

LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY

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Abstract

A common adage says that “knowledge is power”. Knowledge is acquired through education and any body that wants to be employed and as well be productive in his field will seek to acquire education. This paper tries to highlight the importance of education in employment and productivity. It argues that all education is education in language since every educational process is tied to a language. The paper; therefore, suggests that the teaching of the language skills should be the business of every educational enterprise and that anybody who wants to be employed as well as to be productive in his chosen career should endeavour to master the language skills.

The philosophy of Nigerian education is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen. A sound and effective citizen is one who has acquired the necessary skills and abilities in order to be useful or effective in his environment. He is one that will contribute meaningfully to the development of his society. He is that person that can be gainfully employed because of his possession of the necessary facilities that can make him articulate good strategies and decisions that are capable of imparting positive changes in an environment. What are those necessary facilities if one may ask? The answer is of course education and its benefits. Anybody that acquires good education is capable of being employed as well as productive.

There is no gainsaying that there cannot be any meaningful educational process without a language. In other words, all education is education in language. This is because language is the bedrock of any educational process. All learning in schools is done in one form of language or the other. This implies that all school subjects including sciences and Mathematics are done through the instrumentality of a language. Abdulazeez (2000) in support of the above opinion argued that subjects like Mathematics which may involve manipulations of various symbols, that the process by which those symbols are manipulated and the significance attached to such manipulations are none the less actually constructed and interpreted in a language. This by implication means that linguistic processes are fundamental to all learning in the school. This, of course, implies that the acquisition of linguistic properties (language) is a panacea for attainment of education which in itself is a pre-requisite for employment and productivity.

Education

The word education is derived from the Latin word ‘educatio’ which means ‘to bring up’ or ‘to rear’. It is an enlightening experience. Fafunwa in Nnamani (2011) defined it as the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. Education equips the individual with the necessary potentials that will help him to make positive changes in the environment he finds himself. Farant in Kayode (2005) saw education as the process of a person learning to live as a useful and acceptable member of the community to which he belongs. Without education, the individual will not develop his potentials and resigns himself to fate believing whatever state he finds himself as an act of God. That belief goes contrary to the stipulation made in National Policy on Education (NPE) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) which states that education fosters the worth and development of the individual for each individual’s sake and for the general development of the society. It goes further to state that education aims at inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the mind in the understanding of the acquisition of appropriate skills and development of abilities (mental, physical and socio-economic abilities) and competencies as equipments for the survival to live in and contribute to the development of his society. It provides

skills for growth and better quality of life. Agusiobo (2000) contended that it equips one with the necessary instrument to transform his condition as well as those of his environment.

Functions of Education

Occupational Role: Education is geared towards affecting a person by introducing him into a way of thinking and behaving as well as instilling in him the right norms, values, attitudes, skills and techniques that are considered desirable for development purposes in the society. A person that has acquired these desirable norms, values, attitudes, skills and techniques will be gainfully employed because he is already equipped with the necessary skills that he needs to perform any role that is assigned to him. Take for instance, a medical doctor or a teacher who has acquired the skills and techniques of his profession will perform without problem any role that is required of him in his chosen profession. Education equips one with the ability of getting employed as well as being productive in his job. It is a pre-requisite for lucrative employment.

Route to Progress: The level of educational attainment of a society goes a long way to determine the progress, development and level of civilization of that society, (Adebiyi and Babajide, 2005). It is a catalyst to any developmental process. Education brings about progress and advancement in the society thereby promoting and improving the status of the society. Okeke (2000) observed that it is a panacea for achieving social and economic freedom as well as knowledge acquisition which will empower the recipient in bringing comfort and happiness to the society and family. Good education helps one to make progress in his chosen career. Any body that is educated is regarded as well bred and modest.

Preservation of Man's Culture: Education exerts a lot of influence on man. It is the influence of education on man that distinguishes him from animal. Animal has no education and has no culture too. Ocho (2005) observed that up until now that the 'cow has not learnt to do anything'. Man has consistently through education improved his culture and this culture has been preserved and transferred from generation to another. Man keeps on improving, changing and discarding some aspects of the culture that are either not suitable or obsolete unlike the animal.

The above functions of education can only be harnessed through language. Man needs language to harness his society for the improvement of self and others and to keep abreast of what is going on in the rest of the world. For him to be productive in his ambition, he needs the power of expression which is language, (Jiboku; 1999 and Yusuf; 2003) in Yusuf (2003).

Language

Language is a tool which one uses to express himself. It is an instrument with which human beings use to make representations of their feelings and thoughts. It could be verbal or written. Offorma (2009) defines it as a system of signs and symbols and rules for using them, and that is why each language has its lexis, structure, stylistics, orthography and phonology. It is made up of words, their pronunciation and the methods of combining them. Language development goes in four sequential stages:

Listening —————> speaking —————> reading —————> writing

Listening skill is the first in the hierarchy of the language skills. It has to do with one's ability to comprehend what another person has said. It goes beyond hearing. Ifionu and Ohuche (1996) described hearing as a 'psychological capabilities'. This is because one can always hear what is uttered within his hearing range provided one does not have any hearing impairment. Listening goes beyond hearing to comprehension. It involves the conscious effort of the individual (listener) in order to comprehend what is being said. Hybel and Weaver (2001) describe listening as a process of receiving, interpreting, evaluating and responding to messages or information. The message or information has to be received or heard through the senses after which they will be processed or interpreted for the necessary evaluation and response. One cannot boast that he has heard something if he cannot interpret or comprehend what he has heard.

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The speaking skill is the second stage. After the listening stage, the language learner moves a step further to express himself through speech. It is the art of expressing oneself through the use of the speech organs. In this stage, the individual tries to express his thoughts and feelings through speech in such a way that he could be understood by other users of the language. Speech is an indispensable tool in human communication. Anybody that is incapable of communicating to his fellow through speech is regarded as having speech problems. Its activities include conversation, discussion etc. Through these activities, vocabulary usage and coherent organization of oral communication are improved, Callahan and Clark (1966) in Mgbodile (1999). Without adequate knowledge of speaking skills the language user may have problems in pronunciation, spelling and information, (Marjah (2008) in Oforma (2009).

Reading has to do with one's ability to interpret written words. It is the process of translating written or printed symbols into ideas which the writer intends to convey to the readers. It involves pronunciation and interpretation. If one looks at the words and his mind fails to register the quantum of meaning that is required of those words, the person will not be said to have read. Makama and Makama in quoting Cahll (1999) described reading as looking at graphic symbols and formulating mentally the sounds and ideas they represent. Reading is not mere mentioning of words; it entails one's ability to pronounce the words correctly, interpret them and utilize whatever information there in.

Writing is the process of making paper presentations of one's thoughts, feelings and ideas. Uzoegwu (2001) described it as a means of expressing feelings, thoughts, and using the appropriate graphic symbols that are acceptable to the target language. A person is deemed a good writer if he is able to put down his thought, feelings and ideas on paper in an organized manner. Writing is a higher order skill and the last skill in language learning. Before one acquires this skill, the person must have acquired the previous skills. Oforma (2009) contended that writing skill requires intensive teaching and practice. This is because it is the highest and the most complex of all the language learning skills.

Implications for Employment and Productivity

The word 'employment' is a noun that means the act of employing or state of being employed, simply put, the idea of giving work to an employee by an employer. This employee is the one who is hired to provide services in an organization or a company. Productivity in this context has to do with ability and efficiency in production; whereas production means the act of producing something or one's ability in achieving a significant amount of result.

Now going by what have been discussed, education empowers one to achieve significant result; it makes one productive. If one can be adjudged as being capable of producing significant result, that is being productive, the person is capable of getting employment. This is because the essence of recruitment or employment in an establishment or organization is to have people that are capable of making the establishment move forward, thereby yielding positive results. Education is a good asset for employment and productivity. This is because it provides the necessary ingredients for employment and productivity.

The business of education in its entirety is tied around language. The Nigerian government reiterates the relevance of language in education in NPE (2004:10) by stating that... "every child shall learn the language of the immediately environment, and for the interest of national unity, it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba". And then for the smooth interactions with our neighbours, every Nigerian child should learn to speak French and, hence; French shall be our second official language and should be a compulsory subject in the primary and Junior Secondary Schools. Furthermore, the medium of instruction in primary schools should be the language of the immediate environment while English should progressively be used as a medium of instruction from fourth year in the secondary schools. We should recall that one of the goals of primary education according to the National Policy on Education is to inculcate in the learners permanent Literacy and Numeracy, and ability to communicate effectively. Literacy is anchored in reading, which is language, (Ogenyi 2008, and

Nnamani 2011). Numeracy has to do with numbers (mathematics) which are also manipulated in a language.

Language is fundamental to acquisition of education since every teaching and instruction in the schools is done in a language whether foreign or indigenous. For this reason, the mastery of language skills should be the business of any educational enterprise. Anybody that wants to excel and be productive in his chosen career must master language skills. Whenever we make reference to someone as being productive and fit for employment, what readily comes to our mind is that the person is highly knowledgeable in his chosen field. The truth is that behind the knowledge is the language which enhances instruction and understanding. The person must have listened effectively and efficiently to authorities in that field for him to be knowledgeable and productive. The skill of listening has to be imparted to students so that they will learn how to encode information in the long term memory for the purpose of reproduction if the need arises, (Offorma 2009). They need to know that comprehension is the essence of listening, for comprehension begets knowledge.

Speech is the core of oral communication. For any one to be proficient in speaking, the person must have been an effective listener. Students who listen acquire the right speech skills, (Offorma 2009). The art of speaking should be taught to learners so that they will master pronunciation, spelling and intonation and in turn be able to present their knowledge of a thing orally when the need arises. Take for instance, a medical doctor who has not mastered the speaking skills will not pass his viva (oral exam), and so most unlikely to effectively communicate with his patients, and as such will not be employed. He will not be productive in the hospital because he cannot effectively communicate orally with his patients and staff. Oral interview is part of the recruitment exercise that is undergone by a teacher before he or she could be employed to teach. Then one begins to wonder whether a teacher that has not mastered his intonation, spelling and pronunciation will be able to communicate his ideas effectively with his interviewers. In the class room also, instruction and teaching will elude students who have a teacher who cannot communicate effectively orally to his them. He will be misinterpreted and his teaching will leave nothing to be desired.

Reading cuts across every subjects ranging from sciences, arts, humanities etc. The records of man's breakthroughs in these various fields are stored in the books and reading is the only instrument for unraveling the information so stored. Anybody that does not know how to read will be ignorant and handicapped in terms of awareness, knowledge and experience. Reading eliminates illiteracy and broadens one's horizon. In education, it is the key that one uses to unlock treasures stored in the books. Bologun in Umo (1992) describes reading as an indispensable factor in modern life because it is one of the major avenues of communication. A student should be taught to learn to read and subsequently read to learn. He should be taught the associated reading skills like the skimming, scanning, surveying and studying. These skills will enhance the student's reading in order to understand other subjects so as to be gainfully employed and become productive equally. Hughes (1975) regards reading as a 'top skill' because it affects most of the children's learning in the school and the individual's progress in other subjects will depend considerably on his reading ability. A non-reader is handicapped and cannot be productive in any field in today's society.

The individual needs to be exposed to writing narratives, dialogues, descriptions etc. This is to instill in him the habit and opportunity of using the appropriate words, phrases and clauses to describe persons, events and situations and to express personal and individual thoughts and ideas. Writing skill consists of having something that is worth expressing and knowing how best to express it on paper. A secretary that can neither put up a memo nor record the proceedings of a meeting or typist who cannot easily take down dictations is not productive and therefore not fit for employment.

Conclusion

I conclude this write up by saying that education is very important to human development. It affords one the opportunity for employment and at the same time sustaining it by being productive. However one looks at it, language remains the bedrock of all education, for every education is

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education in language (foreign or local). This therefore implies that the knowledge of the language skills should be the business of anybody that wants to be employed and productive.

Recommendations

Since language is paramount to the acquisition of skills for employment and productivity:

1. Public enlightenment on the importance of language should be intensified.
2. Government should fund the study of language in Nigerian schools.
3. It is also good to mention that language teachers should be motivated
4. Parents should as well encourage their wards to take special interest in study of language.
5. Awards should be instituted by the governments, individuals and corporate organizations for students that excel in language subjects.

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