INCLUSIVE)
- Academic (teaching subject preparation)
- Professional studies in education
- Teaching/professional practice

The present study focuses on colleges of education. The reason for this selective treatment is based on the decision of government to ultimately make NCE the minimum qualification for Nigerian primary and junior secondary teachers. Besides, the colleges help to produce the needed teachers for the successful implementation of the Universal Basic Education.

The study of English language tagged "General Studies English (GSE) is embedded in the curricular of Nigerian Colleges of Education. It is a compulsory course that cuts across all disciplines, comprising of language and communication skills of reading, writing, listening, speech drills and the development of grammar and vocabulary. The course does not only serve as a developmental course, it is also meant to take care of the deficiencies carried over from the secondary school level in order to meet the demands made on the language as a medium of instruction at the tertiary level. It also serves to equip the prospective teachers with enough communicative competence and fluency to be able to use the language effectively in the teaching of their major subjects, all of which make use of English as medium of teaching.

Several recent research strands offer interesting implications of teacher effectiveness. For instance a three year study conducted by the International Reading Association (2003) highlighted the importance of highly prepared classroom teacher. The teachers who completed quality teacher preparation in the use of English were more confident, successful and effective; resulting in high student achievement in school. Onukaogu (2001) noted that our current trend of having untrained and incompetent teachers in the use of English in our schools is a disservice to the teachers and their students. These observations necessitate immediate studies to collect highly reliable and hard data that should inform the General Studies English curriculum for all teachers. The present study evaluates the General English Curriculum in relation to the perceptions of pre-service teachers. This is with a view to determining the contributions of the curriculum towards the recipients' competencies. This will help to identify the gaps between the intended, the implemented, the achieved and the required curriculum. This recognition will translate to the enrichment of the curriculum content in the training of teachers and the promotion of practical competence. The investigation focuses on Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education for each accessibility, cost implication and logistic problems.

The study involved 140 pre-service teachers. 68 from the school of Arts, 40 in the sciences and 32 in vocational studies. Proportionate random sampling procedure was used for the selection.



## Methodology

The study involved 140 pre-service teachers. 68 from the School of Arts, 40 in the Sciences and 32 in vocational studies. Proportionate random sampling procedure was used for the selection.

A questionnaire designed to measure specifically students' assessment of the GSE programme was used in this study. The instrument was developed because of the non-availability of a directly applicable instrument at the time the study was conducted. The questionnaire was prepared based on the conceptual framework of the curriculum conceived in its historic dominant concept as subject matter there is to be taught by teachers and learned by students. It therefore reflects the theory relating to principles of selection, sequence and grade placement of subject matter (Wheeler, 1967) namely:

- i) Use of expert judgement based on various social and educational factors to determine what subject to teach and the aims for the selection.
- ii) Use of criterion (difficulty, interest) to select the subject matter for particular population.
- iii) Plan and implement appropriate methods of instruction to ensure mastery of subject matter.
- iv) Selection of objectives as statements of change in the behaviour of the learner which will result from instruction, educational treatment or stimulation.  
(A compilation of the aims and objects of the GSE programme as spelt out in the departmental brochure was used in this study).
- v) Relevance of subject matter to individual and societal needs.

Evaluation within the context of this study is seen as process evaluation which deals with making judgement of worth about the relevance, coverage, suitability, sequencing, fit, content of learning participation and teaching methodologies. It is also formative in that it involves posing of questions concerning the merits of a programme during the process of its development or alternatively after the process of programme development has been fully completed. In this instance, evaluation results serve as source of information to the programme developers and given them the opportunity to correct defects discovered in the programme and its implementation (Wheeler, 1967).

The researcher views the General English Curriculum under focus as being at an intermediate level of development at which it is subject to progressive change as the years roll by with the ever increasing knowledge of improving the teaching of English in second language situations. These were used to prepare the questionnaire on a five-point scale ranging from excellent to poor. The questionnaire had 5 main sections.

- i) Perceptions of aims and objectives of the GSE programme
- ii) Perceptions of content of the GSE programme
- iii) Perceptions of resource persons and materials for the programme
- iv) Perceptions of relevance of the GSE programme to individual and societal needs.
- v) Perceptions of general aspects of the GSE programme

The preliminary list compiled from the sections identified was given to four knowledgeable and experienced lecturers of English and General English. These lecturers were requested to review and assess the suitability of the content of the list in terms of their suitability for

the purpose of the study and detect difficulty and ambiguity. Collation of the comments and suggestions from the reviewers led to

- a) reframing of some of the items and
- b) deleting of some of them. This led to improvement on the quality and clarity of the items.

In order to test the reliability of the instrument it was administered to 20 student-teachers from the school of education. A split half reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained.

### **Design Procedure and Analysis**

The study adopted the descriptive design to seek information about pre-service teachers' perception of the GSE programme. The questionnaire was administered on individual basis. Pre-service teachers' cooperation was sought with the assurance of confidentiality. The respondents had enough time (24 hours) to respond to items on the questionnaire to make for objectivity and reflective thinking.

The investigation was carried out by the researcher and three other lecturers in the college. The number of respondents given each type of response was calculated. Scores were assigned to each response as follows: Excellent (5), Good (4), Average (3), Below Average (2) and Poor (1). This made possible the calculation of mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) and standard deviation (SD) ratings for each statement on the questionnaire on one hand and for each section on the other.

From this scoring scheme, the higher the mean rating, the more acceptable the statement, the further towards excellent gravitates the curricular point. A low standard deviation indicates considerable cohesion among respondents.

## Results

Table 1 – 5 below show the evaluation of the GSE curriculum item by item as spelt out in the questionnaire by the whole sample.

**Table 1: Assessment of the aims and objectives of the GSE course**

		Mean	S.D
1.	The development of listening skill to a level that the student is able to listen to lecturers, tutorials and make more useful notes.	4.38	0.88
2.	A student who is able to speak English intelligibly and effectively, who is able to communicate meaningfully with other people reflecting in his being able to give clear directions, instructions, explain a process, defend a point of view and participate in discussions.	4.33	0.92
3.	The development of the reading skill to the level that the student is able to read about fluently seek information from books, find answers to questions raised from print, draw inferences and summarize people's opinions	4.33	0.92
4.	A teacher who is able to write essays, reports, minutes of meetings, draw inferences, interpret ideas, make judgement of worth of ideas and submissions and write intelligibly using the medium of English	3.99	0.89
5.	A teacher who has a broad knowledge of the Nigerian society and other societies through introduction to literature and literacy fiction.	3.55	0.95
6.	A teacher who is well exposed to the techniques of writing and creating works of fiction in poetry	2.42	1.09
7.	A teacher who is well exposed to the techniques of writing and creating works of prose	3.47	0.87
8.	A teacher who is well exposed to the techniques of writing and creating works of drama	3.99	0.92
9.	A teacher who has an understanding of the Nigerian traditional literature	3.96	0.98
10.	A teacher who has the knowledge of the functions and characteristics of Nigerian traditional literature	3.80	0.95

Table 1 displays the overall mean and standard deviation values of aims and objectives achieved by the GSE programme. The development of listening, communication, reading and writing skills rank highest with mean scores 4.38, 4.17, 4.55 and 4.11 respectively while exposure to the techniques of writing and creating works of fiction in poetry rank lowest with the mean score of 2.42.

**Table 2: Assessment of the contents on the GSE programme**

		Mean	S.D
1.	Appropriateness of content of the course title "Lexis and Structure" to expectations from the GSE programme.	4.11	0.90
2.	Appropriateness of "Reading" as a course to expectations from the GSE programme.	4.07	0.95
3.	Appropriateness of "Writing" as a course to expectations from the GSE programme	3.88	0.93
4.	Appropriateness of "Listening" as a course to expectations from the GSE programme	3.31	0.98
5.	Appropriateness of "Speech" as a course to expectations from the GSE programme	4.08	0.90
6.	Appropriateness of "Study Skills" as a course to expectations from the GSE programme	4.06	0.91
7.	Agreement of content with course titles and syllabic description	3.76	0.97
8.	Flexibility of content in following your own interests in assignments and term papers	2.04	1.09
9.	Intellectual coherence (including organization)	3.35	0.98
10.	Adequacy of content for the target population i.e. level of difficulty	2.11	1.01

Table 2 presents the mean and standard deviation values of content of study for contributing positively to the expectations from the GSE programme and its adequacy for the student teachers. They rated "Lexis and structure" highest ( $X = 4.11$ ). They rated flexibility of content in following their own interest lowest ( $X = 2.04$ ). Also below the ladder is the adequacy of content for their academic level. They perceive the course content as difficult for their academic level ( $X = 2.11$ ).

**Table 3: Assessment of resource persons and materials for the programme**

		Mean	S.D
1.	Availability of space for lectures	2.35	1.17
2.	Provision of adequate equipment and gadgets necessary for studying GSE courses	1.63	1.45
3.	Availability of space for reading when not at lecture	1.86	1.38
4.	The regularity of attendance at lectures	3.84	0.95
5.	The lecturers' mastery of subject matter	4.08	0.91
6.	Availability of required texts in the library	2.25	1.06
7.	Lecturers' ability to present concepts clearly in lectures and tutorials	4.07	0.95
8.	Availability of lecturers for consultations and discussion on academic issues	2.83	1.03
9.	Their readiness to be consulted freely on personal matters	2.90	1.07
10.	Their ability to evaluate and grade (how often, how adequate, how objective)	3.59	1.06

Table 3 displays the students' assessment of the lectures and materials for the programme. Lecturers' mastery of subject matter, their regularity at lectures and their ability to present concepts clearly in lectures ranked highest ( $X = 4.08, 3.84, 4.07$ ) respectively. Supporting physical facilities are rated low with the highest mean score of 2.35, space for reading

when not at lectures as well as provision of adequate equipment for teaching are considered poor with the low rating of 1.96 and 1.63 respectively. Their lecture halls are not considered conducive or supportive of effective teaching and learning. So also is the deficiency of the library in catering for their needs ( $X = 2.25$ ).

**Table 4: Assessment of relevance of the GSE programme to individual and societal needs**

		Mean	S.D
1.	Relevance of content of course to current educational social, economic and political issues in Nigeria.	3.85	0.93
2.	Contributions of content to your academic and professional development	4.18	0.89
3.	Contributions to the enhancement of your performance in your two teaching subjects	3.31	0.98
4.	Impact on your performance in the education courses	3.59	1.06
5.	Assess yourself as a teacher who can carry out small scale investigation into problems in any of the two subjects studied	4.06	0.87
6.	A teacher capable of running a 2-year degree programme	4.08	0.87
7.	A teacher capable of continuing reading even outside the school situation	4.14	0.87
8.	A critical and reflective teacher outspoken and sensible to major issues in writing	3.76	0.97
9.	A teacher capable of assisting to formulate policies on education	3.55	0.96
10.	Assess the level of the time you account to the study of GSE in relation to your two major subjects (out of lecture hours).	2.02	1.05

Table 4 presents the relevance of the GSE programme to students' individual and societal needs.

Students consider the GSE programme relevant to their individual and societal needs; the lowest mean score being 3.31. They however rate their level of commitment to the study for the GSE courses low ( $X = 2.02$ ).

**Table 5: Assessment of general aspects of the GSE programme**

		Mean	S.D
1.	Assess your performance in GSE course judging by the result of your continuous assessment and sessional examinations	4.11	0.90
2.	How will you rate the adequacy of your mastery of the English Language at the point of entry into the College as far as coping with the demands of the GSE programme is concerned	2.11	1.01
3.	How far will you support the motion that a pass in 'O' level English is adequate for admission into the College especially in coping with the heavy laden academic content of the GSE courses	1.96	1.38
4.	How will you recommend the GSE programme to a friend thinking of taking the course	4.35	0.87
5.	How far will you support the view that GSE programme should continue to be made compulsory for all students in the College.	3.73	0.88

Table 5: Presents students' assessment of the general aspects of the GSE programme.

They agree that their performance in the GSE courses is below average.  $X = 2.81$ . Their opinion of the GSE courses is good ( $X = 4.35$ ). They will readily recommend it to anybody wishing to take the course. They are of the opinion that a pass in "O" level English is not adequate for admission into the college especially in coping with the heavy laden academic content of the GSE courses. It is important to note that even though students perceive the course as difficult in terms of content (Table 3) they believe it should continue to be made compulsory for all students in the college ( $X = 3.73$ ).

### **Discussion**

The investigation was designed as an exploratory study of pre-service teachers' assessment of the General English Programme. The findings of the investigation have been analyzed in the preceding section. Highlights of these findings are discussed under:

- i) Aims and objectives by the GSE programme.
- ii) Pre-service teachers' rating of the content of the GSE courses.
- iii) Adequately and aptness of resource persons and materials for the programme.
- iv) Relevance of the GSE courses to individual and societal needs.
- v) Assessment of General Aspects of the GSE programme

### **Aims and Objectives Achieved by the GSE Programme**

Overall mean scores for the aims and objectives achieved by the GSE programme as rated by the student teachers indicate that their exposure to the courses provide opportunities and enhances their capabilities to listen to lectures, tutorials and make useful notes.

- i) Increase their communicative competence
- ii) Develops their reading abilities
- iii) Enhances their abilities to write English intelligibly.

However, the programme least provide opportunities for the mastery of techniques of writing and creating works of fiction in poetry. The student-teachers' low rating of the poetry Course agrees with the findings of Bishop (1970) that students are generally not favourably disposed towards poetry. He found in a study of the response of prospective teachers of literature to four poems that their major problem was the inability to confront the poem. Their inability to enter imaginatively the situations described by the writer dampened their interest.

It is instructive to note that the students rating of their communicative ability is high (see table 1) in spite of their poor performance in class tests and examinations (Table 5). This gives an impression of students' ignorance of their perceived deficiencies in communication skill. This is probably indicative of students' inability to link knowledge gained in the classroom with real life situations. This agrees with the opinion of Unoh (1983) that Nigerian students have not explored the interrelationship among the various oral and written communication skills.

Olafe (1983) explained the cause of this phenomenon submitted that the course outlines designed in our tertiary institutions are so clearly demarcated as if there is no relationship between speaking and reading or reading and writing. Such a rigid course in this opinion overlooks the fact that reading can be used as prelude to writing or speaking or that reading, writing, speaking and listening skills can be integrated into the same instructional unit.

### **Pre-Service Teachers' Rating of the Content of the GSE Course**

Data on pre-service teachers' rating of the content of the GSE courses towards the achievement of the aims and objectives for which they were designed indicate that the following courses were rated highest:

- i) Lexis and Structure
- ii) Reading
- iii) Study skills;
- iv) Speech and listening skills

Least in the students' ratings is writing. The reason for this may not be alienated from the largeness of the class which does not encourage lecturers giving feed back from written assignment. Added to this is the faulty assumption by some lecturers that students in higher institutions are matured people who do not need to be fed back on written work as opposed to lower level students who are requested to make correction of written assignments. It has been established that knowing how much progress a learner is making helps to improve his attitude (Rivers, 1972). According to Rivers, a learner needs to be favourably disposed if he must perform creditably in a second language. He recommends a careful monitoring of the learner's achievement in language use and the steady provision of feedback to the learner in respect of his achievement.

It is worthy of note that students are of the opinion that lecturers do not take cognizance of their interests in assignments and term paper. Interest has been found to be an important part of the teaching procedure (Palmer, 1964) according to him, not many people learn anything well unless they are interested in it. According to Mohammed (1981) teachers need to know the specific interests of the students in order to capitalize upon them in giving assignments and term papers. He suggests daily classroom observation of the books students chose to read as one of the ways of studying students reading interest. Students consider the content of the GSE courses too difficult for their academic level. This is an indication that the prospective teachers require higher entry qualification than are now asked for to cope with the academic level of content.

#### **Adequacy and Aptness of Resource Persons and Materials for the Programme**

The component of physical facilities and materials to support the GSE curriculum content fared very low in the estimation of the respondents. The students however, had a fairly high opinion of their lecturers although they are indirectly accused of not making themselves available for consultations. This however is not unexpected since the general picture in a tertiary institution is liberal rather than the authorization atmosphere of discipline prevalent at the lower levels. Nonetheless, the students cannot benefit maximally from the course content because most of the books required for individual study and assignments are not within easy reach as expressed by the students.

#### **Relevance of the GSE Programme to Individual and Societal Needs**

The contribution of the GSE programme to the students' professional development was given the highest mean rating of 4.18 i.e. considered almost excellent. The near total endorsement is confirmation of the position that the N.C.E. represents the first attempt to design courses (GSE course inclusive), that are truly reflective of our needs and aspirations (Ogunsola, 1975).

It is instructive to note that students give a low assessment of their commitment to the study of General English ( $X = 2.02$ ). A probable explanation for this is that students do not attach much importance to the course as they consider the major subjects more important. This agrees with the opinion of Olajide (1997) that by the term "General English" the tendency is for students to regard it as part of General studies that only sought to give general information about objects, issues and concepts and so no specific skills to be mastered.

### **Assessment of General Aspects of the GSE Programme**

Students' opinion of the GSE programme is good. They agree however that a pass in "O" Level English is inadequate for admission into a College of Education especially in coping with the heavy-laden academic content of the GSE courses. They also have a low assessment of their performance in the GSE courses judging by the results of their continuous assessment and sessional examination but they do not see themselves as low achievers in the use of English Language as revealed by their high assessment of their communicative abilities as revealed in table 2. As noted earlier, this is indicative of their inability to correlate performance in tests with the oral Use of English Language. The fact that students recommend that the course should remain a compulsory course is a reflection of the high regard they have for it and the conviction that it is contributory to their intellectual and professional development.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the foregoing, the following recommendations are hereby offered:

- The aims and objective of the GSE programme as explicitly and implicitly stated be more vigorously pursued.
- Enlisting students' interest by suiting the assignments and term papers to their disciplinary needs.
- Improving students' attitude by monitoring their achievement and providing feedback.
- Ensuring the right relation between the lecturers and students by introducing "wrap sessions" during which both interact more informally.
- Encouraging impromptu speeches during which students' grammatical and structural errors are corrected. This will help establish the link between written and spoken forms of the language.
- Minimum entry qualification be raised to at least 5 credits or merits in G.C.E. 'O' level school certificate and grade II certificate with a credit pass in English Language. Where this is not practicable, students with 'O' level pass in English should be made to undertake one year pre-N.C.E., a specially package remedial English programme should be designed for their use preparatory to the General English Programme.
- Physical facilities necessary to make meaningful learning a reality should be provided.
- The adoption of the title 'Use of English' rather than "General English" which is more general than specific in outlook.
- Replacing the old method of teaching poetry by reading for comprehension with textual analysis is aimed at finding the basic linguistic structures which are the difficulties in the poem.
- Conducting internal examinations for prospective students to determine their entry behaviour, individual strengths and weaknesses.

### **Conclusion**

This investigation has examined the pre-service teachers' assessment of the General Studies English as a remedial and developmental programme for the College students. As an exploratory study using locally developed instrument and limited sample of students in a single college of education, the findings may not have said everything about the topic of investigation. However, the data of the study reveal to us how student-teachers in an institution perceive the objectives achieved by the programme and their rating of the



influence of the programme on their professional and intellectual gains. The objectives and factors used to analyze student- teachers' assessment of the programme certainly need further application in student teaching research.

Nevertheless, the findings of this study suggest the need for teachers of the "Use of English" or the "General English" in our tertiary institutions to recognize the importance of the programme in the perception of prospective teachers who are the expected models and mentors of our teenage youths. The student-teachers need to be made to see their deficiencies, change their indifferent attitude towards English and Communication skill in order to ensure considerable improvement in their performance and to avoid committing avoidable grammatical and structural blunders at which their pupils would giggle in ridicule. Also, the findings of this study will be of immense use to the Federal and State Governments who are stakeholders in the preparation of N.C.E. graduates. The findings will be particularly useful for proper implementation of the Universal Basic Education Programme. Since the N.C.E. graduates implement the programme from primary I to JS III.

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