

APPRAISAL OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ATTRIBUTES OF DRAFT REVISED BENCHMARK MINIMUM ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR UNDERGRADUATE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN NIGERIA

BY

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Abstract

This paper appraises the entrepreneurial attributes of the draft revised Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) for English Language released by Nigeria's National Universities Commission in the first quarter of 2018. Critiques of the Nigerian university curriculum for English Language revealed its inadequacies in engendering entrepreneurship and employability in knowledge-based economy. This therefore makes regular curriculum review necessary. Curriculum revision is a veritable instrument for making the university to develop contents that would meet the needs of overall national development. In consequence, this paper adopted five criteria to appraise the entrepreneurial and employability attributes of the BMAS under review. The criteria are availability of elements that could prompt the development of: job communication skills, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, sustainable use of resources/productivity skills, development of self and a sense of community skills; and expansion of one's world vision skills. It was found that the English components meet all the five criteria. However, it was found that except the English language programme administrator is innovative they may not utilize the content to bring the expected results. Thus, the English language educators in the university system should be trained on how to implement the contents to produce graduates of English that are employable and entrepreneurial, the enabling environment should also be provided etc. Ceteris paribus the BMAS under review has the attributes of producing graduates of English that could use the declarative and procedural knowledge of English language to be employable and entrepreneurial in a society that is looking up to English Studies for the projection of positive culture and identity.

Introductory Background

The utilitarian value of a course of study serves as a catalyst for its acceptance by the society and by extension how prospective candidates would aspire to study it. Beginning from the 1980s, the emphasis in Nigeria has been on science and technical education. The recent past indicates that the emphasis has shifted to education that is capable of enhancing entrepreneurship. This may not be unconnected with the fact that there is a youth bulge coupled with the production of university graduates that end up unemployed (British Council, 2016). In some cases, the employability of the Nigerian graduate cannot be guaranteed chiefly because of the nature and scope of the course they studied or how they were nurtured when they were undergoing the degree programme.

According to Saint, Harnett and Strassner (2003:259) "... higher education in particular, are fundamental to the construction of a knowledge economy and society in all nations." Fain, Moes, Van Doorn and Duhovnik (2018:1375) concur and posit that: "the way in which institutions manage knowledge, apply information technology and develop system to enhance

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capability and competence has surfaced as a key factor in economic performance." In consequence, Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) in section 5:81(c) and (e) of the *National Policy on Education* stipulates that some of the goals of tertiary education shall be to "provide high quality career counseling and life-long learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills of self-reliance and the world of work" and "promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community services" respectively. For this reason, it is expected that tertiary institutions (in our own case, Universities) implement curriculums that would enhance the employability of university graduates based on the principle of need analysis. According to British Council (2016:10); "Employability can relate to entrepreneurship and the creation of new economic opportunities, as well as acquiring salaried employment." From this exposition, one can extract three elements that make up employability. They are entrepreneurship, creation of new economic opportunities and absorption into salaried jobs.

A critical appraisal of the entrepreneurship component of General Studies aspect of the draft Benchmark Minimum Academic Standards (BMAS) released by the National Universities Commission (NUC) in January, 2018 revealed that none of the entrepreneurship potentials in the English Studies (Applied Linguistics, Literature and Creative Arts) was explicitly mentioned as an element the Nigerian undergraduate can take as an option. This is not only going to make the undergraduate to assume that English Studies lacks entrepreneurship capacity but also make the undergraduate studying English as a course to feel that they could end up unemployable after graduation. James, Gulies and Unwin (2011) report that investment in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics is what would make a country develop to compete in a global knowledge-based economy. This forecloses the role language can play in national development. However, it is apposite to underscore that one of the reasons the NUC released a draft BMAS in January 2018 was to make all the courses studied in Nigerian Universities relevant in the global knowledge-based economy.

Shan and Guo (2014:19) underscore that "... despite all the fanfare around the labour market need for educated workers, the labour market in China does not seem to be able to absorb the several million new graduates each year." The situation in Nigeria is not different from the one in China. Despite the investment of Nigerian governments in higher education, there is an outcry about the employability of Nigerian graduates. Worse complained about are graduates of the humanities – of which English language is one. Most of the graduates of English did not necessarily apply for the course as their first choice. Taiwo (2018:43) submits that: "Most students who could not be admitted to study Law, the natural first course of choice for Arts students, end up in the Department of English." The concern of parents is the dividend of their investment in the education of their children. In consequences, they are never comfortable investing in a programme that lacks explicit utilitarian attributes. The orientation of the secondary school leaver with bias in Arts subjects and by extension the reluctant undergraduate and graduate of English is people that studied English pave ways for their lack of employability.

Given the exposition made thus far, there is the need for the undergraduates to be groomed on how to become self-employed in areas related to their respective courses of study. It is in the light of this that this study was conceived to appraise whether the English Language component of the draft BMAS has the capacity of making the undergraduate

student of English Language acquire competencies and skills that could make them entrepreneurs thus contributing to national development.

The Problem

Out of the three elements that make up the features of employability as postulated by British Council (2016), the perception of most of the people in the society is graduates of English can only fit in the third which is acquiring salaried employment. However, there are no adequate vacant salaried employment positions to absorb all the graduates of English. It is assumed that the curriculum of undergraduate degree programme in English Language excludes the graduate of English from applying the knowledge they acquired from the course in entrepreneurship and the creation of new economic opportunities. Over time, the Nigerian University system has embarked on the review of university curriculums with the view of making the contents reflect the rapidly advancing frontiers of knowledge-based economy (Saint, Hartnett, and Strassner, 2003). The most recent is the draft released by the NUC in January, 2018. However, there is a major concern on the overall employability and utility value of the draft curriculum. It is in view of this that this work attempts to appraise the entrepreneurship capacities of the draft BMAS for B.A. English Language.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

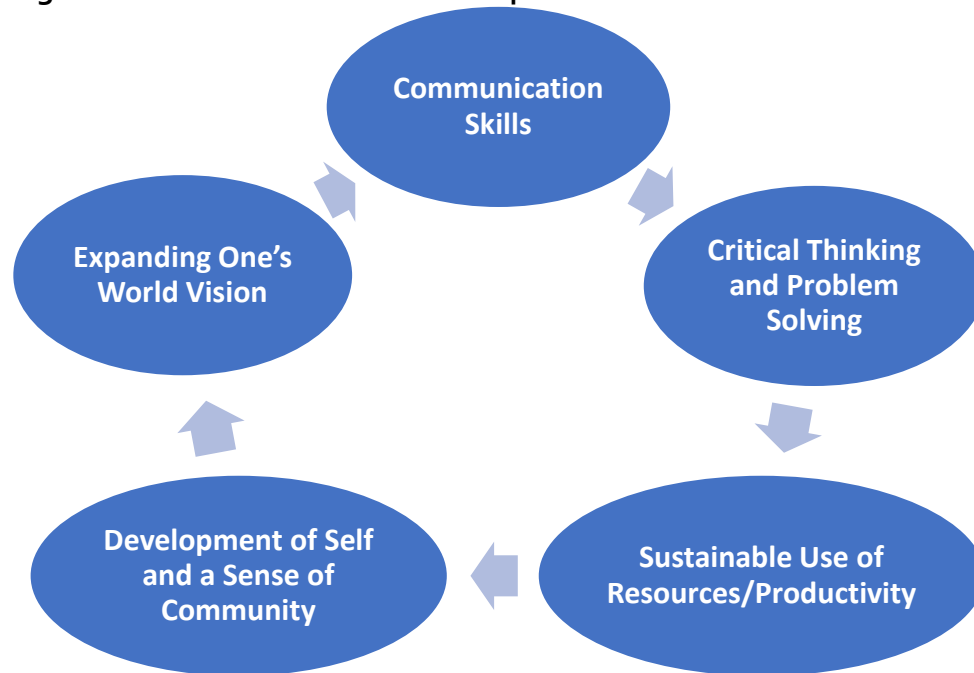
This study adopted two theories as guides in the analysis of the draft BMAS. They are utilitarianism theory and Skilbeck's reconstructionism theory. According to Cernetic (2012:7), "In utilitarian concept of professional choice, everything is managed by rational aspiration to gain additional income; this aspiration by itself however defines attitude of income that is expected from investment." On the other hand, Gunashekar (2015:20) reports that the goal of reconstructionism "... is to bring about desired social change, and in order to reach this goal, learners should be provided with knowledge and skills that are useful for social life." Any course structure that can enhance employability is useful for social life because it gives the graduate of English the opportunity to participate fully in public, community, and economic life (The New London Group, 2000).

This work adopted critical policy analysis as method for data analysis. According to Kariwo (2014:25), critical policy analysis is aimed at "... exposing connections between policy context, process and content." The contents of the draft BMAS are analyzed on the basis of the goals of tertiary education as provided in the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the position of the National Universities Commission (2018:2) which provides that one of the aims and objectives of the Arts Discipline (Humanities) – of which English Language is one – is "To instill in them the spirit of self-reliance, self-pride and self-actualization." The word *them*, as presented in the objective, refers to the undergraduate. NUC (2018:15) added that in order to ensure that the students in the Humanities possess the requisite skills and competencies that will enable them to thrive as global citizens, all programmes will expose the students to courses that will make them possess "... some measures of flexibility, transferability, and a knowledge of computer application".

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the critical policy analysis attempts not only appraising the contents of the BMAS based on the policy statements and objectives, but also attempts assessing whether the contents in the BMAS can inculcate some five broad skills

adapted from Asian Development Bank (2007) and British Council (2014). The five broad skills are shown in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Five Basic Skills of an Entrepreneur



Results

Critical policy analysis of the contents of the draft BMAS indicates that the undergraduate student of English Language is expected to take basic Courses in Computer Application, General Studies and Entrepreneurship. In addition, they are expected to take courses targeted at enhancing their knowledge and competencies of language skills, general linguistics, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, elements of English usage in various professional domains; and literary and creative knowledge from the mainstream Department of English (and Literary Studies). They are also expected to take elective courses from natural languages, philosophy, African languages and literature, European languages or theatre arts in the first three years of their university education.

Table 1 presents the outcome of the critical policy analysis of the draft BMAS based on the five basic skills adapted by this study.

Table 1: Result of Critical Content Analysis of the Draft BMAS

S/No.	Entrepreneurship Skill	Relevant Course	Level
1	Communication Skills	ENG 101: A Survey of the English Language	100
	Ability to clearly express one's ideas and feelings	ENG 102: Introduction to English Grammar and Composition	100

orally and nonverbally; ability to listen; ability to read, comprehend, and respond to ideas presented; ability to write and clearly express one's ideas and feelings; ability to access, process, and utilize available basic and multimedia information in English, foreign and indigenous languages	ENG 103: Spoken English (Practical)	100
	GST 111: Communication in English I	100
	GST 122: Communication in English II	100
	GST 123/ GST 124: Basic Communication in French/Basic Communication in Arabic	100
	LIT 104: Introduction to Poetry	100
	LIT 105: Introduction to Prose Literature	100
	LIT 106: Introduction to Drama	100
	Natural Language	100
	ENG 201: An Introduction to Morphology and Syntax	200
	ENG 202: Advance English Syntax	200
	ENG 203: Introduction to General Phonetics and Phonology I	200
	ENG 204: Introduction to General Phonetics and Phonology II	200
	ENG 205: Advance English Composition I	200
	ENG 206: Advance English Composition II	200
	ENG 207: Varieties of English Language (Including English based Pidgins and Creoles)	200
	ENG 211: English Morphology	200
	LIT 208: Prose Fiction	200
	African Language and Literature	200
	European Language	200
	ENG 301: Contemporary English Usage	300

		ENG 302: Phonology of English	300
		ENG 304: Introduction to Semantics	300
		ENG 306: Discourse Analysis	300
		African Language and Literature	300
		European Language	300
		ENG 309: Research Methods I	300
		ENG 401: New Trends in Syntax	400
		ENG 405: English for Specific Purposes	400
		ENG 406: Project/Long Essay	400
		ENG 408: Speech Writing	400
		ENG 409: Research Methods II	400
2	Critical Thinking and Problem Solving	GST 112: Logic, Philosophy and Human Existence	100
	Numeracy skills, flexibility and open to change, aware of options, ability to make critical and informed decisions, innovativeness and creativity, scientific thinking, future orientation	GST 125: Contemporary Health Issues	100
		LIT 104: Introduction to Poetry	100
		LIT 105: Introduction to Prose Literature	100
		LIT 106: Introduction to Drama	100
		LIT 107: Introduction to Creative Writing 1 (Practical)	100
		GST 211: Environment and Sustainable Development	200
		LIT 208: Prose Fiction	200
		LIT 210: Creative Writing II	200
		ENG 306: Discourse Analysis	300
		ENG 309: Research Methods I	300

		LIT 308: Creative Writing III	300
		ENG 402: Pragmatics	400
		ENG 403: Psycholinguistics	400
		ENG 406: Project/Long Essay	400
		ENG 407: Language and National Development	400
		ENG 409: Research Methods II	400
3	Sustainable Use of Resources/Productivity	GST 223: Introduction to Entrepreneurship	200
	Ability to earn a living, sustainable use of resources (including time) and appropriate technology (e.g. IT/computer literacy), entrepreneurship and business acumen, customer orientation, productivity	CMP 300: Introduction to Computer	300
		CMP 301: Application of Computers to Arts	300
		GST 311: Entrepreneurship	300
4	Development of Self and a Sense of Community	GST 113: Nigerian Peoples and Culture	100
	Self-development: self-awareness, self-discipline, self-promotion, sense of responsibility, self-worth, self-realization, principled, willingness to learn, interpersonal skills, team spirit, leadership; a sense of personal and national identity: humane, nationalistic, love of nature, God-centered; knowledge of one's history,	GST 121: Use of Library, Study Skills and ICT	100
		LIT 104: Introduction to Poetry	100
		LIT 105: Introduction to Prose Literature	100
		LIT 106: Introduction to Drama	100
		ENG 209: Language and Society	200
		GST 224: Leadership Skills	200
		LIT 208: Prose Fiction	200
		ENG 303: Introduction to Applied Linguistics	300
		ENG 305: The English Language in Nigeria	300

	pride in one's culture and respect for those of others; recognition and practice of civil and political rights	ENG 307: The Socio-Linguistics of English	300
		ENG 403: Psycholinguistics	400
		ENG 404: Multilingualism	400
		ENG 405: English for Specific Purposes	400
		ENG 407: Language and National Development	400
5	Expanding One's World Vision Knowledge, acceptance, respect, and appreciation of diversity; peace; nonviolent resolution of conflicts; global awareness, networking, interdependence and solidarity	LIT 104: Introduction to Poetry	100
		LIT 105: Introduction to Prose Literature	100
		LIT 106: Introduction to Drama	100
		ENG 207: Varieties of English Language (Including English based Pidgins and Creoles)	200
		ENG 209: Language and Society	200
		GST 222: Peace and Conflict Resolution	200
		LIT 208: Prose Fiction	200
		ENG 303: Introduction to Applied Linguistics	300
		ENG 307: The Socio-Linguistics of English	300
		ENG 404: Multilingualism	400
		ENG 405: English for Specific Purposes	400
		ENG 407: Language and National Development	400

Discussion

According to NUC (2018:64), one of the specific aims and objectives of the B.A. English Language Programme is:

to orient students towards self-employment by a focus on skills such as writing e.g. of articles in magazines, of speeches, designing and presenting special programs (sic) on radio or TV, designing and publishing, magazines etc.), creative writing and other kinds of original output through independent thought, inventiveness and creativity.

In the light of the above, this study found that the draft BMAS for B.A. English Language has course contents that have the capacity of boosting the employability of the graduate of English especially from the entrepreneurship angle.

One of the skills an individual needs to become an entrepreneur is communication skills. This study found that the entire curriculum has a minimum of 33 courses that are capable of enhancing the communication skills or communicative competence of the undergraduate in English, foreign and indigenous language. One of the key factors a potential entrepreneurship needs to consider in the course of planning and mapping business strategies and by extension execution of business plan is communication. These courses will not only help the graduate of English who wants to establish an industry focusing on editing, translation, speech writing, article publications on mainstream and social media, English language materials development and evaluation, creative writing, forensic linguistics, language test development, peace linguistics etc. to advertise their products by using language that complies with the principles of clarity, brevity, tact, comprehensiveness, completeness and correctness but their industry could be commissioned by other entrepreneurs to develop or edit adverts for them.

However, it is the responsibility of the teachers of these courses to lead the students or raise their consciousness toward realizing the entrepreneurship potentials inherent in the courses. Any attempt at using pedagogical methods that could thwart the manifestation of this objective would make the learning environment ineffective. British Council (2016:4) asserts: "simply piling more bodies into universities without adequate attention to the condition of learning reduces the impact of university study, and at worst can waste precious years of young people's lives ..."

Another attribute of an entrepreneur is risk management. No business is without risk. As a graduate of English who want to establish an Applied Linguistic industry, there is the need for one to have critical thinking and problem solving skills. Even though a teacher could apply the principles of critical thinking and problem solving in the course of teaching almost all the contents of the entire curriculum, this study found that there are 17 courses which can expose the undergraduate of English Language to critical thinking and problem solving. Business is sustained on the basis of flexibility, innovation and ability to identify options.

This study found that there are 4 courses in the curriculum that can prompt the undergraduate of English Language develop the skills of sustenance of resources and productivity. These courses will not only guide the undergraduates on how to earn a living, use their time and technology effectively, but also make them develop overall entrepreneurial skills. Global economy is technology-driven. British Council (2014:2) underscores that: "What matters is not just having technology but understanding how to use it well and locally." It is envisioned that once quality time and resources are devoted towards exposing the undergraduate to the 4 courses in this category, they should be able to apply their knowledge in establishing Applied Linguistic industries and also excel in their business ventures.

University education is designed to facilitate the overall development of the undergraduate. The curriculum is implemented to ensure that the cognitive, affective and psychomotor endowments of the undergraduate are explored and therefore making the graduate apply what they acquired in real life. This study found that there are 16 courses in the draft BMAS that can be used as scaffolds by the university to ensure that the affective objectives of the curriculum are attained. These courses can concretize the overall self of the

undergraduate and inculcate the spirit of sense of country in them. This would make the English Language programme to achieve its aim of producing conscientious individuals that are worthy in character and learning. This will guide the graduate of English who is an entrepreneur in the Applied Linguistics industry exhibit exemplary leadership skills, patriotism, avoid cutting corners etc. thus promoting their respective images and the image of the country positively.

Kramersch (2014:249) reports that: "Globalization, coupled with global media and global communication technologies, has exacerbated the multiplicity of codes, media and ways of making meaning in everyday life." Conflicts are driven by inability to negotiate meaning and accommodate differences. This makes one's reasoning to be blurred thus triggering violent conflict. This study found that 12 courses in the draft BMAS can make the undergraduate develop the skills of networking, global awareness, appreciation of diversity etc. These skills would make them do Applied Linguistic business with people irrespective of the people's background.

Conclusion

Existing realities reveal that governments at all levels in Nigeria do not have the capacity to provide jobs for all Nigerian graduates that intend to secure employment in the public service. Similarly, the private sector cannot absorb those the public sector cannot accommodate. This lack of opportunity would continue to deepen the rate of unemployed graduates of English in the country. In order to minimize the numerical strength of Nigerian graduates that could be unemployable, the NUC, the body responsible for regulating university education in Nigeria, in January 2018 developed a draft BMAS for each of the programmes ran in Nigeria universities. One of the concerns of the Commission is to make each programme meet the entrepreneurship needs of the Nigeria undergraduate. One of the programme in draft BMAS is the B.A. English Language programme. The draft BMAS was diffused to all Nigerian universities to enable members of faculty in the respective universities to review it. This study found, after a critical policy analysis of the draft, that there are so many courses in the document that can make the Nigerian undergraduate of English Language to develop entrepreneurship skills. *Ceteris paribus*, this will not only make the graduate of the programme self-employed and self-reliant but also a job and wealth creator.

The potentialities of the courses in the draft BMAS to make the undergraduate of English Language an entrepreneur notwithstanding, this study notes that except the teaching and research staff in the Department of English (and Literary Studies) is exposed to functional pedagogical skills of teaching the respective courses with the aim of unveiling the contents' entrepreneurship endowments, the implementation of the draft BMAS may not yield the expected outcomes.

Furthermore, businesses survive in favourable economic climates. Given that most of the entrepreneurship activities that could emerge from the B.A. English Language programme depend on the economic status of the populace, the business value of the Applied English Linguist may not blossom and get appreciated if the populace is poor. In consequence, governments and relevant actors should implement economic policies that would reduce poverty thus enabling the populace access the services rendered by the entrepreneurial applied linguist. This will guarantee the survival of the applied English linguist's business.

There is the need for learned societies like the Nigerian Academy of Letters, the Linguistic Association of Nigeria, the English Scholars' Association of Nigeria, the English Language Teachers' Association of Nigeria etc. to collaborate with programmes working on entrepreneurship development to sponsor exhibitions and cognate events that would showcase the entrepreneurship endowments of the B.A. English Language programme.

Industrial attachment or internship programmes at organizations – such as media houses, forensic linguistic laboratories, English language teaching and learning providers, speech writing cohorts, publishing houses, English language materials and software development industries, peace linguistics and conflict briefing notes development outfits etc. – where the entrepreneurship potentials of the undergraduate of English could be harnessed should be made compulsory. This will equip the undergraduate with an experiential insight into the human and non-human resources needed to start an applied English linguistics based industry. They will also learn how to write proposals, concept notes etc.

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