

LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR THE FAMILY AND SOCIETY IN EDUCATING THE NIGERIAN CHILD IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

In Nigeria today, the family plays a vital role in the life of a child in making him a functional and useful individual in a society. The family is the first agent of socialization in the life of a child. The medium of communication between the family and the child in the society is the language. This paper examines the concept of language, family and society using language education, specifically English language, used in educating the Nigerian child in the 21st Century.

Introduction

Language, according to Longman Dictionary of contemporary English is the system of human expression by means of words. It further states that it is particular system of human expression by means of words. Language is the basis of all creative thought. Without language, there would be no progress, no civilization, and no culture.

Language is defined as a vehicle of communicating messages and meaning. Language is a tool that enables human being to express their thoughts feelings and gives the sense of belonging and security. (Richard and Rogers, 1995).

Today, in this era of technology, the world is just but a global village through various telecommunications and other scientific inventions. Communication through language is the basic foundation for all human cooperation, without which no civilization is possible. Language is

indispensable in the elaboration of thought. Of course, when we think, we think in language which is why for human beings communication is unique because it involves the use of language.

Language Education

Language is a unique means of communication and it is learned through system of symbols which every fluent speaker of any language has thoroughly learnt. It also gives an explanation or the reasons why a child takes the pain of learning a language of his immediate environment between the ages of two and six since he cannot automatically speak the language but acquires it through his language acquisition device (LAD).

It must be recalled that Nigeria is a Nation which constitutes so many diverse and different ethnic groups with each speaking its language and practicing its

own culture. There are not less than two hundred different languages that are spoken in Nigeria (Rufai, 1997) of all the native speakers of the individual language; it is only eight out of the two hundred that have a million or more native speakers (Bangbose, 1994).

Education on its part is a service provided by the society for its members at all stages of development. It involves the training of the individual for life inside and outside the society, and not merely for the present but also for the future. This services is obtained through the acquisition of language (Farrant, 1980) is of the view that "Education is the total process of human learning by which knowledge is imparted, faculties trained and skills developed. Schooling is one form in which education is provided.

The Concept of Family

The family is the fundamental biological institution into which a child is born and it is where the child's primary socialization takes place.

The family in the African setting includes parents, siblings and blood relations while in other countries. However, members of a family in Africa may not share the same household.

The characteristics of a family according to Levi – Strauss (1960) are as follows:

- (i) It finds its origin in marriage;
- (ii) It consists of husband, wife and their children, though it is conceivable that other relations may find their place to that nuclear group;

- (iii) The family members are united together by (a) Legal bonds.
- (iv) Economic, Religious and other kinds of rights and obligations.
- (v) A precise network of sexual rights and prohibitions as well as varying and diversified amount of feelings such as love, affection, respect and care etc.

The United States census defined a family as two or more persons who are related to each other by blood marriage, or adoption and who live together. Many people would broaden this definition to include, for example, the family units of college students who live away from home. Some people feel the definition should be widened further still to include adults who are not relatives but who have made a commitment to each other and want to live together in some sense as a family – for instance, two unrelated old people or homosexual couples. The above definition differs from a more traditional conception of the nuclear family which consists of a mother, father and their children.

Functions of the Family

- (1) **Biological Reproduction/Child bearing:** All Societies need to reproduce their members and the need varies widely when people had a relatively short life span and infant mortality is high, it was important that as many families as possible be formed in order to raise as many children as possible.
- (2) **Care and Socialization:** Humans nurture many years of socialization

- before they are ready and able to become full – fledged members of their society. So, effort is made to teach children the norms, values, beliefs and behaviors appropriate for membership in that society through caring for them.
- (3) Economic Functions: To survive, all societies must meet the subsistence needs of their members: food, shelter, and warmth. The family has been a traditional means for seeing that the dependent members of society is cared for by other members who were able to produce the necessary food and shelter.
- (4) Primary Socialization: The ability of the families to do this differs due to their significance in the social order in terms of social status, prestige, economic strength, and political power. What the modern family can teach a child therefore depends mostly on the cultural background and socio-economic status of that family which is of paramount importance of the socialization of its children within the framework of societal demands.

The Concept of Society

“No man is an island” is a popular saying in the global world. It is believed that human beings do not live alone as individuals. They are always in group and members of the groups do interact and depend on each other for survival. The groups, the individuals and their activities

take place in a large set up called community or society. The members of the society always have certain things in common-geographical territory, religious belief and general feeling of belongings. The society members are conscious of their mode of life and are united by a common set of norms and values and it is also capable of existing longer than the lifespan of an individual.

From the above definition, it can be seen that though children are members of the community, they are functionally not members of the society. This is due to the reason that they do not know their rights, duties and obligations as full members of society. They are actually oblivious of the way their society functions. They are however, potential members of the society. Every society has a set of techniques for bringing up their children.

Language Education as a Tool for Educating the Nigerian Child in the 21st Century

The national policy on language education (1981) specified that.

Language policy at primary level is specified, in section three as:

- The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English language shall be taught as a subject and from 4th year, English language shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of the immediate

environment and French shall be taught as subjects.

The Nigerian national language policy is in appreciation of the importance of language as a means of.

- i. Promoting social interaction and nation cohesion
- ii. Preserving cultures
- iii. Fostering national unity and
- iv. Smooth interaction with our neighbours (National Policy on Education).

The first three goals above have intrinsic value and they are of great advantage to the society and the country at large. It demands that every child shall have to learn the language the immediate environment and in addition, shall have to learn one of the three indigenous languages of Nigeria which is native to the people; they are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. This implies that any citizen who is not a native speaker of any of the three major languages may have to learn at least two to the major languages as a price for fostering national unity.

The prime source of socialization within the family and the society is language. Once a child has acquired language, he can be told how to do things and more importantly why they should be done. The child acquires language through the family where he develops his language ability and he later learns other languages through formal schooling system and the society.

Although Nigeria is blessed with over 400 languages our discussion of language education for educating the child shall focus mainly on English language,

giving its importance as the official language in Nigeria.

English language is a notable legacy of our colonial experience and it functions to date as the country's official language and the predominant language of power, of rising high, of mass media, officialdom and most importantly, of education Osborn (2007) called it literacy colonization of our educational system because various mother tongues have been degraded while English has been moved to the center state. Very few Nigerian men and women cannot sustain two minutes of conversation without code-mixing and code-switching. He further asserted that even illiterates now possess respectable repertoire of English words and phrases with which they spice their speech.

English language virtually touches all aspect of life, such as communication act, grammar, literature, stylistics, etc therefore, it can be easily used in so many aspects for example, we can use the language properly in enlightening the children.

English language also plays vital role when used as functional language for self development. A child can learn the language and later acquire a job as a teacher in an academic setting because English teachers demand in the society is usually higher than their supply.

English language can also be used as language of communication with regards to religion. If there is a religious gather of people from different ethnic groups. English language can be the only remedy to be used to communicate.

Bamgbare (1971) stated that all the heritage left behind for Nigerians by British at the end of colonial rule or administration, probably none is more important than English". It is unrealistic for anybody in Nigeria today to think of national unity in the country without recourse to the utilization of the English Language.

Economically, English language connects Nigeria to the outside world as it is the language of science and technology. The world is going computer day by day and all the windows on the computers are in English Language.

The Roles of the Family and Society in Language Education.

- The family should provide all the necessary things that will enhance the Childs education for instances, by making sure he eats before going to school and by providing him with leaning materials.
- Though there are many agents of socialization, the family is the most significant, so it should inculcate the moral values and standards of the society to the child.
- The society must establish a shared and articulated set of goals e.g. by allowing even non-governmental organization (NGO's) to help in the child's education by building voluntary classes, schools in community.
- The parents should send children to school early, check their books after school hours, and praise them

for hardworking and can even employ extra-lesson teachers for their children.

- More importantly is by inculcating good reading culture in their children by encouraging them to extensive reading. This can be done by buying them reading books such as story books.

Conclusion

Language education, specially the English language, as seen in this paper, has been a very important aspect of the Childs education if there is a society without language, such a society is in darkness and will continue to be in darkness till the end of time.

Recommendation

Language will always be crucial factor in the development of the children, the family, the society, the community and the nation at large. If governance is to be a collective endeavor, then the populace especially the children must be well informed and understood.

The government should embark an aggressive mass literacy programme, especially in the rural areas where most children are not privileged to be in school. As a result, most of them can neither read nor write in English language nor in their mother tongues.

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