



# **Language Education In A Recessed Economy: The Nigerian Experience**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Education is the bedrock of development, therefore, no nation develops beyond its level of education. Suffice it to say then that the notion that education as a whole contributes enormously to the development of individuals and nations is not contestable. Each subject in the school curriculum contributes to that, including English language. This paper examines Language Education in Nigeria in an economy recovering or coming out of recession. It sees the introduction of English as a product of evangelical expediency, in which Missionaries passed the language to colonial administrators until English became the official language of the country. The paper also opines that Nigeria's near-total dependence on imported manufactured goods, ranging from the simplest of household consumer products to the most complex of industrial inputs, makes the economy more vulnerable to both internal and external shocks. It further suggests that the government should come up with comprehensive, inward-looking policies to boost production and thus mop up the excess labour force in the market among other measures as a way out to avoid another slip into recession.

**Keywords:** Language, Education, Recession, Economy, Nigeria.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Natural Languages have many features; they play dual roles in most known formal educational system. They feature as a subject on the school curriculum on one hand, and also serve all over the world as the medium of instruction in all the subjects including itself (Awobuluyi, 2010). The threats to survival of citizens around the world seem to increase in leaps and bounds. Issues such as hunger, abuses to human rights, endangerment to species and nature and military conflicts amongst others, are part of our realities, even for those who only see the consequences through the media (Ikeda, 2001). "Numerous are the streams that lead to social prosperity, but all spring from the same source and that is public education (Jovellanas, 1744-1811).

The economic recession being experienced in Nigeria presently as it affects the education sector could be seen as an earth tremor which will leave a lasting impression on the education sector. Sobowale, (2016), posits that neither the Federal Government nor the ministries of education (Federal and states) nor even the parents of the school age children paid attention to the tsunami unfolding in education.

The recession which started this year 2016 and the economic downturn that may last until, at least, the end of 2017 will turn out to be a watershed for the entire country. The recession, just belatedly admitted, will have its most impact on the kids and their education. This paper seeks to look at Language Education in a receding economy. What effect the recession will have on education with Language Education as a focal point. The paper will also discuss what recession is and the causes of recession in Nigeria. Some measures that could be adopted to come out of the economic doldrums will be suggested.

### **A Historical Review Of Language Education In Nigeria**

“Numerous are the streams that lead to social prosperity, but all spring from the same source and that is education” (Jovellanes, 1744-1811). In Nigeria, just before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Christian Missionaries introduced Western Education in the country. For about four decades after that initial date, both the nature and main thrust of Language Education in Nigeria were completely left to the Missionaries to decide. Fafunwa (1974) posits that with the well-known belief of such missionaries, first, that the African Child was best taught in his native language. Second, that the interest of Christianity would best be served by actually propagating that religion in the indigenous Languages. It is no doubt then that the teaching and learning of indigenous languages enjoyed and received much genuine attention in those early days of Western type of Education in the country. The products of such were not liked or approved by everybody. Quite on the contrary, members of the then elite were widely of the view that people turned out under that system of education were not well suited to the job market of those days whose unsatisfied needs were for persons with training in English rather than in the indigenous languages (Taiwo, 1980). Perhaps, one would say, the government was influenced in part by such views as it began in the early 1980s to gradually intervene in education of the country with the view to accord English much prominence. The policy succeeded with time such that the interest in Language Education in the country shifted substantially away from the indigenous Languages towards English, the Language of the colonial masters.

Awobuluyi, (2010) opines that it was first, pupils and their parents who gradually formed the opinion, which regrettably is still widely held today, that it was financially more rewarding to study English, and finally, the various governments in the country from the colonial period till independence in 1960 rarely felt that they had any duty to promote the study of the indigenous languages whereas they considered themselves obliged to encourage and even enforce the study of English. Sadly, even today in our homes, preference is accorded to English to the detriment of indigenous Languages. Luckily, for the indigenous Languages, however, the realities of the situation then, as now, were such that the teaching of the indigenous few school children, if any at all, in those days spoke any English before actually entering school. Such children therefore, were willingly or unwillingly instructed in their mother-tongues until they had gained enough proficiency. English is then introduced by their fourth, fifth and even sixth year in school to be able to receive all or most formal instruction in it (Awobuluyi, 2010). Even up to this stage, the mother tongue existed as an optional subject on the school curriculum, particularly in case of those languages like that were lucky enough not only to have been reduced to writing but also have sufficient reading materials both sacred and secular for use in teaching school children. With the birth of the National Policy on Education, (NPE) first published in 1977 which has since then undergone review, the government for the first time laid down as a policy for the whole country in section I sub-section 10 thus:

- a. Government appreciates the importance of Languages as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving culture. 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 three major Languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.
- b. For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official Language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools but non-vocational elective at the senior secondary school level (NPE, 2004).

In the policy document, no specific prescriptions are made under reference for Language Education at the tertiary level of education. It is likely that it was felt presumably, that the choice of subjects of that high level will necessarily be determined by the choices already made at the primary and secondary school levels. Going by what was said earlier on, it can be seen that the teaching of English in the school is not a new policy initiated by the NPE so also the teaching of the indigenous Languages, or at least the teaching of some of them as mother tongues. The only innovation in the NPE so far as Language Education is concern is the teaching of the three major indigenous Languages as second languages (Awobuluyi, 2010).

The government followed suit with a constitutional backing as a pointer to the reference of language in national life of its citizenry. In the 1989 Constitution, the sub-section dealing with educational objectives of the state policy, the sub-section in question viz: sub-section 19(4), states simply that 'government shall encourage the learning of indigenous Languages.

### **Recession**

There are several commonly used definitions of a recession. For example, journalists often describe a recession as two consecutive quarters of declines in quarterly (inflation adjusted) Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Economists on the other hand use monthly business cycle peaks and troughs designated by National Bureau of Economic Research to define periods of expansion and contractions. According to Akon (2007) a recession is a significant decline in economic activity spread across the normally visible in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production, and wholesale-retail sales. A recession begins just after the economy reaches a peak of activity and ends as the economy reaches its troughs.

In economics, a recession is a negative economic growth for two consecutive quarters. It is also a business cycle contraction which results in a general show down in economic activity (Recession, 2016). Macroeconomic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), investment spending, capacity utilization, household income, bankruptcies and unemployment rate rise. Recession generally occur when there is a widespread drop in spending (an adverse demand shock). This may be triggered by various events such as a financial crisis, an external trade shock, and adverse economic bubble (Wikipedia, 2016).

### **Causes of Recession In Nigeria**

A failure to save for the rainy day as well as poor monetary and fiscal policies were said to be partly responsible for the country's recession, according to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). In an interactive session with media managers in Lagos in September 2016, the Governor of CBN noted that a number of external factors particularly the crash in global oil prices, also contributed to the nation's economic woes. "I must confess that what is happening is a result of global crisis in the sense that we've seen commodity prices dropping, we've seen geopolitical tensions all around the world," (The Guardian, 2016). The Governor of the Central Bank recalled that when it was very buoyant, Nigeria fritted away about \$66billion or an average of \$6billion per annum funding Bureau de Change (BDC) operations over 11years period, beginning from 2008, when the country's foreign reserves stood at \$62billion, and oil price about \$120/ barrel.(The Guardian, 2016). He said such funds could have been kept for the rainy day or invested in infrastructural development that would have buoyed economic activities.

Nigeria has indulged in frivolities, including high taste for imported products; the waste in the system began much earlier dating back to the discovery of oil in commercial quantities in the mid-1950s, if Nigeria had held strongly to her potential in agricultural sector and in the same vein held strongly to the potential that it have because it found oil in Nigeria, its story would have been different today. Nwachukwu (2016) in a media chart with the CBN Governor, reported that the CBN Governor said that apart from abandoning agriculture, revenues for petro-dollars, successive governments failed to plan with the proceeds from export sales, which compounded issues for Nigeria, unlike Norway, which invested its fishery and oil proceeds in a sovereign wealth fund now worth about \$873billion.

The continuous fall in the price of oil at the international market had not helped matters either, with reserves on a free fall. Between August and September 2014 until recently, we have seen a consistent drop in prices of crude to the extent that by May 2015 to be precise, our reserve had dropped to \$31billion, at the time crude price had dropped to \$48 per barrel. At that time too, the country's receipt from export of crude dropped to \$1.3billion. at the same time, demand for forex, the demand for import had remained high (Nwachukwu, 2016).

**High interest rates:** This cause recession because they limit liquidity, or amount of money available to invest. Increased inflation is another factor that causes recession. This is a general rise in prices of goods and services over a period of time, as inflation increases, the percentage of goods and services that can be purchased with the same amount of money decreases.

**Reduced consumer confidence:** If consumers believe the economy is bad they are less likely to spend money. Consumer confidence is psychological but can have a great impact on the economy.

**Reduced real wages:** This refers to wages that have been adjusted for inflation. Falling real wages means that a worker's payback is not keeping up with inflation. The worker might be making the same amount of money but his purchasing power has been reduced.

### **The Recession in Nigeria and Language Education**

Banjo, (1983) opines that language permeates every aspect of human activity; no society can survive let alone develop without the use of language. Rinmark and Duguryil, (2001) are of the view that the seeds of scientific thinking are embedded in every language, though their germination has been more spectacular in some languages. Language is the key to the heart of the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches which cannot be guessed at from the other side of the door. Therefore, a lost language is a lost tribe, a lost tribe is a lost culture, a lost culture is invaluable knowledge lost (Ajao, 2008).

From the different postulations, language is the cardinal point in the development of any nation. There is no need to emphasise the position of English as the official language in Nigeria. For well over a century now it has continued to enjoy the pride of place in the nation's educational system. The economic recession being experienced in Nigeria presently as it affects the education sector could be seen as an earth tremor which has left a lasting repercussion on the education sector. Neither the Federal Government nor the Ministries of Education (Federal and States) nor even the parents of school age children paid attention to the tsunami unfolding in education (Sobowale, 2016). The recession which started in 2016 and the economic downturn that may last until a long time will turn out to be a watershed for the entire country. The recession just belatedly admitted, will have its most devastating impact on the youths and their education. For most Nigerians, who find time to be informed about such matters, are aware that for more than ten years, over ten million children are known to be out of school (Vanguard, 2016). The figure represents about 20% of the youths and they constitute the vast army of losers of tomorrow. As a matter of fact, they have already lost today and might never recover lost ground. In our own expectations we always look up to government to do something but what government should do is not usually defined and there is no pressure on the government to actually do anything.

As stated earlier, the recession lasted until the end of 2017, these growing evidences may be considered in this regard. School fees in private and even some public schools have gone up with the rise in exchange rate. Sobowale, (2016) postulates that every 100 Level student of Economics knows that fees are one of the synonyms for price. Through his understanding of the basic principles of demand and supply, he would also recollect that where prices go up demand goes down because price is an element of crowd control. In response to devaluation and rising costs of providing education, schools are forced to increase fees to unprecedented levels. The resultant effect of that is low school enrolment- all things being equal as the economists say. Unfortunately, all is far from being equal.

Many of the parents with children in schools are battling with unpaid salaries, some half salaries, companies whose accounts have been blocked by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), partial shutdown of plants, retrenchments, higher fuel prices, food prices and high cost of transport charges among others. (Vanguard, 2016). Even if school fees have remained unchanged, many are already poised to remove their children from the pricey Schools to less expensive private schools and those in town are preparing to enrol their children in public schools. Meanwhile the public schools have not yet been prepared for the crowds they will find at their gates. Sobowale, (2016) said that two owners of popular private schools in Lagos Island were the first to draw attention to the problem. According to them he said, the rate of withdrawal of kids in the primary schools by parents who can no longer afford to pay fees- even if unchanged was unprecedented. The trauma involved for the parents compelled by economic necessity of down-grading conspicuous consumption of expensive private education for their kids is bad enough. For many of the kids, the problem would be adjustment to the new schools, new friends and classmates, new rules and regulations which will be devastating and destabilizing on them- particularly for those moving from private to public schools.

But in case we think that fees are the only hurdle we have to cross, we should be reminded that prices of books, laboratory equipment, uniforms, shoes, and transport have increased since the Naira could not appreciate against the Dollar. Prices of those indispensable accessories to education have also gone up by 70% to 150%. All these is with no prospect of any salary increase in sight. Government and even banks are talking about slashing salaries or laying-off of some of their staff. As if that is not bad news enough, food prices have escalated and pump price of petrol might soon go up again. Kerosene that was patronized by the masses is now almost beyond the reach of the common man.

### **Coming Out of the Recession**

Successive regimes have paid lip services to the need to diversify the economy and provide credible alternatives to oil as our foreign exchange earner. This recession leaves Nigeria with no alternative than to make good this plan by coming up with a comprehensive, inward-looking policies to boost production and thus mop up the excess labour force in the market.

The Federal Government should focus its policy of massive spending as a way out. As the purchasing power of the citizenry is low at the moment (mainly due to months of unpaid worker's salaries), government needs to enhance individual liquidity by spending wisely on agriculture, infrastructure and stimulating the manufacturing sector. Efforts must be made to pay the backlog of worker's wages. We must increase the consumption of locally-made goods and services. We must export more to drive the economy. The Federal Government and State Governments should borrow from capital market to finance revenue yielding capital projects, ensuring that contractors are faithfully paid to enable them pay their workers.

The economic policies of the government must be shaped to attract foreign direct investment, not just portfolio investors. The Federal government also has a duty to start addressing the core issues in the economy frontally, carrying stakeholders along. Nigerians must be reoriented to produce what they consume and discard their wholesome preference for foreign goods. No country has ever created a great economy by depending on the industrial output of other nations. The task of rebuilding the economy is an assignment for all Nigerians.

### **CONCLUSION**

In this paper, we have seen that language features as a subject on the school curriculum on the one hand, and also serve as a medium of instruction in all subjects including itself. The paper has discussed that Nigerian's near-total dependency on imported manufactured goods, ranging from the simplest household consumer items to the most complex industrial inputs makes the economy more vulnerable to both internal and external shocks. It was also discussed that failure to save for the rainy days as well as poor monetary and fiscal policies amongst others are responsible for the country's slip into recession. The paper stressed that the economic recession has affected the education sector in Nigeria which leaves a negative lasting impact on the education sector.

We concluded by suggesting that the government should come up with comprehensive, inward-looking policies to boost production and thus mop up the excess labour force in the market among other measures. No country has ever and will ever create a great economy by depending on other nations. The onus of rebuilding the economy rest with all Nigerians.

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