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## To Do or Not to Do: Implementation Issues in the NCE English Language Teacher Education Programme

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### **Abstract:**

*The paper examines the implementation issues of the English Language teacher education programme in two Colleges of Education within the Nigerian context. Although the programme is well-structured and has clear objectives, it is plagued by a number of problems which affect the implementation of the programme itself. The paper explores the interpretations of the programme objectives from the lecturers' perspectives and the implications this has on their perception of the programme, their teaching practice and on what they teach. The study compares "said practice to actual practice" and highlights and explores some of the problems resulting from a mis-match of policies and practice which have a domino effect on the overall implementation and success of the English Language teacher education programme in two Colleges of Education. The findings reveal that some lecturers in the programme have very limited knowledge of the programme objectives. The study equally shows that the Colleges of Education, in their quest for internally generated revenue, unintentionally "sabotage" their own programmes.*

**Keywords:** English Language teacher education programme, programme objectives, implementation, NCE

### **1. Introduction**

This paper examines the implementation of the objectives of an English Language Teacher Education (ELTE) Programme at the NCE level within the Nigerian context. Teacher education in Nigeria is provided by the Colleges of Education and Faculties of Education in the Universities. The Colleges of Education award the National Certificate in Education (NCE) which is the minimum teaching qualification in Nigeria. The Colleges are governed by a regulatory body, the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE). This body is in charge of formulating policies, setting the minimum standards, monitoring and accrediting all academic programmes in the Colleges of Education.

Teacher education in Nigeria is in a regrettably poor state. It has been greatly neglected and this, undoubtedly, has taken its toll on the implementation of teacher education programmes. The lack of adequate planning, preparation and inconsistencies in government policies have been identified as factors which affect the implementation of teacher education programmes (Afe, 2006). Buttressing the point further, Westbrook et al (2008) emphasize that in the formulation of new policies, it is crucial for policymakers to take into consideration the context in which teachers work. They argue that this allows for the assessment of the suitability and relevance of such policies. This paper seeks to examine the implementation of NCCE stated objectives for the ELTE programme in two Colleges of Education. It also seeks to explore the lecturers' interpretations of the said objectives.

### **2. Literature Review**

Peacock (2009) argues that the field of language teacher education remains under researched. This area has also been identified by Barkhuizen and Borg (2010) as a field of emergent inquiry. In their opinion, the field lacks well-defined research agenda and approach. This, they state, can be attributed to the constant negotiation between actual practice of teachers and the current practices from evolving theories developed in different language contexts. Moloney (2005) toes the same argument as he believes that teachers are defined by their social context. This invariably means that the context in which language is taught plays a major role in the teaching of the language. It would be interesting to see the role played by the Nigerian context in this research which seeks to explore the lecturers' interpretations of the objectives of the English Language teacher education programme in the Colleges of Education, and how these interpretations frame their teaching practices.

Ozturk and Aydin (2019) identify ELTE as a relatively new and independent field of inquiry. As such, they argue that research in this field should focus more on how teachers learn what they know, and not on what they should know. In their view, many ELTE programmes have their focus on theory. Farrell (2015) holds the same view and stresses the importance of hands-on training in language teacher education programmes as many programmes have failed because of a major focus on theoretical knowledge. It thus becomes expedient for such programmes to be turned inside-out and practice be placed at the centre of students' learning experience (Ozturk and Aydin, 2019).

With the increased rate of failure of students in the English Language, and with fingers pointed at teachers for this constant failure, it becomes pertinent to re-examine how teachers of the English Language are trained within the Nigerian context. This has become an issue of grave national concern because of the rapid deterioration in the quality of teaching and learning of the English Language in language classrooms (Ola-Busari, 2014). In her view, teachers of the English Language in Nigeria are found 'wanting' as some of them are poorly trained while some are not even trained. To Hamisu et al (2018), the lack of knowledge in English Language displayed by school teachers indicates gaps in their training. Olaofe (2013) apparently agrees with this view as he describes the teaching of English Language in most primary schools as defective. He explains that most teachers lack proficiency in the four language skills, namely, reading, writing, speaking and listening. This is in line with the view held by Ajeyalemi (2008) that gross incompetence in content and pedagogical knowledge, as well as inhibited communication skills are major factors which militate against the successful implementation of the NCE programmes. Emarievbe (2013), thus, reiterates the need to focus on the adequate preparation of teachers, especially teachers of the English Language who, with their NCE qualifications, presently, teach at the primary level of education in Nigerian schools.

Although the literature is teeming with research on English Language teaching, not much has been done to utilise their findings to improve English Language teaching practice within the Nigerian context. Given the challenges encountered in the teaching of the English Language, it is pertinent to re-evaluate the programme objectives viz-a-viz its implementation. According to Bailey (2013), teachers are charged with delivering pedagogical content. The onus, therefore is on the lecturers in the ELTE programme at the Colleges of Education, to be aware of the programme objectives in order for it to be effectively implemented. As aptly summed up by Altmsdort (2016), the goal of a good ELTE programme is to train and guide competent teachers to have successful language learners. This research paper focuses on the English Language teacher educators and their unique interpretations of the objectives of the NCE ELTE programme.

The research aims to:

- Identify the objectives of the ELTE programme at the NCE level.
- Explore the objectives of the programme as perceived by the lecturers.
- Examine how these objectives are implemented in the programme.
- The study is based on the following research questions:
  - What are the objectives of the elteprogramme at the NCE level?
  - How are these objectives perceived by the lecturers in the programme?
  - How are the objectives implemented?

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Research Design

According to Bennette (2003) research can be conducted on specific aspects of an academic programme which are of interest to the researcher. In this paper, the focus of interest is on the interpretation of the objectives of the ELTE programme in two Colleges of Education and how this translates into practice. The study adopts the qualitative research design. This design is apt at exploring the how and why questions which require explanations (Yin, 2009). Qualitative research aims to understand the phenomenon under study. This is done by examining the problem from different perspectives which provide unique interpretations to the phenomenon (Emarievbe, 2013). This research seeks to understand the unique interpretations of the programme objectives as perceived by the lecturers in the ELTE programme in two Colleges of Education. It also aims to evaluate the implementation of the objectives in the programme by comparing 'said practice' with 'actual practice'.

By giving a thick description of the data gathered from within the context under study (Gillham, 2000; Nazari, 2002), readers are able to go through the same experience and make their own interpretations of the phenomenon under study. This is because according to Della Porta and Keating (2007), interpretations of a phenomenon vary based on the perspective from which it is perceived.

#### 3.2. Research Context and Research Participants

The study is a small-scale research centred on the ELTE programme in two Colleges of Education within the Nigerian context. The small-scale research allows for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study. For the purpose of confidentiality and anonymity, the colleges involved in the study will be referred to in this paper as College of Education A and College of Education B respectively. The research participants are five lecturers drawn from the two Colleges. They will be referred to as Lecturer 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively. Lecturers 1, 2 and 3 are from the College of Education A, while Lecturers 4 and 5 are from the College of Education B.

#### 3.3. Research Tools

To ensure triangulation of data, document examination and interview were chosen as the main research tools for this study. The tools complement one another (Bennett, 2003). This is because the use of contrastive tools increases the validity of research (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

According to May (1993) documents are important not only for what they contain, but, also for what they leave out. Stake (2000) believes they give unexpected clues which pave way for very unique and interesting research findings. For this study, the NCCE documents were critically examined to identify the objectives and guidelines for the programme.

Interviews allow for an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon under study (King, 2004). Information gleaned from the documents were scrutinized and analysed critically. The research participants were questioned to provide their views on the topic under study. Questions on the interview schedule were formulated based on the research questions for this study. One-on-one interviews were conducted for the five lecturers from the two Colleges of Education. Each interview lasted for about fifteen minutes. The questions were centred on the lecturers' perceptions of the ELTE programme and the implementation of the programme objectives.

### 3.4. Analysis and Findings

Thematic analysis was adopted as the analytical method for this study. This method of analysis identifies, analyses and reports patterns within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It also allows for a comparison of themes across data sets (Bohm, 2004). Documents were critically analysed; interview notes and audio recordings were transcribed and analysed. Patterns within the data and across data sets were identified and compared. Themes were generated from these patterns, which were grouped and refined into initial headings and sub-headings. These formed the main themes and sub-themes which reflected the "central message" of each category (Emarievbe, 2013).

### 3.5. Analysis of NCCE Documents

For this study, the NCCE (2012) *Nigeria Certificate in Education Minimum Standards for General Education*, NCCE (2010) 'Curriculum Implementation Framework for NCE Programmes' were analysed to identify the programme objectives and other stated guidelines for the English Language teacher education programme in Colleges of Education. From the NCCE documents the following were identified as the objectives for the English Language teacher education:

- Develop the four language skills – reading, speaking, listening and writing
- Help students become confident in their spoken and written English
- Enable students develop interest and acquire critical skills to appreciate literary works
- Equip successful students to teach English effectively at the primary and secondary school levels
- Prepare students for further studies in the subject.

### 3.6. Analysis of Interview Data

The analysis of the interview data reveals a number of interesting themes. These include the following:

- Programme objectives
- Lecturers' perception of the programme
- Implementation issues

**Programme Objectives:** One of the aims of this study is to analyse the objectives of the ELTE programme at the NCE level. Lecturers were asked to give their views on the aims of the programme. To Lecturer 1, the programme is geared towards equipping students with the required knowledge to teach English. To Lecturer 2, the programme aims to produce teachers who will not only teach English, but would also serve as role models in their competent use of the language. Lecturer 3 agrees with Lecturer 2 on the production of teachers who serve as role models. She, however, highlights a major aim of the programme which according to her is to "churn out manpower" for the primary and secondary levels of education. This suggests a mass production of English teachers and raises questions as to the levels of the quality of their training in the ELTE programme.

With Lecturer 1, the aim of the programme can be said to be focused solely on theory. Very little attention, it can be assumed, is given to the practical aspect of the language and the acquisition of specific language skills. This contradicts the view held by Lecturer 2 which holds that it is essential to have a good knowledge of the subject, it is equally important to know how to teach effectively to pass the knowledge of the subject on to others. To Lecturers 4 and 5, the programme has both primary and secondary aims. They agree that the primary aim has to do with the production of teachers of English for both the primary and secondary levels of education. They emphasize the development of the language skills of the students as a major aim of the programme. As stated by Lecturer 4 "Our students should be able to pronounce English words in a way that their pronunciation will not impede international intelligibility." In the view of Lecturer 5 "...they [students] should equip themselves with the RP standard." However, the secondary aim is geared towards the production of what they have referred to as 'intermediate staff' for organisations.

A major aim of this paper is to explore the interpretations of the programme objectives as given by the lecturers in the programme. It is thus, surprising to note that with the exception of Lecturers 4 and 5 from College of Education B, the other lecturers seem unaware of the other objectives of the programme and have only focused on the production of competent teachers of the English Language. This according to the NCCE (2012) document examined is actually the fourth objective of the programme. This lack of awareness is portrayed in the comment made by Lecturer 1 "...it might not just be one, certainly it cannot be just be one goal, but at least that's the one I can say now." Lecturer 3 is unable to make a distinction between the general aims of the NCE programme and the specific aims of the ELTE programme under the NCE programme. She states "I don't know if we have separate aims... you know we operate under this NCCE and it's a big umbrella. Whatever we do, we take it from the NCCE."

Given this scenario, it becomes necessary to question how these lecturers translate the 'unknown objectives' through their teaching practice. The findings, thus, suggests that the objectives of the programme are not taken into consideration in the planning and development of materials/lessons/learning activities for the students

**Lecturers' Perception of the Programme:** Four out of five of the lecturers involved in the study agree that the programme is well designed by the NCCE. According to Lecturer 1, the programme is well structured in terms of course content. He

believes that the provision of the course outlines and language laboratory makethe task of preparation of teaching materials easier for the lecturers.

Lecturer 2 describes the programme as comprehensive. Lecturer 4 states that the standard is high as it is 'tougher' than other programmes in the college. To Lecturer 5, the programme has 'no deficiencies', it is balanced and adequately prepares students for further studies. In his words: *"It prepares the students for the Pre-University Programme... I mean for the University Programme."*

Although Lecturer 3 acknowledges the effort of the lecturers in teaching the students, she however, argues that the programme has become worse; *"...we are doing our best in conditions that are not the best really... the standard of education has really gone down."*

ImplementationIssues: Although the lecturers (with the exception of Lecturer 3) agree that the ELTE programme is well designed, Lecturers 2 and 3, however, note that the programme is dogged by problems which hinder the implementation of the programme objectives. To Lecturer 2 there is a strong conflict between NCCE requirements and actual implementation of stipulated guidelines. Some of the areas of conflict are noted below:

*Student Population:* Funds seem to determine the implementation/non-implementation of NCCE policies. The lack of funds has made the colleges to throw their gates open to admit students (both qualified and unqualified) into the academic programmes in order to generate funds. Lecturer 2 registers her despair as she points out that the language laboratory in her college is shared by seven other departments. She explains that the Language Laboratory can only cater for forty students at a time and as such they *"...find it difficult to find time that is convenient for them to be at the lab."* Her view contradicts that of Lecturer 1 who said his teaching task is made easier with the use of the language laboratory. For Lecturer 2, her learners do not use the language laboratory and this has an impact not only on the teaching practice of the lecturer, but, also on the quality of the learning experience of the students. Lecturer 3, on the same issue, talks about a squeeze in space, which she attributes to the presence of other degree programme running concurrently with the NCE programme as a result of the college quest for internally generated revenue. Although Lecturer 1 describes the programme as well structured, he, however, finds the class size at variance with the stipulations of NCCE, which states that there should be ratio of 1 lecturer to thirty students (1:30). He has a class size of forty-seven students. In his view, this affects his teaching practice as he is not able to give his students class work and assignments on a regular basis as he is petrified. He explains that

*...because of the number, the marking of such things, both the exercises you put into teaching, one is scared... You have to think twice before you do such things and you cannot be regular in such activities.*

With Lecturer 1, there is the provision of inadequate feedback to students on class tasks and assignments. Lecturer 2 also laments about her inability to also give quality one-on-one feedback to the students. The zeal to teach is dampened because of the difficulties encountered. In her words:

*...it's not very encouraging, you find the class is noisy and you just find yourself discouraged... it kills your zeal.*

*Contact hours:* Lecturers 2 and 3 identify contact hours as another area where there is mismatch between NCCE guidelines and actual practice. In their view, the contact hours assigned by the College to teach their respective courses is insufficient. As stated by Lecturer 2 *"...NCCE designed the course I'm teaching now to be a two-credit unit course, but I'm given just one hour."* Lecturer 3 agrees with her as she explains that a 2-unit course is supposed to have *"...two contact hours a week."*

Lecturers 2 and 3 argue that the quest for internally generated revenue has made the colleges cut corners and compromise on the quality of students' learning experience. According to Lecturer 2 she merely *"scratches on the surface of the topics."* Lecturer 3 explains that the insufficient contact teaching hours actually *"...tells on the teaching of the subject."* This is because as explained by her, lecturers do not have the time they ought to spend with their students. Learning thus becomes superficial as course outlines are covered in the most basic way. This is evident in the comment made by Lecturer 2:

*I don't have the time for the in-depth treatment of each topic as I would have loved to or else I'll end up not covering the syllabus.*

Learning, which according to NCCE (2012) guidelines should be engaging, becomes docile. This is at variance with the NCCE stipulated guidelines.

*Quality of students:* On the quality of students, the findings show that there is a huge tussle between the NCE and degree programmes for qualified students into the English Language teacher education programmes (which run concurrently in both Colleges of Education). According to Lecturer 2, to raise the standard to attract the best students into the programme, the NCCE raised the entry requirement from four to five credits in subjects, making it at par with the degree programmes. These five subjects, however, must include Mathematics and English. Although the initial aim appears to be to place the NCE programme at par with that of the degree, the reverse now seems to be the case. Students prefer to go into the degree programme than the NCE given that the entry requirements are basically the same. The aim, thus, seems to be defeated.

As explained by Lecturer 3 *"...we do not have the best caliber of students."* She describes them as the "bottom of the barrel" students. This can be interpreted to mean that those who go into the English Language teacher education programme at the NCE level are the remnants or leftovers after the good students have been chosen for the degree programme. Lecturer 2 points out that most of the students come into the programme with results that are not credible as *"...their performance does [do] not match these results."* She attributes this to the students' poor academic foundation. Lecturer 3 illustrates this clearly as she describes the writing skills and performance of some of the students during examinations:

*...there are some scripts, exam scripts you open and you don't know the language in which it was written. Some of them can be that bad. They can score zero in an exam.*

Lecturers 2 and 4 also note that some of the students in the ELTE programme have spelling difficulties. To Lecturer 2 such students are beyond help as *"...they can't spell anything."* Lecturer 4 buttresses the point even more as he says:

...a student... who is not able to spell correctly or write correctly ...what I feel is the major cause of such a thing is that, the person, before getting to that particular level, such a student did not have a good foundation even from the primary school level.

To Lecturer 4, therefore the problem stems from the shaky academic foundation laid at the primary level of education. Such students, he emphasizes, should not be on the English Language teacher education programme. To Lecturer 2, because the students do not have the basics, it increases her work load as she finds herself building on a non-existent foundation.

Although not all the students in the programme are bad, the good students are in a 'minority.' According to Lecturer 3 the good students "... are usually like ... at most 10%." Lecturer 2, in her comment, seem to imply that the students are too good to be on the programme and that they do not belong there. According to her such good students "...should actually have gone to university, but maybe for the politics, they were disadvantaged by JAMB." Her comments suggest that the lecturers have not only resigned themselves to working with students who they perceive as failures but they believe that they are "rejects" from the degree programme. In other words, the NCE programme serves as a rebound for those who are not able to gain admission into the degree programme. As stated by Lecturer 3, one of the reasons for the influx of students into the English Language teacher education programme is that "... [the students] think English is so easy. If you can't fit into some other course, you can just land in English because everybody speaks English."

**Workforce:** The data reveal that it is not just the physical facilities provided for the NCE programmes that are over stretched, but even the human factor, that is the workforce. The lecturers in the NCE programme also constitute the workforce for the ELTE programme at the degree level. As a result, lecturers are literally 'choked' with work. In the words of Lecturer 1, they are "... overcrowded with work." Due to the heavy workload, there is also a high risk of lecturers becoming 'burnt out'. As stated by Lecturer 1, lecturers become "fagged out" [very tired]. Lecturer 2, contributing to this view, explains that because of the monetary gains attached to teaching the degree courses, some of the lecturers in the programme neglect their NCE classes and concentrate more on the degree students. In her words "...some of these lecturers do not even go for their lectures with the NCE students." This invariably means that they are not able to give their best to the job any more. This is disturbing as lecturers are expected to be innovative to make the entire teaching/learning experience exciting for their students.

As illustrated from the discussion above, the data gathered from the documents and interview have generated very interesting findings. These will be used to answer the research questions for this paper.

#### 4. Discussion and Findings

The paper examines the objectives of the ELTE programme in two Colleges of Education. It seeks to evaluate the NCE guidelines for the programme against actual practice. It equally explores the interpretation of these objectives by the lecturers in the programme. There is also a focus on how this affects the implementation of the programme within the Nigerian context.

The findings reveal that the ELTE programme at the NCE level is well structured, with laudable objectives which can be described as achievable. However, as in the study conducted by Peacock (2009) on the Hong Kong context, there is a mismatch between policy and practice. For example, most of the policies guiding the development of the programme have not been effectively implemented. The contact teaching hours, the lecturer/student ratio, quality of students and on-campus degree programmes have taken their toll on the quality of teaching and learning provided for the students in the ELTE programme at the NCE level. The findings show that these issues have affected the programme negatively and had an impact on the teaching practice of lecturers and what they teach. As Lecturer 2 explains, in order to cover an extensive course outline in the limited time provided, most of the courses are taught on a superficial level, with the lecturers "skimming" through the topics. As a result of this, students are not as equipped with the required knowledge and skills to become competent teachers as stated in the programme objectives. This invariably, agrees with the views held by Hamisu et al (2018) which suggests gaps in the training of students in ELTE programmes.

The situation implies that the main aim of the programme is defeated and as such contradicts the view held by Altmisdort (2016) that the main aim the English Language teacher education programme is to produce teachers who would in turn produce successful language learners. This is in line with the point made by Farrell (2015) and Ozturk and Aydin (2019) that student teachers in second language context have very little hands-on experience as their learning is largely theoretical.

Although the standard entry requirement into the programme is high, and, apparently at par with that of the degree programme, the students coming into the programme are said to be below standard as "...their results do not match their performance." Lecturers believe that those coming into the programme are the rejects from the degree programme. This notion gives cause for concern as it appears that lecturers have not only resigned themselves to working with students they perceive as failures, but have equally accepted this move as their lot in the college. This adversely spells doom for the programme. It can be deduced from the findings that the Colleges of Education have on their own, unintentionally (perhaps), sabotaged the NCE programme through an unhealthy competition with the on-campus degree programmes from other universities running in the colleges.

The findings, surprisingly, reveal that not all the lecturers in the programme are aware of the complete list of the intended objectives of the ELTE programme at the NCE level. One of the objectives of this paper is to explore the interpretations of the programme objectives by the different lecturers. It is, therefore, alarming to note that some lecturers actually prepare lesson plans, course materials and other learning activities without a good working knowledge of the objectives of the programme. This, thus, calls into question what they teach and how they teach it. The argument that

lecturers should be aware of the programme objectives for the successful implementation in academic programmes (Bailey, 2013), does not hold sway in this context. As shown in this study, the reverse is the case. From the findings, some of the lecturers, through their responses, show that they are clearly ignorant of most of the objectives of the ELTE programme at the NCE level.

## 5. Recommendation and Conclusion

This study critically analyses the objectives of the ELTE programme in two Colleges of Education. There has been a comparison of said practice to that of actual practice. Based on the research findings, some factors which hinder the successful implementation of the programme have equally been identified. Consequently, the following recommendations are proffered by this study:

**Orientation programmes/workshops:** To ensure lecturers have a good working knowledge of all the objectives of the ELTE programme at the NCE level, it is expedient to train the trainers. As such, it becomes necessary that orientation programmes and hands-on workshops/training sessions be held with lecturers regularly to keep them aware of the objectives of the ELTE programme and abreast with the current trends in their respective fields of practice. Lecturers should also be trained on how best to integrate the said objectives with their teaching practice.

**NCCE Guidelines:** Although lecturers are encouraged to be innovative in their teaching practice, it is equally important that they work with the stipulated NCCE guidelines. This, without doubt, will reduce to a minimum, the mismatch between NCCE policies and actual practice within English Language classrooms in Colleges of Education.

**Re-evaluating the College Priorities:** Given the present scenario of the ELTE programmes at the NCE level viz-a-viz other on-campus degree programmes, it becomes crucial for the College Management to re-evaluate the situation and prioritise their objectives accordingly by focusing intently on improving the teaching and learning experience of students in their ELTE programme at the NCE level.

**Quality of Students:** Although it is important to attract students to the programme, it is equally important to avoid the proverbial garbage in, garbage out syndrome in the ELTE programme. It is thus essential that only qualified students, who have been duly tested by the Colleges, should be admitted into the ELTE programme at the NCE level.

**Facilities:** Adequate working/learning facilities should be provided to allow lecturers work effectively with students, providing hands-on learning experience. For example, bigger and more computer-equipped language laboratories should be built to accommodate students in the ELTE programme in the Colleges of Education.

This paper has identified the objectives of the ELTE programme at the NCE level. It has explored the varied interpretation of these objectives from the perspectives of some of the lecturers in the programme. A major finding of this research is the unintentional, 'self-sabotage', by the Colleges of Education, of the ELTE programme at the NCE level conducted in the said colleges. The research also highlights the high lack of awareness of the programme objectives exhibited by the lecturers who should be the flag bearers of the programme.

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