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# RE-ENGINEERING LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN THE POLYTECHNIC FOR EMPLOYMENT AND SELF PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

*Naturally, language is the human vocal sounds or the arbitrary graphic representation of these sounds in writing used systematically and conventionally by speech community for purposes of communication. On the other hand, education is seen as the overall round development of individuals, their economic, cultural and spiritual being. The process of moulding and shaping personality is facilitated through the use of language as a vehicle; language plays vital roles in most known formal educational systems. It features as a subject on the school curriculum and is used to serve as the medium of instruction in all the subjects globally, including itself. However, when we talk of Language education we tend to talk the same way we talk of Biology Education, Chemistry Education, Economics Education to mention a few as they are obtained on our curriculum. Thus this paper seeks to consider 'Re-engineering language education in the polytechnic for technological development self improved productivity in Nigeria'.*

Nigeria is one of the former British West African colonies. These are countries that were colonized by the British and left after political independence with English language as one of the main legacies. This could therefore be imagined how tedious it is for homogenous or mono-ethnic societies, who interact and relate to one another easily through a common language, though rarely realizable in Africa, be amalgamated into heterogeneous societies. Even where mono-ethnic societies exist, the use of a common language for all transactions might pose a lot of challenges. For instance, take the cases of Northern Ireland and Vietnam where continuous conflicts are the prevailing conditions despite their being homogeneous societies. Nigeria, Ghana, Zambia, Kenya are good examples of the former British colonial territories.

The economy was the main motivating factor that aroused the British interests into the interiors and later turned to religious and political activities. This also gave rise to the use of language as a medium for instruction in churches, language for commerce, slave trade and other forms of transactions that were based on religious and political inclinations. Hitherto, Europeans settlements were restricted to only costal city states of Calaba and Lagos to mention a few but later extended into the interior through the two

main rivers, river Niger and river Benue. At a later Stage, there was the amalgamation of the then Northern protectorate to the Western and a southern protectorate into what was later known as Nigeria in 1914. This gave rise to three regions as south, west and North. The inhabitants of these regions are people from different cultural and religious beliefs,, the dominant languages being: Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. This phenomenon characterized Nigeria as a heterogeneous society, hence a multicultural and multi lingual society. It is worth noting that Nigeria became a multi lingual nation due to colonization. Language as a vehicle in communication became the main subject of discussion. The quests for language of education, commerce, industry, sports, national language became the subjects of deliberations.

### **Multilingualism**

The term “multilingualism” refers to a person who can communicate in more than one language be it actively (through speaking, writing, or signing) or passively (through listening, reading or perceiving). Other terms such as “bilingual” and “trilingual” are used to describe a multilingual person or polyglot. “poly” means many “glot” refers to language, i.e. as interpreted in Greek.

### **Conceptual Frame Work**

Let us now consider the key concepts: language, education, the English language in Nigeria and the language Education and how the concepts could re-engineer education for employment and self productivity or self reliance in Nigeria.

There could be various definitions to what a language is. However, the most encompassing definition, in the context of this paper is, the human vocal sounds or the arbitrary graphic representation of these sounds in writing used systematically and conventionally by a speech community for purposes of communication. Based on this, one can further explain that vocal sounds represent speech or oral communication while graphic sounds representation refer to written forms of communication. Based on the above features, the numerous functions of language could be identified as: a medium for instructions, a vehicle of thought for ceremonial purposes, for documentation, for business transaction, for influencing people etc.

On the other hand, education is seen as the overall round development of individuals, their economic, cultural and spiritual being. Formal western type of education was introduced in Nigeria by the Christian missionaries just before the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to Fafunwa(1974:92) and Taiwo (1980:10-17), for about four decades after that initial date, both the nature and main thrust of language education in the country were completely left to those missionaries to decide. This proves that, prior to the advent of the colonial masters, the system of education in the regions later known as Nigeria, was a traditional and well-organized system. However, language education and language in education refer to the two distinct roles that natural language plays in education. Therefore, this paper concerns itself with how the language education re- engineers education for employment and self reliance in Nigeria.

A reference to the polytechnic Education will also be made as it attracts a high level of patronage after the University education in Nigeria.

### **Language Education in School Curriculum**

The government introduced teaching of indigenous languages after the attainment of political independence in 1960. The main objective was to preserve the indigenous cultures and languages. English, though was used for all other transactions during the political era, the policy began to face some criticisms from the then intellectuals. This also, according to Bamgbose (1976:12-13) some people felt and openly canvassed in parliament for English to be replaced as official Language by one of our indigenous Languages some twenty years after independence. Others who were particularly worried with the problem most people in the country actually have in understanding English and communicating well in it, advised that more effort should be put into the teaching of the major indigenous languages to enable them to serve as an alternative to English as official means of communication in Government and Businesses (Osaji1979:159 quoting the white Paper on the Udoji Report). This coupled with some problems faced by other individuals in the use and understanding of English which they too advocated the teaching of indigenous languages in the schools and colleges.

The essence for the above struggles was to bring an important shift in the attitude of the Government particularly at the federal level to the indigenous languages. This was based on what linguists and anthropologists, according to Fafunwa, consider as that a language is simultaneously an indefinitely Vehicle for a people's culture and a means of maintaining and preserving that culture. The writings of Whorf (1956) were particularly influential in drawing linguists' attention to a wider conception of language in relation to culture, society and the individual. This is because certain aspects of a new language item of vocabulary or grammatical features often imply concepts for which the indigenous language has no equivalent (Stern, 1991:203). Based on this, the Government was also of the view that "if we are not ultimately to lose our national identity together with our rich indigenous cultures, then we must begin to pay more attention to the teaching of our indigenous languages.

According to National policy on education (NPE: 2004) the following are the laid down policy for Nigerian education that:

- a) In primary schools, which lasts six years, each child must study two languages, namely:
  - i) his mother-tongue (if available for study) or an indigenous language of wider communication in his area of domicile, and
  - ii) English language:
- b) In Junior Secondary School (JSS), which is of three years duration, the child must study three languages, viz:
  - i) His mother-tongue (if available for study) or an indigenous language of wider communication in his area of domicile.

- ii) English language and
  - iii) Just any one of the three major indigenous languages in the country, namely, Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, provided the language chosen is distinct from the child's mother – tongue
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- c) In senior secondary school (SSS), which also lasts three years, the child must study two languages, viz:
    - i) an indigenous language, and
    - ii) English language

However, other foreign languages such as French and Arabic were considered options at junior and senior secondary school levels. In addition to that, it is worth noting that the policy (NPE) centered on primary/secondary levels of education. These subjects served, and up to date serve as pre-requisite subjects to what the learner will be taught at the tertiary level of education.

### **Constitutional Backing**

In sub-section 19(4) of the Nigeria 1989 constitution it is stated that “Government should encourage the learning of indigenous languages” the languages here refer to the languages that have so far been reduced to writing such as Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. These languages were to be as subjects under the NPE policy on language education in primary and JSS schools. However, out of these languages only Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are taught in most of the secondary and tertiary institutions. This was due to the fact that these languages “have enough materials to sustain teaching them as they really ought to be taught at any level. These statements prove the legality of inclusion of our indigenous languages into curriculum of studies. These considerations by the Government in policy statement and constitution as cited above, tends to manifest the movement of citizenry to self reliant nation since all the concepts and skills will be fully explained in the indigenous languages.

### **Challenges on Policy Statements**

There are a lot of challenges facing teaching of indigenous languages, for instance, on the policy statements, it has not been clarified as to which of the indigenous languages will serve as the core subject at the senior secondary school level. Furthermore, the selection of such languages also is up to date perceived with biased minds by majority of the citizenry. This is coupled with inadequate number of indigenous language teachers, and where they exist, they face shortage of materials to teach the languages effectively.

### **Discussion**

The central idea for this paper is Re-engineering Language education for technological development, employment and self productivity in Nigeria “this could be attained through the use of language education, particularly in our polytechnics where middle level manpower is developed”. The polytechnic education is more practical and

pragmatic, and using indigenous languages will facilitate development in all facets of life with the current introduction of entrepreneurship Education at tertiary level, particularly in the polytechnic education, graduates will be able to establish small scale industries and are self reliant.

Technical and technological education prepares learners for life and self-reliance. However, the issue is whether we could have adequate man power to implement the curriculum meant for this. Often, we hear adverse comments from students on lack of understanding of a course due to the lack of professionally qualified personnel. Also, it is difficult to have concepts of similar or nearly the same meaning in both indigenous languages and in science and technology which makes it difficult to achieve some desired goals and objectives.

### **Polytechnic Education and the Nigeria Situation**

In section 6 of the policy on Education, polytechnics are identified as one of the five techniques of education institutions outside the universities which offer technical education. According to Okumephuna (2003) "polytechnics are an established and organic component of the education system in most countries. They are designed to provide professional and work oriented training to meet the developmental needs of the society. In a related development, polytechnics are also avenues where the work force for industries are produced and are by this critical to industrial development. To achieve these goals, polytechnics employ teaching and learning approaches that differ from the traditional academic model (Guardian News paper, 2004). It is against this background that this paper considers re-engineering language education in the polytechnic education for employment and self productivity in Nigeria which will lead to the acquisition of practical and applied skills as well as basic scientific knowledge (Naira land 2007).

In the words of Esho (2008) before the establishment of the Yaba centres Higher College in 1930, there were various forms of training being adopted by some Government Departments. These were the Land and Survey Training Centres (1908). Marine Training Centre (1928), the Public Works Department (1931): the Posts and Telegraph (1931) and the Railways (1942). This simply meant that all these could not meet the demands of the society of the era though there were first generation universities such as UNN Nsuka, Ahmadu Bello University Zaria and Ife, Ile-ife that were teaching engineering courses. However, need a rose for paying more attention on polytechnics to produce middle and high level manpower. As time went on, the second National Development Plan (1970-75) identified shortage of technical manpower as detrimental to the success of the development plan it self. This was what led to the establishment of seven (7) polytechnics via No33 of 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1979. The establishment of these polytechnics gave rise to the establishment of a National Board for Technical Education to monitor the activities of the new institutions.

The National Board for Technical Education was mandated to over see and co-ordinate all aspects of technical and vocational education received from polytechnics,

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mono-technics such as school of surveying, agriculture, colleges of health technology, technical colleges and allied institutions (M.B. Yunusa, 2008). The main objective of this education as stated in the National policy on Education (NPE) 2004 (edition) are:

- a. To provide trained manpower in Applied Science Technology and Commerce, Particularly at sub professional grades.
- b. To provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial and economic development.
- c. To provide the people who can apply scientific knowledge to the improvement and solution of environmental problems for the use and convenience of man.
- d. To give an introduction to professional studies in Engineering and other Technologies.
- e. To give training and impart the necessary skills leading to the production of craftsmen, Technicians and other skilled personnel who will be enterprising and self reliant.
- f. To enable young men and women have an intelligent understanding of the increasing complexity of technology.

Based on the above, we can realize that this system of education is more accessible to an average Nigerian who might not have influence and affluence to further his education to university. The content of this kind of education based on the policy statement exposes the students to real life situations through practical exercises, excursions and other practices such as induction courses, and students industrial work experience scheme (SIWES). Therefore, since polytechnic education is practical-oriented, more accessible to an average (economically) Nigerian, it is suggested that the system is more adequate for national development and self productivity in Nigeria. In addition to that, the system, if it is to be effective should overcome some intricacies associated with the science and technology manuals. There are materials written in English, and not indigenous languages. Therefore, only the so called literates would be able to use such materials. Translating such materials into indigenous languages would also be tedious and too demanding.

There will be burdens on the government for the production of these materials, provisions of adequate teaching/learning facilities, provision of well trained indigenous language teachers all to facilitate effective implementation of the programme. The government should not relent in her effort to effectively, use indigenous languages as languages for instruction, commerce, industries, language for sports, science and technology. We should at this juncture realize that, if countries such as Japan, Russia, China and India could use their languages to develop their societies in different facets of development, there is no reason why Nigeria as a great nation could not try a common national language. Thus, Foreign and Local manufacturers of automobile engineering equipments, electronic gadgets to mention a few, are to be encouraged to produce manuals written in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Also engineering technical details alike should come with simple explanation in indigenous languages.

## Re-Engineering Language Education in...

Nigerians should, in a serious note, begin to consider the quests for national indigenous language to be used for all transactions so that our industries both governmental and private would adopt indigenous languages, our small scale industries also should adopt the same system.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, re-engineering education for employment and national development for self productivity could also be achieved through polytechnic education. This, according to Ben Yunus (2008), the system of education at this level is “practically oriented”. The emphasis should be laid on the development of industrial materials that would involve actively, the learners’ skills acquisition and application. This could be effective through training of indigenous language teachers to implement the programme, thus leading to have effective learner support system and effective curriculum delivery process in the polytechnic education. This will also lead to getting more employment opportunities for national development. Provisions of all these will consequently make the individuals self reliant and productive.

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