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# LANGUAGE EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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## **Abstract**

*Language is more than just a mean of communication; it is a principal source of a group's identity and a veritable tool used in the transmission of such identity to other groups of people. It is the most important factor at all levels of education. There is no substitute for language in the education process. This paper has therefore examined the importance of language in education as a powerful tool for national development that will help to change people's attitudes. The paper also discussed the relevance of language to national development. Finally, the paper drew up its conclusion by suggesting ways of improving quality education in Nigeria.*

Language as a concept has been defined as more than a tool for communication; it helps to shape the identity of individuals and groups, as well as serving as a key element in social integration and cultural development. This means that language helps to identify a people as a tribe and transmit their way of life to the next generation as they use it to interact within the group and with other groups of people.

Dabo (2001) defines language as a means of communication within speech community which helps to sustain relationship with other people. It is a vehicle for sharing ideas, thoughts, feelings experiences, using speech, sounds and symbols. Language and communication are inseparable. This is because language is the principal means for communication. A good mastery of language makes communication easy. Language could be non-verbal, verbal or written, and must convey exactly what the speaker or writer has in mind to convey to the listener or reader for communication to take place. In this regard, Crystal (1971) states:

*It is impossible to conceive a relational being of a society without implying the existence of a language. Language and thinking are so closely related that any study of the former is bound to be a contribution to our understanding of the human mind.*

Crystal sees language as a unique, distinctive element that differentiates man and human society from that of the lower animals. Without language, there can be no meaningful development.

Language, the divine benevolence to man is so inexorably tied to the effective existence of man in the society that any meaningful discussion of man must begin with it, it steers the course of, and ends discussion. The end and purpose of language is to enhance communication. If culture is seen as the sum total of that which man contributed to nature, everything which elevates the human life above that of animals, then language is at once the expression of culture, the depository of culture and the crucial mode of culture transmission. So, human existence and development depend largely on the existence and development of language for communication.

Language is important because through it man is able to express content (and meaning). Language enables man to have self-expression to express what he means. Human perception and conception are conveyed through language in forms of message; messages are then transformed into meaning. Language is an integral part of man. It surpasses communication and social interaction. Language influences thought and thought often conditions actions, and also influences conduct. Language therefore is the medium of transmitting culture and social reality.

Democracy is part of the present world order which is genetically inherited by being learned. Democracy is an acquired form of knowledge as well as practice; it requires the use of language for its cultivation, survival and blossoming. For democracy to thrive and be entrenched, its norms, tenets and practices must be in cultural idioms that are indigenous to the people.

## **Development**

Adeniran (2013) sees development as a multidimensional process, one that changes the economy, polity and society of the country in which it occurs. Amartya Sen (2008) argues that development is a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy. According to her, development requires the removal of major obstacles to freedom namely poverty, tyranny, poor economic opportunities as well as systematic social deprivation, neglect of public facilities as well as intolerance or over activity of repressive states.

Development can be seen as discipline. It is about how discipline drives the human spirit to triumph over odds of poverty trap, physical geography, fiscal trap, government, cultural barriers, geopolitics, lack of innovation and demographic trap (Utomu, 2006). Kambhampati (2004) in Ademiran (2013) argues that development requires growth and structural change, some measure of distributive equity, modernization in social and cultural attitudes, a degree of political transformation and

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stability, an improvement in health and education so that population growth stabilizes, and an increase in urban living and employment. From the above, it is clear to us that though there are different perspectives to development, there is general consensus that development will lead to a good change manifested in increased capacity of people to have control over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology; and obtain physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter), employment, equality, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education, gender equality, sustainable development and peace (Igbuzor, 2005).

### **The Concept of Education**

Olugbodi (2003) defines education as the transmission of the worth-while values in morally acceptable manner involving knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective. Furthermore, Education equips the individual with basic skills, capabilities, knowledge and attitude for his personal development in particular and the society in general. Education is the catalogue of experiences that enhance the satisfying and productive life of upward social mobility, manpower training and general development. It is the process of imparting knowledge, judgment and a level of intellectual maturity.

Education is also a very powerful tool for national development because it is a process by which an individual develops useful abilities, skills and other forms of behaviors that are of value to his society. Education process could be through formal school system or through informal way that include extramural classes, departmental training centre, agricultural and health extension service programmes, self-improvement on the training and many others. In any form that learning is organized and skills are acquired by individuals to use in the society; they are forms of education.

### **Language Education**

Language education is the teaching and learning of a foreign or second language. It has to do with language policy and planning. Language education is acquisition of specialized knowledge, skills and other capabilities in language in a formal educational institution. It refers to the study of art of language which, in effect involves the understanding of the nature and importance of language as a vehicle for communication and insight into the processes of language development. It further include the techniques of developing the four language skills (Ugoji and Stella, 2010).

Language education is a branch of applied linguistics that is more commonly used with regard to second language learning of a foreign language. The study of language education is based on the general importance of language as an instrument for human activities on earth (Haddy, 2011).

Given the fact that language is the sole means of inculcating knowledge, skills and competencies, there is the need for teachers of all subjects who employ the use of language in raising other educationists for other fields of knowledge to have some specialized knowledge and understanding of the mechanics of the language in order to provide their learners with some deeper understanding of the science of the language and equip them with skills for better proficiency in manipulating the language art. By so doing, the pace of learning is accelerated and the younger generation develops high level of scientific, political, socio economic and technological advancement which is the hallmark of national development and achievement of millennium development goals (MDG).

Language education and learning are so closely related that it is very rare to discourse one process without discussing the other. It is the bridge that one crosses to communicate and share ideas with people of different cultures and learn in school. According to Makiluwa (2001).

*Language education has two dimensions vis-à-vis language in education and language of education. The former refers to language taught or learn in an educational system as a school subject, while the later has to do with language used as medium of instruction.*

Language is the father and power of learning. The primacy of language in education is not in contention. The collaboration between language and education results in proper development in individual learner's communication skills that in turn influence national development. In Nigerian schools, every school teacher needs a good knowledge of foreign language to teach his subject. Language and learning are indivisible. This fact has to be realized by everyone involved in the business of imparting knowledge that a great deal of what teachers learn to some extent, is the learning of language. This explains why we have different registers for different fields of education.

### **Education for National Development**

National development is an all encompassing phenomenon which embraces all facts of human activities be, it social, economic, political and cultural. According to Abimiku (2012) in Adeniran (2013) "development is a process of raising real per capital income of a nation which is evident in the reduction of income inequalities and the attainment of the preferences of the entire masses". Development of any nation does not come by chance rather; it depends on some strategic and purposeful plan to bring it into existence (Tijani and Ahmed, 2009). Having said this, the place of education in national development cannot be over emphasized; education is a necessary tool for human development. The purpose of education is to expose learners to many learning experiences that would change their perception to things with a view to making them informed members of the society. National development within the context of this paper is an indication of economic viability, socio-political stability, good governance,

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display of desirable attitudes, social adjustment within the school system and adequate utilization of national resources for the benefit of the citizens.

Adeniran (2013) opines that the low level of the Nigerian development today is attributable to the poor level of performance of her educational system. The education sector has collapsed so much that it has lost its “social vitality” required for national development. Several reforms have been made but failed to yield the desired result. In spite of this, the government still relies on educational sector to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

No country can survive where bribery and corruption have been institutionalized. Nation cannot advance where citizens are dismissed as fools by their kith and kin, simply because they refused to loot, plunder and abuse public office and public confidence. Nzekwe (2005) in Adeniran (2013) asserted that “in Nigeria, people struggle for power not because they know what is expected of them but for their desire to make ends meet and amass undue wealth at the expense of the masses”.

Though education in Nigeria is faced with many challenges such as inadequate finance, lack of qualified teachers, poor government commitment and lack of facilities in schools, insufficient access to education, inadequate funding, poor infrastructural development, lack of education supportive services; language education still has a lot of assistance to render to ameliorate these national problems in the area of adequate communication for national development.

#### **Insufficient Access to Education**

Access could be referred to as having opportunity to something, making available for people. According to Fajonyomi (2008) in Adeniran (2013) “access constitutes opportunity to make use of experience or something. Access to education therefore simply means making education available for the citizens”.

Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) has made unequivocal statement when it declared that “every Nigerian child shall have a right to equal educational opportunities irrespective of any real or imagined disabilities each according to his or her ability”. However many Nigerian children especially in the rural areas do not have access to education. For example the ECDE expected enrolment is 22million but the actual enrolment is 2.02million leaving 19.98million out of school. The expected enrolment for primary education is 34.92million but the actual enrolment is 24.42million leaving 10.5million out of school. In junior secondary schools the expected enrolment is 9.27million but the actual enrolment is 3.27million leaving 6.0million unenrolled. For nomadic and migrant children, only 450,000 are enrolled out of 3.5million school age children. It could be deduced from the foregoing that many Nigerians of school age do not have access to education. Even those who are in schools are not accessing quality

education due to infrastructural decay and grossly inadequate teaching facilities among other reasons.

### **Inadequate Funding**

Though federal republic of Nigeria (2004) declared that education being an expensive social service that requires adequate financial provision from all tiers of government for the successful implementation of educational programmes, the requirement is yet to be met which would enable all and sundry to be adequately educated. The international requirement of 26% budgetary allocation for the development of the educational sector has not been met and this is evidently shown by the decay of infrastructure in the Nigerian institutions especially at the primary and secondary education levels.

### **Poor Infrastructural Development**

Nigerian institutions are bedeviled by dilapidated infrastructural facilities that cannot engender effectiveness and efficiency of the school system. Teaching and learning demand conducive atmosphere. Bulama, and Tijani (2011) in Adeniran (2013) asserted that a situation where classes are held under the trees constitute a threat to meaningful academic activities and quality education at all levels.

### **Language and National Development**

As earlier said, language is central to all human activities. Education on the other hand is a tool for the integration of the individual into the society so that he can achieve self realization, develop national consciousness, promote unity and strive for social/ economic, political, scientific, cultural and technological progress (Kpanja, 2011). This implies that language education enhances understanding in the individual which in turn enables him to be conscious of his rights and privileges in the society. Language, thus liberates one from being intimidated and being deceived with empty promises. Language consciously liberates the mind and enhances good communication and invariably the understanding of good or bad policies.

According to Awobuluji (1991) language is simultaneously a vehicle for peoples' culture and a means of maintaining and preserving that culture." Without language education, culture cannot be maintained, preserved and passed on to the younger generation. Nigeria education is geared towards making social, cultural, economic, political contribution to national development.

The ability to use language enhances communication and good communication enhances understanding. Attainment of political economic or social goals depends on the understanding of people's thoughts and ideas. Language and culture can only be preserved if taught and learned from child hood.

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Suffice it to say that in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nation like that of Nigeria, language is a unifying factor that enhances national development. Yande and Shirga (2007) posited that language, national unity and development are such valuable things to mankind that no human society can afford to ignore. This is because effective use of language is key to man's success. It is a string that ties a people together. The biblical account of the Tower of Babel in the book of Genesis, the scripture confirmed that the people planned to come together build themselves a city and a tower and make a name for themselves, lest they be scattered abroad.

Language is a human activity through which he expresses his thoughts and feelings. With this, one can say that human language is a valuable heritage without which man cannot meaningfully interact. For the attainment of Nigerian developmental goals, citizens must be well educated and the right use of language adheres to in order to face the challenges of the time.

### **Conclusion**

Language Education is without doubt a sine qua non for an accelerated national development. This is why it is a fundamental right of every citizen irrespective of social or economic status to be educated. Nigeria's desire for societal advancement can never be achieved within the prevailing challenges. Government has to show genuine commitment to language education in the transformation agenda of this democratic dispensation so that Nigeria can occupy a desirable place of pride in the global economic market and regain her lost glory in the West Africa sub-region.

### **Recommendations**

Language is the most important factor at all levels of education. There is no substitute for language in the education process. This paramount position of language in education, makes it necessary for every education system to have experts in the language for instruction so that subject teachers will be proficient in it as they direct students to register in different fields.

There should be collaboration between language teachers and teachers of other fields to enhance competence in the language of instruction thereby ensuring national development.

Government should be committed to the growth and development of education by increasing access to quality education through the provision of schools especially in the rural area and employment of qualified teachers to teach in the schools.

Government at all levels should adhere strictly to UNESCO directive of 26% budgetary allocation to education to enhance its social relevance to the people. Library, infrastructures like classroom to cater for the enrolled population and other teaching

facilities should be provided by the government in order to enhance academic performance of students and the teaching and learning process.

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