
Language Education as a Viable Means of Learning Core Democratic Citizenship Values

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Abstract

This study deals with certain influential factors in the organization and sociolinguistic foundations of language teaching and the linguistic ideas of work in problems related to the language and citizenship education. It is a descriptive and programmatic work whose purpose is to demonstrate the complexity of the questions involved in language teaching and democratic citizenship education. The work developed on the basis of a shared educational culture. The study also considered some aspects of the wider political context in which language education policy has to be developed and implemented. Its central point is in the discussion of human rights and human rights education. It maintained that if human rights and education for democratic citizenship are to be successful in a multi-ethnic and multilingual society like Nigeria, then the question of diversification of language learning must be taken into consideration. The paper finally submitted that, for Nigerians to know peace during the after elections, they should recognize the conditions for collective creativity and for development as a component of democratic citizenship through linguistic tolerance which is fundamental value of their actions in language and language teaching.

Language education refers to the process and practice of acquiring a second or foreign language. It is primarily a branch of applied linguistics, that can be considered an interdisciplinary field. There are four main learning categories for language education. These are communicative competencies, cross-cultural experiences and multiple illiteracies while citizenship education is the education of children from early

childhood to become clear thinking and enlightened adult citizens who participate in decisions concerning society. Society is here understood in the special sense of a nation with a circumscribed territory which is recognized as a state. In all, the only means through which the knowledge and skill of citizenship education can be acquired is through language education.

Democratic citizenship is membership in a political democracy. The unit for democratic membership does not have to be a nation state, it can also be a city or some other sub-national jurisdiction as in a local government and state or a supranational order as in the case of a compact like Economic Community of west African States (ECOWAS) in west Africa.

Language Education Today

Over time, language education has developed in schools and has become part of the education curriculum around the world. In some countries, such as the United States, language education which is also referred to as world languages and in Nigeria, government or citizenship as it is called has become a core subject such as English, Maths and science.

Language education may take place as a general school subject or in a specialized language school which does not so much exist in Nigeria. There are many methods of teaching languages. Some have fallen into relative obscurity and others are widely used; still others have a small following, but offer useful insight.

Furthermore, in the learning of language for communicative competence the terms “approach”, “method” and “technique” are hierarchical concepts. An approach is a set of assumptions about the nature of language and language learning, but does not involve procedure or provide any details about how such assumptions should be implemented into the classroom setting. There are three principal approaches - the structural, the functional and interactive.

A method on the other hand is a plan for presenting the language material to be learned and should be based upon a selected approach. In order for an approach to be translated into a method, an instructional system must be designed considering the objectives of the teaching/ learning, how the content is to be selected and organized, the types of tasks to be performed, the roles of students and the role of teachers.

A technique (or strategy) on the other hand is a very specific concrete stratagem or trick designed to accomplish an immediate objective. Technique derived from the controlling method and less directly, from the approach.

Defining Democratic Citizenship

Democratic citizenship has been described as a “polysemous and contested concept. At the core, however, citizen is always a matter of belonging to a community, which entrains politics and rights: Citizenship always has a political dimension, because citizens have the capacity to determine the law (Audigier 1998) In Nigeria, citizenship is supposed to be based on the respect for justice, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law but it is usually the obverse.

Citizens belong to communities, defined as groupings of people who recognize that they have something in common. What unites them may simply be an acceptance of the legitimacy of the state within which they live. It may also be a strong affective bond based on shared history, ethnicity, religion or common purpose. States are internationally recognized entities with governments which have the power to confer nationality or the right to residence in the states territory. It is expected that states have the obligation to respect the rights of all those who come under their jurisdiction. This means that, in theory, nationals and non-nationals living within a state can exercise citizenship. That means that they can participate in the economic, social and political life of their community.

Thus, although citizenship is often closely associated with nationality, it is a freestanding and independent concept. The nation is only one possible community within which citizenship is exercised (Anderson, 2011). Citizenship is most commonly experienced at local levels and it exists at supranational levels such as West Africa.

Diverse language communities can live together harmoniously within a state or a wider political entity such as African Union. However different language communities may not have equal power. Citizenship stresses the notion of equal respect and dignity even where there is inequality of power. It also acknowledges the right of individuals to group together and engage in political and cultural activity to assert their rights. Such non – violent democratic activity, is one legitimate, even exemplary expression of citizenship.

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, in their Declaration and Programme of Education for Democratic Citizenship of May 7th 1999, noted that at the time of the 50th anniversary of the Council of Europe their vision for building Europe was

A freer, more tolerant and just society based on solidarity, common values and a cultural heritage enriched by its diversity (Council of Europe, 1999).

Languages are a particularly important component of this cultural heritage. The diversity of languages contribute to the richness of Europe's culture, African culture and particularly Nigeria culture. Their preservation and development depend on common understandings of citizenship.

Democratic Citizenship & Languages

Citizens are able to participate in the life of the communities when they have rights, fundamental freedoms, legal and political equality and protection from discrimination. All of these are guaranteed within the member State of ECOWAS by national laws. In West Africa and Nigeria in particular there is the right to speak, broadcast and publish in any language, so long as the content is respectful of the right, privacy and dignity of others. Freedom of Association allows meetings for cultural, political, religious or educational purpose and the creation of trade unions, political parties and pressure groups. In Nigeria discrimination on the basis of language is specifically outlawed. As an example, an individual charged with a criminal offence is required to be kept informed in a language which he/ she understands.

Communities, particularly the political communities are therefore expected to be multilingual entities in which freedom of expression is not constrained, in so far as it remains respectful of human rights and freedom of association is guaranteed. Healthy democracies are made up of individuals who are able to communicate with their fellow citizens and use their linguistic skills to participate actively in, for instance, associations, movements, cultural groups and political parties.

Issues of language, identities and participation are common to policies for the teaching and learning both of languages and democratic citizenship. Central to both is an awareness of and concern for human right as a legal and an ethical basis for citizenship and for education.

Language Rights

Language is one of the most important social and cultural markers of identity and the Nigerian community in its essence is multilingual in different native tongues and in English as a lingua franca. Although relations between language communities and tribes can be a source of tension within and between tribes, the achievement of equality of citizenship in these communities and tribes is a demonstration of the possibility of success of democracy and may be considered exemplary of the very essence of democracy. Although language sometimes perceived as a marker of difference, the linguistic capacities of human beings are a unifying feature, distinguishing humans from other species and bringing with them an automatic entitlement to human rights.

Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) protect individuals against discrimination on their entitlement to rights and specifically mention language in this respect. The international Covenant, in its Article 27 refers to linguistic minorities within states and affirms.

Persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with the other member of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion or to use their own language.

Although human rights apply to individuals, this formulation starts to approach the concept of group rights. Communication between individuals is by definition a group phenomenon. Languages dies if there are insufficient social contexts in which they can be used. The use of a minority language is sometimes perceived as a threat by members of their language groups. The most likely impediment to the right to communicate in one's own language is the possible inability of others to comprehend, not to say the possible hostility users of minority languages may face. Education for linguistic education and tolerance can start to remove obstacles to the full democratic participation of individuals from different language communities.

Languages and Peace Education

Linguapax, which started in 1987, is an international project for teaching foreign languages and literature fostered by UNESCO to:

- Promote the culture of peace through language Education

- Protect linguistic heritage
- understanding and co-operation between peoples (Cunningham and Candelier, 1995).

It is co-ordinated by UNESCO's language Division and the UNESCO centre of Catalana.

The project considers that:

Education is a fundamental part of the process by which individuals are socialized, thereby acquiring values, attitudes and behavioural patterns. By presenting the learner with communicative practices different from his/her own. Language teaching offers an excellent means of promoting values and representations favoring the development of a culture of peace.

A symposium on the teaching of modern languages to the promotion of peace was held at the European Centre for modern languages in Graz (Austria), where the contribution of language to democratic citizenship and peace education was highlighted. It drafted a series of statements and recommendations which include the following:

- With the aim of enabling individuals and groups to live together in plurilingual and pluricultural societies which need to develop all kinds of contacts with their international environment (immediate and distant), school plays an essential role in ensuring a pacific climate of inter-individual and inter-community relations.
- Modern language teaching must take on a prime responsibility in the achievement of this task, in so far as communication constitutes both one of its essential objectives and its preferred means, language is also closely linked to the cultural aspects of communities and the study of language is able to demonstrate the relative nature of the interpretation schemas of each community.
- In order for this responsibility to be completely fulfilled, certain restraints or obstacles need to be removed.

Necessary Competencies and Skills for Democratic citizenship

The Council of Europe's project on Education for Democratic Citizenship produced a statement of core competencies on the vantage level specification which is aimed at:

Thus, the core competencies associated with democratic citizenship are those called for the construction of a free and autonomous person, aware of his rights and duties in a society where the power to establish the Law, i.e. the rules of community life which the freedom of each is exercise, and where the appointment and control of the people who exercise this power are under the supervision of all the citizens (Osler & Starkey, 2010).

In this context three broad categories are distinguished: cognitive competencies; affective competencies and those connected with the choice of values; and those connected with action. All these are described as follows:

Cognitive competencies

- Competencies of a legal and political nature, i.e. knowledge concerning the rules of collective life.
- Knowledge of the present world including a cultural dimension.
- Knowledge of the principles and values of human rights and democratic citizenship.

Affective Competencies and Choice of Values

Citizenship cannot be reduced to a catalogue of rights and duties, it also belongs to a group or to groups. It thus requires a personal and collective affective dimension (Hugh Starkey, 2002).

Capacities for action, sometimes known as social competence.

- The capacity to live with others, to co-operate, to construct and implement joint projects and to take on responsibilities.
- The capacity to resolve conflict in accordance with the principles of democratic law,
- The capacity to take part in public debate, to argue and choose in a real-life situation.

The skills associated with understanding and supporting human rights include:

I. Intellectual skills

These are skills involving judgment, such as:

- The collection and examination of material from various sources, including the mass media and the ability to analyse it and to arrive at fair and balanced conclusions;
- The identification of bias, prejudice, stereo-types and discrimination.

II. Social skills, in particular

- recognizing and accepting differences;
- establishing positive and non-oppressive personal relationships
- resolving conflict in a non-violent way.
- taking responsibility.
- Participating in decisions
- Understanding the use of the mechanisms for the protection of human rights at local, regional, European and world levels.

All these competencies and skills can be developed through the study of languages. Indeed, many of them are listed in the common European Framework of Reference for languages.

Contributions of Languages to Citizenship

One of the contributions of languages to citizenship is in the area of knowledge. The vantage level specification (B2 level) of knowledge is aimed at:

Those who want to use another language for communication with persons who speak it, both for transacting the business of everyday life and for exchanging information and opinions on private life and public affairs (Van EK & Trim, 2000:5)

However the emphasis on acting together as well as speaking together could be developed. Personal interaction and social contact, for example, is exemplified to engage in meaningful relations in various domains of public life (eg business, education, welfare, entertainment) whereas this does not exclude working with others to promote democratic citizenship, this element could be more strongly represented in the taxonomy. For instance pages were devoted to the vocabulary of political institution which include titles of nobility, war and peace, including the names of military ranks and types of weapons (Starkey, 1996,1999).

In many educational systems, the programme of study of languages is determined more by process and linguistic concerns than by a specific content. There is therefore potentially scope within the language curriculum to cover three of the cognitive competencies for citizenship which are explicitly included in the common European Framework, namely:

- Knowledge of law and political systems;
- Knowledge of the present world;
- Knowledge of the principles and values of human rights and democratic citizen.

This could include specific reference to human rights instruments and the discussion of case studies in the light of this knowledge and awareness.

Indeed, the 1998 Council of Europe Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers on linguistic Diversity seeks to encourage the use of foreign language in the teaching of non-linguistic subjects (Council of Europe, 1998). Non-linguistic subjects include citizenship and human rights, which make excellent material for culture and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL).

However, current approaches to syllabus construction are often weak on including such potentially interesting questions in the Junior Secondary school. Learners may be faced with topics well below the interest level of those encountered elsewhere in the curriculum. One consequence is that the learning of languages may be more attractive to some groups than to others. Boys, for instance, are in some case more reluctant learners of languages than girls.

A second area of contribution of languages to citizenship is that of the pedagogy associated with language learning since the development of communicative methods is in itself democratic. The skills developed in language classes are directly transferable to citizenship education.

The communicative language classroom implies that priority is given to speech acts. The role of the teacher is to give pupils in their use of the new communicative tool, the second language. Teachers will be concerned not just with linguistic achievements but with communicative competence as an end in itself. Skills (savoir faire) such as ability to listen, to reformulate other persons words for a better understanding, put a different point of view, produce a valid argument, and conceding are life skills (savoir etre) with applicability elsewhere in school and in the outside world.

When the requirement is for advanced, complex communication, such as a formal debate, the learner has to draw on knowledge (savoirs) (culture, lexis, grammar), skills (savoir faire) (function of arguments, agreements and disagreements, riposte etc)

and life skills (savoir- etre) such as listening, reformulating an opposing view before modifying or refusing it, remaining calm and polite etc. The language class is therefore a site where education for dialogue is developed (Tardieu, 1999)

In the communicative language classroom learners are often required to speak and discuss in pairs, having the freedom to express their own opinions and develop ideas and new ways of thinking. This contribution to the overall project of democratic citizenship can also be reorganized and developed. In particular it can help develop competencies of a procedural nature. What is more, since the topics chosen may involve personal choices and require a consideration of values, there is much scope for work on the effective domain of citizenship. From here language teachers will recognize the assertion that:

Argumentation and debate call for a knowledge of the subject under discussion, the capacity to listen to the other and acknowledgement of his point of view, as well as the application of these capacities to the precise situation in which the people find themselves (Maclaughin T., 2011).

A third and equally important dimension of language teaching is the consideration of culture. The Parliamentary Assembly's Recommendation 1383 (1998) on Linguistic Diversification calls for:

The promotion of a type of education which gives greater emphasis to the culture and society of the countries concerned.

Studying other cultures enables learners to deculture from their own world view, accept relativities and develop multiple identities. To acquire the ability to communicate in a new language is the first step to identifying with other speakers of that language community. This inter-culture dimension of language learning has the potential to promote antiracism or hatred as a positive principle of democratic citizenship. As the rapporteur to the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on culture, science and Education puts it:

Beyond this utilitarian aspect, however, language learning has a strong socio-cultural component.

In an increasing uniform world, cultural diversity will become ever more important as a means of preserving human values. Learning a language means learning to be closer to others. Learning a foreign language means equipping oneself with intellectual tools for confronting the real and the unknown, as well as personal enrichment through a knowledge of other cultures and other views of the world. Learning also means combating the ignorance that lies at the root of intolerance and racism (Legendre, 1998).

There are a number of approaches to learning about cultures, one of them being critical cultural awareness which is an ability to evaluate critically on the basis of explicit criteria, perspective, practices and product in one's own and other cultures and countries.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates and illustrates the many opportunities available to language teachers to contribute to education for democratic citizenship. Language

teaching in Nigeria, particularly at school level, has been heavily influenced by considerations of how to communicate, often at the expense of what to communicate about or for. A concern for intercultural communication within Nigeria should be paramount to place language teaching and learning at the heart of a humanistic curriculum.

Citizenship in a democracy needs intercultural skills for living in communities where cultural diversity is the norm. Critical cultural awareness to understand the world around us and challenge injustice, complacency, social exclusion and unwarranted discrimination is highly needed. The construction of a peaceful, democratic and multicultural Nigeria requires plurilingual citizens.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:-

Government should take all necessary measures to improve the status of the various languages especially the three dominant native languages in Nigeria, in accordance with the guidelines laid down in the charter for Regional and minority languages of the Council of Europe so as to take all necessary measures likely to favour the development of a positive collective attitude towards these languages and towards linguistic diversity in general.

1. There should be a means to promote reflection on the means of evaluation of attitude and competencies developed within the framework of language teaching which contribute to the promotion of peace and to raise questions about the often exclusively linguistic orientation of examination.
2. To encourage collective reflection by teachers and educational specialists on the content of a professional ethics relative to the teaching of modern languages which takes account of the responsibilities towards individual and societies of this teaching and those to whom it will be entrusted onto.
3. Knowing another's language may, because it entails communication, be a definitive step towards tolerance as one of the fundamental objectives of language teaching is to develop the learner's communicative ability in citizenship education. The language class becomes the environment in which the ability to listen to others are exercised and developed, the place where learners become aware of how mutually enriching a sharing of perspectives can be. Experiencing a tolerant approach in the language class prepares learners to extend this beyond the school environment.

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