

David Roger Jowitt: The Quintessential British-Nigerian Dedicated to Nigeria's Education

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Driven by the sheer passion to explore the world beyond his immediate environment, David Roger Jowitt – a fresh Cambridge University graduate at the time – decided to move from London where he was born and raised to Nigeria to teach in Nigerian schools. It was 1962, and he was just 21. Ironically, this was a time when, following Nigeria's independence in 1960, many British expatriates were leaving Nigeria back to the UK. But young David wasn't looking for an easy life. He was simply consumed by a deep-seated desire to make meaningful impacts in education outside the UK, which would also afford him the opportunity to experience what other cultures looked like.

David Jowitt's first teaching position in Nigeria was at the Anglican Grammar School, Ubulu-Uku in Delta State, where he taught a wide range of subjects, such as English, History, Latin, French, Literature and Fine Art. After two years of teaching in Ubulu-Uku, he wanted to further sharpen his skills as a teacher, so he returned to the UK to study for a postgraduate course in education/teaching between 1965 and 1966. It was while he was in the UK at this time that he perhaps realized how much he had come to admire Nigeria and how much he had begun to be attached to Nigerian life. In his words, "I just knew that I wouldn't be happy if I was not going to come back to Nigeria." And he did in early 1966! This time, he was employed at the prestigious Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha, now Anambra State, Nigeria, where he taught History, English Literature and General English.

Unfortunately, hardly had he resettled in Nigeria than the Nigerian Civil War broke out. Having disrupted educational activities in most of Southeastern Nigeria, the War forced Mr Jowitt back to the UK from where he sojourned in Libya where he taught English between 1971 and 1973, following which he returned to the UK to study for an MA in Theoretical Linguistics at the University of Essex. After his MA programme and with the War in Nigeria over, he returned to Nigeria where his soul truly belonged to continue his contribution to education in the country.

Armed with his MA, he decided to move up the educational ladder: he taught English at the Federal College of Education, Okene, Kogi State (1974-81) and Federal College of Education, Pankshin, Plateau State (1981-86). His first university employment in Nigeria was at Bayero University, Kano (BUK), where he was employed as a senior lecturer in 1987, rising to the rank of professor in 1998. He taught until 2005 when he moved to the University of Jos. Until 14 August 2023 when he passed on in a hospital in London, Prof. David Jowitt, 82, remained active as a professor in the Department of English at the University of Jos.

Prof. David Jowitt's greatest contribution to Nigerian education is arguably his educational materials, especially secondary education English language textbooks. For some, he is probably

best known for his book *Common Errors in English* (co-authored), which was a regular inclusion in the secondary school English curriculum from the 1980s until the early 2000s. For others (especially his university colleagues, I'd imagine), his 1991 book *Nigerian English Usage* is the masterstroke. For me, the work I consider his *magnum opus* is his 2019 book *Nigerian English* published in Berlin by Mouton de Gruyter, which I have described elsewhere as the “‘go-to’ reference book on Nigerian English.” Now, that is the tall task of characterizing the massive contributions of Prof. Jowitt to English language education in Nigeria – it is like the proverbial elephant being described by different people.

Here's a snapshot of some of his books:

- 1) *Common Errors in English* (co-authored) Longman Group, 1985.
- 2) *Use of English* (co-authored). Longman Nigeria, 1987.
- 3) *Nigerian English Usage*. Longman Nigeria, 1991.
- 4) *Junior English Project 1, 2 & 3* (co-authored). Longman, 1996-97.
- 5) *Senior English Project 1, 2 & 3* (co-authored). Longman, 1996-97.
- 6) *Essential English for School Certificate* (co-authored). Spectrum Books, 1999.
- 7) *Gateway to English for Junior Secondary Schools - Pupil's Books 2 and 3 and Teacher's Guides 2 and 3* (co-authored). Pearson Education Limited, 2005.
- 8) *English Language and Literature in Historical Perspective: A resource book for students in higher education*. Spectrum Books Limited, 2009.
- 9) *Concise Grammar, Books 1-4*. Learn Africa Plc, 2013.
- 10) *Nigerian English*. De Gruyter Mouton Berlin, 2019.

His complete devotion to everything Nigerian led him to take a keen interest in the peculiar ways in which Nigerians speak and write English, known as Nigerian English. His observations gave birth to his *Nigerian English Usage* published in 1991. He would go on to publish numerous research articles on different aspects of Nigerian English and to become a global figure in ‘Nigerian English research’ – the exact title of a research article I co-authored with him, which has just been accepted for publication in a leading international journal – unfortunately he didn't live to see yet another feather in his capacious cap. At 82, he was still intellectually active, with many books he was still finishing off, including his in-press memoir.

Even though Prof. Jowitt only officially became a Nigerian in early 2023 following the conferment of Nigerian citizenship on him by the Federal Government of Nigeria, he is probably more Nigerian than many of us. Not only did he spend 52 years of his 82-year life in Nigeria, but he did so living, working and visiting every nook and cranny of Nigeria. And here's the shocker! Prof. Jowitt spoke four Nigerian languages quite fluently: Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba and Ebera. By his own assessment, he's unsurprisingly most fluent in Igbo – since he spent his young years in Nigeria in Igbo-speaking communities. Prof. spoke nearly impeccable Igbo with me when I was with him and his elder sister Audrey in London just two weeks before he passed on.

That's not all! He once told me that he can say "how are you?" in almost 20 Nigerian languages. He also told me the story of how he spoke Epira, Hausa and other Nigerian languages to the amazement of the immigration panel that interviewed him during the processing of his Nigerian citizenship. That was how immersed in Nigeria he was. In fact, he admitted to me that one of the reasons he stayed back in Nigeria was that he had become too Nigerianised to fit into the British culture. He loved Nigeria that much. When asked what he liked most about Nigeria(ns), he said: "...laughing... we laugh a lot as Nigerians. As you know, we have a lot of problems in the country. Yet, we have this ability to laugh about them and that is a great human quality." The Nigerian education sector has lost a gem.

There has been a torrent of accolades in the community of English language scholars in Nigeria under the auspices of the English Scholars' Association of Nigeria (ESAN) which he was a strong member of. One member of ESAN described him thus: "He was more than a teacher; he was a mentor, a guide, and a source of inspiration. With a passion for his subject that was infectious, he ignited a love for learning in all those fortunate enough to cross his path. His books weren't mere recitations of facts; they were journeys of discovery that left us in awe of the worlds of linguistic complexities."

I'm a firsthand beneficiary of all this goodness, having stayed under his intellectual tutelage since 2008 when I first met him in Jos. Professor Kehinde Ayoola of Obafemi Awolowo University said this of him: "He was a leading light in Nigerian English scholarship, the last English man standing, who, in spite of his advanced age, continued teaching, publishing, and mentoring both junior and senior academics nationwide. A role model that participated in debates on ESAN platform, taking up... the rest of us as if we were 'his mates'. His productivity, camaraderie and humility is legendary."

Prof. David Jowitt must be immortalized in Nigeria in recognition of his innumerable contributions to Nigeria's education.



Prof David Jowitt as a young academic



With Prof. Jowitt in April 2022 at the historic Durham Cathedral, Northeast England



A Nigerian in every sense of the word