

Promoting Nigerian Economy Through Language Education

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ABSTRACT

The importance of the relationship between language education and economic development cannot be over emphasized in the overall development of any nation. It is a medium through which humans have expressed their thoughts, imaginations, creativities, aspirations, desires and emotions, among others. One can also say that nation building can be possible through language, especially when the language acts as a unification factor for most ethnic groups in a specific nation. National economic development can be achieved through collective effort. Languages could act as valuable channel through which unified skills, creativity, knowledge and innovations can be put together to promote national economic growth and development. The paper tries to examine promoting Nigerian economy through language education. The aim is to show the extent to which the language education has been able to facilitate national economic development. Therefore, this paper extensively looks at problems of learning English in Nigeria; language and national development; language and youth empowerment; language and nation building; language and social development; language and political development and language and economic development. The result led to the conclusion that the use of English as a second language as well as the language of education provided a speedy access to economic development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Language education, culture, development.

INTRODUCTION

Language is the vehicle through which people's culture is transmitted. It is an index of identity which serves as a repository of a people's culture, industry and exploits. It is language that differentiates the homo-sapiens from other animals. The most effective engine of a people's culture is their mother tongue. Indigenous languages are treasures of culture and self-identity. In other words, language is the indicator of history and self-identification (Solanke, 2006). It is an indispensable cultural legacy with which all forms of human interactions are carried out. According to Nwadike (2004) it is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to wealth or affluence, thus bringing about national development.

This development ranges from growth in education (i.e. intellectual growth), politics, economy, science and technology. In educational process, language is the main pillar through which man has to plan, instruct and evaluate programmes. The development of individuals in respect of their aspiration in the society means development of a nation. Individuals develop educationally, socially, economically, politically and culturally through their interaction with government agencies that disseminate ideas and policies through various media in the languages that the individual's best understand. According to Aziza (1998) national development is a gradual and advanced improvement through progressive changes in the sociopolitical life of the nation. National development refers to the growth of the nation in terms of internal cohesion, integration, unity, economic well-being, mass participation in government, and educational growth, all of which are pathfinders to vision 20-2020.

Language is a catalyst in educational development which is an important index of national development. Qualitative education in any nation is not a luxury, but an imperative to national development. In order to achieve national cohesion and unity, Nigeria recognizes the importance of mother tongue education hence she states in her National Policy on Education (NPE) that the language of instruction in the primary schools should be initially in the child's mother tongue or the language of the immediate community. Indigenous language is the most important tool with which society is organized, and it is hardly possible to talk of national development without including the language with which the people formulate their thoughts and ideas.

English as a Language of Education

We had earlier remarked the large number of different languages spoken in Nigeria .It will not make good sense therefore, to ignore the problems that these languages will pose to education in Nigeria. The federal government demonstrates appreciation for the use of the indigenous languages as a language of education through the provisions of the (1981) National policy on education, particularly under the section: 'The National Language Policy'. This section states that: "Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage, English". Government goes further to demonstrate its commitment towards the enforcement of these provisions. A subsection 19(4) was further introduced into the (1989) constitution under 'Educational Objectives of State Policy', emphasizing that 'Government shall encourage the leaning of indigenous languages'. To give strength to these provisions, some Nigerian scholars such as Bamgbose and Akere. (1991), Awobuluyi, (1991) vehemently opposed the use of English as the language of education and for that reason, openly canvassed in parliament for the replacement of English language with one of the indigenous languages as the official language citing the problem most people have in understanding the language and the inability to communicate effectively through the language as the major barrier (Bamgbose, 1976).

However, much as one would like to salute the sense of patriotism demonstrated by these Nigerian scholars, the fact remains that none of the indigenous languages has the linguistic capacity to handle the teaching of subjects like physics, chemistry, mathematics, geography, etc. This fact is buttressed by Adedeji, (1984) when he points out that: "A science student needs language for acquiring and communicating knowledge and skills in science and technology. He needs language to help him define concepts and describe substances, objects, locations and processes, report facts, draw inferences, make conclusions, classify items and make generalizations" In addition to this, as long as the Nigerian constitution guarantees the freedom of movement, freedom to live and operate in any part of the country, using an indigenous language in education will deny many non speakers of such language many benefits and a sense of belonging.

It is a common knowledge that traders and civil servants move and receive transfers to work in any part of the country. What happens to a teacher who does not speak the language of the host community or the pupils who find themselves in a school where a different language other than the one they speak is used? It must be stated clearly that it is not the intention of this paper to oppose the use of indigenous languages in schools. Even scholars such as Brann,(1977) Osaji, (1979) believe that the best means of acquiring linguistic skills is a sound linguistic foundation in the mother tongue. Apart from this, countries like

Japan, and China acquired their science and technology through the use of their indigenous languages. They are among the technologically developed nations of the world today. However, in a nation of linguistic and cultural diversities like Nigeria, an acceptable language to serve as the language of education and communication will be a daunting task.

Language Policy in Nigeria

Policies are a set of interrelated decisions by a political actor or group of actors concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them with a specified situation where these decisions should in principle, be within the power of those actors to achieve. Policy making is the bedrock of every administration. It is geared to address public needs and issues of importance to government. Government at all levels always strive to develop policy in terms of laws and regulations at addressing crucial needs in education, health, social welfare and many others for the benefit of the citizens. But often times, the implementation of such policies have always been the problem of each successive government in the country.

Crystal (1990) believes that language policy should be understood as a systematic attempt to resolve the communication problems of a community by studying the various dialects it uses and developing a viable policy concerning the collection and the use of different languages. It is common knowledge that Nigeria does not have a well-articulated and explicit national language policy that can be found in one document (Emenanjo 2009). This confirms Afolayan's (1977) observation that there is no known special document of Nigeria that deals with language policy of the country except the 1977 Federal Republic of Nigeria's National Policy on Education where there are aspects relevant to the learning of various languages within the school system. Yet language is indispensable in the human society. The language policy of Nigeria as enshrined in section 51 of the Nigerian constitution of 1979 and 1989 can at best be referred to as mere government's statement of intension towards achieving nationalism. It says, Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Obanya (1979) has hinted that language is a vehicle of communication, a unifying and an instrument for learning and teaching. If languages are so important, one then begins to wonder why the government of Nigeria has not come out with a concrete language policy that will adequately cater for language and the communication processes in the nation. No wonder some people, particularly the Igbo toy with their indigenous language as everybody claims to be an authority in it with little or no competence and literacy.

Problems of Learning English in Nigeria

The word 'problem' is not used in this paper in terms of difficulty alone, it extends to what needs to be done, or considered in the process of teaching, learning and using of the language. One major problem associated with the learning of the language is found in the fact that the language is learned as a second language by students who are already proficient in the use of one language. The common problem associated with this is interference. Majority of the teachers who teach the language, are incompetent. Apart from this, the teachers themselves are victims of incompetent teaching. Part of the problems in the learning of the language according to Bamgbose, (1968) is found in: "the difficulty inherent in the language itself, such as irregular patterns: according to him, (the plural of man is men but the plural of pan is not 'pen'). One of the problems usually encountered by the learners is that some elements of his native language tend to show up in the English they produce, a phenomenon commonly referred to as interference. This is common especially, in the translation of idioms and other expressions and forms which are wide spread in Africa and accepted as a feature of African English but not found in English language. It is not wholly correct to say that all subjects are badly taught, but English language is giving most teachers much difficulty, and since English is the medium of instruction in the school system, other subjects taught in the school are naturally affected. This naturally affects the quality of teaching. Thus

more attention should be paid to the training and welfare of teachers as first steps in improving the standard of teaching as well as the quality of teachers.

Language and National Development

National development is seen by Awolokun (1995) as a minimum socio and political development as well as economic development in the building of a national identity. The ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the people by providing social amenities like quality education, water, good roads access to health facilities, etc accounts for the development of any nation. Education is basic to any form of development. Since we cannot talk of education without the language through which the concepts are expressed, English as the language of education in Nigeria contributes in no small way to the rapid development experienced in Nigeria. There is no doubt that Nigeria, as a country has benefited tremendously through the use of the English language to advance the development of the country. Several scholars have attested to the international value of English language. Baugh (1978) recognized numerical ascendancy over other highly developed European languages. Its importance in global civilization, as well as its accessibility to foreign learners as factors has guaranteed the English language a priority of place in the international community. Expressing a similar view, Treen, (1982), quoted in Akindele, (1985) explains: "Today, like it or curse it, English is the closest thing to a lingua-franca around the globe. Roughly, over 700 million people speak it, an increase of 40 percent in the last twenty years and a total that represents more than one seventh of the world population. Going by what is on ground in terms of human development in all spheres of human interactions, technological advancement, provision of social amenities, etc there is no doubt that Nigeria can lay claim to greater achievement through her adoption of English as a second language.

Language and Youth Empowerment

Language is the most fundamental and important tool for youth empowerment. It is a weapon for the uplift of the underprivileged, the marginalized, the un-informed or the illiterates in the society. The culture of reforms initiated by the previous administration is designed to engender sustainable change in democratic governance. This reform is to be carried out through education, and language is the tool for doing this. This is one of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) that runs through the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS). Youth empowerment is a re-branding enterprise, as the empowered youths are likely to shun corruption, and make positive contribution to national economic growth, peace, security and political stability.

Empowerment is the process whereby people are enabled or given the opportunity to improve in order to contribute to positive change. It takes varied forms and dimensions which include activities like individual self-assertion, self-improvement, collective bargaining or resistance in order to challenge existing power relations (Okeshola, 1995). Self - empowerment takes varied forms such as education, apprenticeship, usurpation, domination and force. Education is the most fundamental and important tool for empowerment or for the achievement of social justice and equity. Social scientists prescribe education as a tool for the up-lift of the underprivileged, the marginalized, and the oppressed within the society (Graham-Brown, 1991). Education is therefore a veritable instrument for promoting empowerment, and best done through the medium of languages.

Modern man can hardly contemplate communal life without the instrument of language. Performance, especially spoken language, defines personality. For the teacher, his credibility is almost entirely anchored on his competence in communicating ideas, and stimulating learning through the use of language. Articulate and well-spoken teachers always invariably win the hearts and respect of their students.

Feminists have advanced the issue of empowerment of women through education as a means of challenging patriarchal ideology of male domination and women subordination. Empowerment entails life-long struggle for survival and transforming the structures and institutions (e.g. laws, social practice, political process, religious matters) that seem to perpetuate or reinforce gender discrimination and social inequality. According to Graham-Brown (1991), for the individual, empowerment through education

promises an escape from poverty, oppression. It also promises greater social prestige, job mobility and better future prospect. Education empowers through language.

Language and Nation Building

The survival of any nation and the success of its drive towards nation state are predicted upon the existence of a language that its people can speak and more importantly read and write. Bamgbose (1991) points out that language is a powerful symbol of society, particularly if its potential is fully recognised and exploited, it can be a key contributing force towards nationhood and nation building if properly managed. Languages are also valuable as collective human accomplishments and on-going manifestations of human creativity and originality. This is buttressed by UNESCO's argument for language preservation, that...,"The world's languages represent an extraordinary wealth of human creativity". In addition, language may also be used as a political and social element in the process of building, unification and maintaining a nation and as an essential element of national identity. National consciousness which encapsulates patriotism is a product of the inculcation of values through language. Government has acknowledged that unity could be fostered in the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual Nigerian context through indigenous languages but practical encouragement towards the realization of this objective is still farfetched. When indigenous languages are used, people can participate fully and more meaningfully in the economic life of the nation. Thus, such languages need to be looked at not as stumbling blocks but as potential national resources. As with other resources, they need to be allocated in areas where they can render the optimal utility (Fishman 1971; Jernudd and Des Guputa 1971). In this way, each nation should look for the optimisation of the use of its national linguistic resources at the least possible cost. Stressing on the role of language in nation-building, Kamba (1998) opines, "To rob people of their language is to rob them of not only their confidence and dignity but also of their creativity". This is because indigenous knowledge can only be conveyed in the language of the people who possess such knowledge; thus people's lives can only be conveyed fully and vividly in their first language.

Language and Social Development

Nigeria has moved from the days of town criers to the latest communication gadgets in the world. The contribution of Information technology to social development is found in human comfort and the guarantee of an easy access to the whole world. This beneficial aspect provided by the influence of science and technology is succinctly captured by Brumfit, (1995) when he observes that: "There is easy knowledge transfer now in quantities and at speeds unimaginable in the past; there is real communication not just through television, but real communication of massive databases. We can be, in principle, anywhere in the world, and connect to databases that are traditionally preserved in Paris or in Oxford or in Washington" Information travels fast these days through more outlets as Internet, Television, compact disc, Radio, Telephone and print media.. It is possible to sit down in your room and reach out to the whole world. Though expensive, these communication gadgets have reduced the whole world to a 'global village'. Any important event now needs not gather crowds together at a particular position to watch such event. You simply sit down in your room and watch events live and direct all over the world. The benefit of such gadget is facilitated through the knowledge of common language which is English.

Nigeria is a member of several international bodies such as African unity (AU), United Nations organization (UNO), etc. Nigeria is able to function and interact effectively in this organization through the use of English language

Language and Political Development

Politics in Nigeria would have been a difficult business but for the ease of communication brought in by English language. One of the activities of politics in Nigeria is house to house and open rally campaigns. Without English language it would have been quite difficult if not totally impossible to address political audience at different rallies. The language made it possible and easy for the Head of State to address the people of the country once. This alone has contributed a lot to the existing unity in the country. All the

houses of assembly, representatives, the senate, judiciary and all other bodies in the nation find it easy to interact and communicate in English language.

Language and Economic Development

One of the major sources of revenue for Nigeria is through oil production. Internally, Nigerians engage in trading and other business activities, the major foundation for the success of these businesses is the existence of English as a language of national communication. Without English, unity and peace will be difficult to achieve. A common language facilitates smooth business interaction and peaceful co-existence. The danger of linguistic diversity was exhibited in the recent religious riot in Kaduna. Language contributed to the identifications of non indigenes as rioters demanded openly from suspected non natives' linguistic evidence that show them as a native before they were either spared or killed.

One other major area of achievement is education. It is possible for Nigerians irrespective of ethnic background to study in any part of the country. The same goes for the teachers who could also choose to teach in any part of the country without fear of language hindrance. The text books too are coded in English language. The importance of English language in the Nigeria educational system is emphasized in the 1977 language provisions of national policy of education: Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a latter state English. Today Nigeria has benefited a lot from the modern technology. They are able to read and interpret, and put into use the instruction of such information. Areas such as medicine, agriculture, communication and transportation, arts and craft have received a boost from modern technology. Even though, these innovations in technology have some negative effect but the advantages far over weighs the disadvantages. Though the country is yet to come out with any known self developed technology, there have been breakthroughs in some areas where certain tools have been refashioned to suit the local needs example are common in agricultural machines and areas of local industries. Before now, it is common for the country to invite experts to assist in almost all areas including such areas as education, administration and construction. Nigerians have now graduated to a stage where they now handle personally almost all of their affairs.

CONCLUSION

From our discussion so far, we have been able to show the language situation in Nigeria and the implication of such situation on national development. We realized that the issue of language in Nigeria is a sensitive one and if not properly handled, could lead to civil-strive among communities if the central government fails to provide guidelines that will determine at the national level which language shall be used or what aspects of our national life and activities. English is used by a sizable world population; this offers the people of this nation the benefit of developing their potentials and participating in global affairs. The paper arrived at a conclusion that English language is a powerful factor for unity that promotes the felling of oneness, progress and national consciousness. The teaching and learning of the language as a subject as well as the medium of instruction has placed the language above all other native languages and this has helped to suppress the power tussles of ethnics Finally, the paper does not in any way intend to suggest that the indigenous languages are inferior or incapable of performing educational functions like the English language, however, it is the believe of the paper that the geographical spread of English language provides the benefits for more international communication and interactions than the indigenous languages that still have a limited spread.

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