

Managing and Marketing ESP in Nigeria

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The harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few (Mt. 937)

Introduction

English continues to play a dominant role in the socio-cultural life of the Nigerian nation. As the official language, it remains the medium of instruction in all Nigerian institutions of higher learning. Understandably, there exists in every Nigerian university, a well-established Department of English (or Department of Languages/European Languages). Either on their own, or in conjunction with their universities' General Studies Units, the Departments of English provide service courses with such titles as Use of English, Communication Skills in English, Basic English, etc.

Whether at Nsukka for example, where it lasts for two semesters, or at Portharcourt where it runs only for one semester, the course is aimed at equipping students sufficiently to cope with their work in an English-medium university. One aspect of this course deserves mention here, namely that what is taught is General English by teachers whose degrees and backgrounds are predominantly in literature, Linguistics, or Education. For our purposes here, this situation easily adds up to one important observation: there is at the moment, no strong tradition of ESP teaching in several Nigerian universities, UniBen and UniPort, for example.

Although the inception of COMSKIP/COMSKIPTECH, as well as NALEAP has done much to change this scenario, much remains to be done. While the acronym ESP is no longer new, MacDonough's 1984

prefatory comment, for example, that "there can be few people involved in language teaching who are unaware of the concept of ESP ..." is interesting in the Nigerian context. To be aware of the concept of ESP is one thing, to implement it, or explore its varied potents is quite another.

This paper therefore raises some issues regarding the management and over-all marketability of ESP in Nigeria. To give respectability to the ESP profession in Nigeria and, also exploit its financial potential, the paper basically advocates the establishment of an ESP unit (simply designated ESPU) by each university. More importantly, it is argued that such a unit should be conceived of essentially as a commercial venture, a business-oriented outfit.

To embark on such an innovative journey is to raise immediately a number of important questions. What is justification for such a unit? What relationships are envisaged between it and the long-standing English department or GES unit? How will such a new unit be managed, to ensure adequate financial returns? What potential problems, if any, militate against the entire venture? What factors demand attention, to ensure the effectiveness and overall viability of such a unit? It is to these and other related questions that this paper addresses itself.

ESPU and English Department/GES Unit

The predominant arrangement in Nigerian universities is that in which a General Studies unit or Division or school administers the teaching of service English courses. While the GES unit is usually managed by a Director/Dean we here argue that there is ample justification for taking all issues pertaining to ELT out of his contro^l

Not only are GES directors often academics in disciplines other than English, they are also sufficiently saddled with the task of administering a variety of other GES courses (GES 102 - Introduction to Logic and Philosophy; GES 103 - Nigerian People and Cultures; GES 104 - The History and Philosophy of Science). It is thus far more advantageous to assign the responsibility of administering ESPU to a language expert (simply designated Coordinator) who, above everything else, must be an ELT, ESP, ESL, or TESOI practitioner. Even if the head of the English Studies department is an ESP practitioner, it would be well impossible to combine his duties with the demands of managing a business venture like ESPU.

ESPU is envisaged as a unit of the English department, at least in its

formative years. Thus it is necessary for both organizations to maintain close administrative-cum-academic links. In fact, the English department will have to provide support for the new unit in terms of both human and material resources, as the latter tries to find its feet. Applying the principle of division of labour here - creating roles for both leaders - by no means precludes cooperation between ESPU and the English department. In terms of ESPU's structure as an organization, then, the coordinator will be responsible to the Chief Executive of the university, through the head of English department. The coordinator will administer the unit with a number of other duly constituted staff, both academic and administrative.

To Sell or Not to Sell

One observation is here necessary, to further underline the point of departure advocated by this paper. Nigerian university departments of English have so far maintained the traditional role of providing service courses, that is, teaching the language to their bona fide students, admitted into standard degree programmes. While not necessarily jettisoning this role, the emphasis for ESPU should be on the teaching of English for *occupational* and *professional* purposes.

The unit is to be concerned primarily with the designing, and packaging of courses aimed at such fields as the oil industry, the civil service, or for such people as broadcasters, secretaries, pilots, computer programmers, sports journalists, company/media executives, and paramedical workers. In designing the courses, obviously, the concern should be with the kind of English such personnel groups need for effective communication in their day to day professional interaction.

The contention here, then, is that university English departments in the country have reached a crucial stage in their development, a point at which a break with the past - in terms of both course content and administration - is demanded. The departments (by establishing ESP units) need to go beyond the traditional function they have set themselves by taking on the role of marketing or selling their services to wider community, not necessarily to students with examinations in view only.

To teachers of English in Nigeria, the idea of marketing their services may sound novel, even strange, but its practicability is in no doubt. The concept of managing, of course, involves some aspect of marketing, but key words have been retained in our title for the purpose of emphasizing two points. First, there is at present no strong tradition of selling English,

but properly managed, ESP in Nigeria has profit-making potential. Several countries of the world boast scores of language schools which are engaged in the lucrative and continuing business of selling a wide range of specific English courses, while their universities also run courses aimed at long-distance customers. Second, the enormous sales potential of ESP presents a challenge to the Use of English teacher: he should no longer conceive of himself solely as a teacher or classroom worker, but also as a businessman, a manager.

Assuming this changed status, or additional role of marketing his product will confer on him greater economic freedom, indeed guarantee greater professional satisfaction. Management and marketing are hardly widely associated with the ESP teacher's function, job or profession in Nigeria, at the present time. But by its nature, ESP represents a truly many-sided phenomenon, a profession in which the practitioner or teacher can also function as guide, counsellor, coordinator, manager, and public relations officer. Indeed a major strand of this paper is the argument that the ESP teacher in Nigeria can and should take his stand - as an entrepreneur - in the language business.

What is important for him is the realization, indeed vision, that the fields are wide, full of prospects of rich harvests, for as Armstrong (1983:135) points out: "An entrepreneur is someone who conceives business visions and turns them into business realities". Even if the teacher has no ESP or administrative training, this paper raises issues the consideration of which will enable him achieve a successful marriage of his academic, business and language skills, whether as head of ESPU, or as a teacher within the organisation.

ESPU as an Organisation

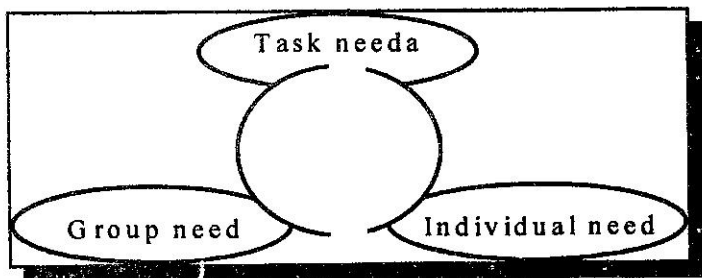
To be successful and, in line with the objectives behind its establishment, ESPU has to operate as a business. As a business concern, it can be considered an organisation, having been set up, "for the purpose of achieving certain goals" (Morphet et al. 1974:88). An organisation involves people of diverse background, political, or cultural, such a loose association needs to be organised if its objectives are ever to be accomplished.

It is imperative for an organisation to specify its needs and goals, as this, in a sense, welds the group together. In addition, the decision-making processes of the organisation, as well as its leadership roles, need to be

spelt out clearly. It is infact necessary to consider these aspects separately. In ESP, goal-setting is a basic pedagogic procedure, whether in the classroom, or in course and syllabus design. It is also standard practice in management (ELT management included). As a document, the curriculum of any educational establishment indicates, among other things, the overall goals and objectives of its educational programmes. For a small outfit as ESPU, the major objective is to stay in business, with an eye for profit. There are, of course, subsidiary roles, such as improving the overall quality of ELT, within the university, and beyond. A successful marriage of both goals is to be sought by the unit.

Apart from goals and objectives, organisations also have needs, as ESPU (or more specifically, its coordinator) will have to recognise. John Adair has grouped such into three broad, but overlapping categories:

- Task needs - these are to be met in order that the organisation can effectively carry out its function.
- Group needs - these are needs pertaining to the maintenance of team spirit within the organisation.
- Individual needs - these are to be met in order to sustain morale and team spirit.



*Adair 1978 represents these needs thus, by three independent circles:

(Adair: The Three Circles Model of Leadership Taken From Armstrong, 1983:176).

Selling the Organisation's Product

Having decided what kind of business to be in, it is imperative for ESPU, as for any other enterprise, to consider both the question of the market in which to operate, and that of a special group, namely the organisation's customers. Although the marketing of its major product -

language - ranks as ESPU's cardinal function, it is impossible in practice to separate the issue of the market in which to operate, and that of the customers.

Suffice it to say that in marketing, the position of the customer is a crucial one. Young (1986:94) appropriately observes that "without customers all other aspects of a business are superfluous", while in the words of Clive Barwell, success in business is only achievable "by identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer needs and desires..." (quoted in Giles 1973:4).

To be successful, then ESPU must pursue a dynamic marketing strategy, one that constantly takes cognisance of the customer, his needs and wants. This assumes greater significance when we consider that ESPU will come in contact with a remarkable variety of customers. Courses have to be for customers who are not only in different professions (the specificity of the "S" in ESP), but also come from quite different backgrounds. An organisation like ESPU will thus be especially answerable to its large number of clients, a situation which further underlines the greater degree of complexity and accountability associated with the ESP teacher's job, vis-a-vis that of the General English teacher.

As Hutchinson & Waters make clear, "ESP is accountable teaching. ESP learners and sponsors are investors in the ESP course and they want to see a return on their investment of time and/money" (1987:144). It has never been enough and, for ESPU, it will never be enough, to simply provide courses or services for fee-paying customers; the unit, indeed the entire venture must be driven by desire to satisfy demands, individual needs and wants.

Kotler (1988:4) draws an interesting distinction between needs, wants and demands, and then comments:

These distinctions shed light on the frequent charge by marketing critics that 'marketers create needs'... Marketers do not create needs; needs pre-exist marketers. Marketers along with other influencers in the society, influence wants.

Kotler sounds defensive, especially with the use of the verb "influence". While PAN, Kaduna, for example, did not create the need for transport, the company may attempt to influence demand or the buyer's choice by advertising their latest 505 model as "Nigeria's most prestigious car". In fact, demands can be created, as Honda himself indicates: "We do not make something because the demand or the market is there. With our technology, we can create demand, we can create the market", (quoted in Armstrong 1983:138). A Sony sales director in America similarly comments: "Others see a market and come up with a product to

fit it. Sony's philosophy is to develop a product when there is no market, and then create one", (Armstrong 1983:137).

To apply the Honda and Peugeot examples to our immediate circumstances, we add that demand or need in Nigeria for ESPU's product certainly pre-exists the organisation itself. Thus, the challenge facing ESPU as a marketing organisation is not so much that of creating need or a market (a la Honda or Sony), as of getting customers (and other potential 'buyers') interested in the product it is marketing.

Once an organisation has decided what business to be in, the next stage obviously, is to ask "How did I promote myself?" Thus, an important aspect of ESPU's marketing tactics is to suggest, indeed, emphasize to the customer the advantages and overall usefulness of its product in this country. Of course, emphasis will be laid on the organisation's capacity to *improve* the particular skills most relevant to the customer's job, such skills as report writing, effective management of meetings, computer programming, business negotiations, and other forms of, say, oral communication. The idea can be effectively sold of how such skills are, and of how much improvement would mean in terms of greater efficiency for the customer's firm, business or occupation, or even as a boost for his confidence and personality.

Thus, an important tool in ESPU's marketing arsenal or strategy is that of advertising and promoting itself. If such well-established multinational companies operating in Nigeria such as Shell, Leventis and Lever Brothers still give considerable attention to advertising, then a new-comer to the Nigerian market scene such as ESPU will have to be ready to fight even harder in this regard. The print and electronic media can be made useful allies in ESPU's task of influencing, or more precisely, educating the market.

Fulfilling Expectations: The Manager as Organizer

The extent to which an organisation proves successful is inexorably linked with the question of its management. Thus, the manager, especially of a young organization like ESPU, will bear great responsibilities. Indeed, the managerial position in any organisation is a complex one, as several forces - both external and internal - strive to exert their influences on the incumbent. We shall examine the function of the manager, by considering some of the organisational needs which, demand his keen attention. Indeed, in his capacity as the chief executive of the establishment, he is charged with steering the organisation towards its specified goals and objectives.

The discussion in the preceding section on marketing, needs, and wants is useful, since such questions are crucial to the objectives and successful

operation of ESPU. The discussion has provided an insight into some of the duties performed in an organisation. The manager, however, does not necessarily carry out the task of selling or marketing by himself. Even in this area alone, there will be a considerable volume of work to contend with - such as preparing advertisements, dealing with correspondence, and going on recruitment-cum-promotional tours- that even the most energetic manager or co-ordinator will find his workload well-nigh impossible.

This clearly necessitates the delegation of duties to other members of his team. Management, in the words of Armstrong (1983), "is often said to be about getting things done through people or ... 'deciding what should be done and getting other people to do it", (pp.14-15).

Much as this definition can be criticized, it clearly emphasizes the "people" or "team" aspect which is crucial to management. Morphet et al. (1974:98) state emphatically that "the effectiveness of an organisation is enhanced when superordinates delegate authority to subordinates".

While we have discussed the tasks of marketing which can be delegated to a marketing officer, for example, there are several other duties and positions not mentioned here. As the organisation expands, the co-ordinator's team will enlarge to include, say, an accountant, examination, accommodation or even transport officer. As an organiser, then the co-ordinator has the responsibility of ensuring that the duties which he has assigned to other members of his management team are adequately discharged.

In general, however, the "people" aspect of the co-ordinator's work is only one side of the management coin. The co-ordinator has to achieve a balance between over-seeing, and the converse aspect of "doing". This aspect lays stress on "the manager's responsibility for achieving the effective use of all resources - money, methods and materials as well as manpower" (Armstrong 1983:15). In other words, apart from being an organiser, the Co-ordinator is expected to be an achiever. The question of achieving and getting things done by the manager of an establishment is nearly summed up thus:

Achieving results, getting things done, making things happen. That is what management is all about ... It can be said that there are three sorts of managers: those who make things happen, those who watch things happening, and those who don't know what is happening (Armstrong 1983:17).

As manager, also, the co-ordinator has to engage in evaluation of himself, the staff and the organisation at regular intervals. An evaluation of this nature will reveal such aspects as what goals have been/not been achieved (and perhaps why), customer's rating of the organisation, and areas where innovation is called for. All information gathered from such

review or evaluation will prove of immense value for the coordinator in his planning for the future.

The manager as motivator

Concerning the group needs of the organisation, the manager cannot afford to disregard one fact, namely that leadership is all about people. For the efficient running of ESPU, then, the maintenance of group spirit is essential. Man is fundamentally a social being and has great need for social relationships. White et al. (1991:9) paint a beautiful picture relating to the creation and maintenance of group spirit:

A happy and harmonious staff room is one sign that such group maintenance needs are being met, while such activities as meeting for a drink after work are further examples of the same thing.

Satisfying group needs means that the coordinator should be able to motivate sufficiently the members of his team. A manager's ability to motivate those he is leading is tied up not only with his personality, but also with how he exercises leadership. An autocratic management style is not likely to achieve results or compel respect as much as a democratic one. It is essential for the Co-ordinator to maintain excellent relationships with those he is leading especially as ESP commonly calls for teamwork. He will also be in charge of teachers who not only have far less experience, but will also be looking up to him. Thus, it is necessary for the Co-ordinator to provide a conducive atmosphere for work, promoting morale, and a sense of belonging and common purpose.

Motivation also involves leading by example. Displaying a high sense of professionalism, discipline and devotion to duty and thus setting high standard will speak more effectively to those being led. In addition to motivation, the manager needs to be approachable, ensuring uninhibited communication with members of the group of which he is leader.

Certainly, overlapping with group needs are individual needs. A worker burdened by personal problems at home can hardly be expected to perform at work, let alone contribute meaningfully to the efficiency of the group or ESPU. The good manager takes cognizance of personal needs by, for example, rewarding deserving individuals in the organisation and by showing some interest in his workers' personal problems. On the question of satisfying personal needs, White et al. (1991:10) comments as follows:

Basically, all of us like to feel valued and a successful organization is one in which people feel that their worth as individuals has been given appropriate attention. Indeed, the kinds of individual treatment which

good educational practice advocates for students apply equally well to teachers and other staff.

The Manager and the Problem Spot

It is necessary to consider briefly, two major problems which would face a new unit like ESPU, and some avenues the Coordinator can explore in dealing with the problems. From the situation described in our introductory section, it is clear that ESPU is bound to encounter the problem of lack of staff.

This is by no means peculiar, for as Pauline Robinson's (1980:75) remarks':

A serious problem for ESP in many parts of the world lies in the provision of an adequate supply of teachers. In most cases the people teaching and administering ESP programmes have themselves received no special training in ESP ...

Similarly, most lecturers of Use of English are "university teachers who have found themselves thrust, willy-nilly, into ESP and service-English programmes..." (Robinson, p.75).

With the recession generally dictating an embargo on new appointments at the university, the coordinator can hardly recruit any significant number of new teachers. He can however, hope for more success in another avenue, namely staff development, a measure of which Main (1985:4) comments as follows:

Staff development is a deliberate and continuous process involving the identification and discussion of present and anticipated needs of individual staff for furthering their job satisfaction and career prospects and of the institution for supporting its academic work and plans, and the implementation of programmes of staff activities designed for the harmonious satisfaction of those needs.

The Coordinator will therefore have to make a strong case to the chief executive of the university, emphasizing that ESP teaching has special features which differentiates it from the teaching of General English. The case is to enable some staff already teaching the Use of English courses to receive ESP training. Another good argument available to the manager of ESPU in trying to convince a hard-up university administration struggling with the recession is that "at such a time the most effective use of staff resources will only be secured if every teacher is encouraged to

develop to the limit of his or her professional potential" (Henderson & Perry 1981:53).

In the mean time and, in collaboration with the English department (where possible), he has to embark on a project of "retaining" other staff who teach Use of English, by means of seminars, workshops, and other in-service training strategies. The Coordinator will need to specifically motivate this category of teachers, some of whom already have neither commitment nor incentive, and view the teaching of General Studies or its Use of English component as an academic dead-end, a certain cul-de-sac that offers no future. The fact that the Coordinator is concerned with the quality of his services to the customers brings into sharper focus the challenge of, and need for, this special motivation. Stevens (in Chamberlain & Baumgardner 1988:43) writes:

The teacher who is new to ESP needs advice, help and support from those teachers who already have the necessary experience ... But the essential point is that becoming an effective teacher of ESP requires more experience, additional training, extra effort, a fresh commitment, compared with being a teacher of General English:

Interestingly, the Coordinator is here offered an opportunity to fulfil some personal, and even group needs, which members of his organization expect of their manager, for "Staff development lies in the area of concern where the needs and interests of the individual come into relationship with the needs and opportunities of the organization of which he is a member" (Gray 1980:123).

The next problem - that of equipment and materials - further underlines the need for both ESPU and English department to cooperate closely. At least, for the period immediately following the inception of ESP, the problem of equipment - producing and maintaining photocopiers, OHPs, cassette players and tapes - can be solved by such cooperation. English departments are also getting excellent collection of ESP books from British Council and every Coordinator will find this useful for any INSET arrangements he is making. The Coordinator's overall intension would be to acquire materials for ESPU as soon as enough funds are generated.

Conclusion

Given the enormous importance of the English language in Nigeria, it is surprising that the universities and their English departments have so far been concerned with teaching the language for educational reasons mainly. The bulk of this paper has argued for change in this regard,