

VISION AND MISSION OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN SCHOOL SYSTEM IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper addresses the vision and mission of indigenous language (Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo) as a medium of instruction in Nigerian Schools in the 21st century. It defines the concept of vision and mission, the concept of language as a means through which society is unified and it, looks at the advantages accruable from the use of indigenous language as a means of instructions in our school system, problems associated with it, and proffers solutions to the problems of implementation of language policy.

Introduction

It is a well-known fact that Nigeria by nature is a multilingual nation, due to her linguistic and cultural diversities, which has resulted from the large number of languages being spoken by different tribes in the country today. Records have it that there are about 400 languages, which include the three major languages (Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo), and other minor languages.

Emenanjo (1990) states that "Nigerian languages are classified according to their mode of development, which include: developed, developing and underdeveloped. The three major languages, Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo as adopted in the National Policy (1981) are already developed because of its documented orthographies and long history of writing, which has facilitated its acceptance as national languages and language of educational system and national life".

The inclusion of these indigenous languages in our educational system as a medium of instruction is, to a large extent to enhance the child's development. It is not an exaggeration that children learn better when the instruction given to them is in their indigenous language/mother tongue (MT), language of immediate community (LIC). All thoughts, ideas and desires can easily be understood and expressed in their mother tongue than any other language to be introduced to them (Ubabakwe, 1979).

Nigeria for so long has depended on foreign language (English) as a lingua franca and a medium of instruction, which is not too healthy. Since we claim to be an independent nation, we should aim at being independent in language as well. We should aim at adopting an indigenous language as a national language and as a medium of instructions in schools in order to achieve the vision and mission of Language Policy as documented in the National policy of Education in 1977.

Some Nigerian students in the Colleges of Education and Universities are not interested in pursuing indigenous languages as a course of study. It is erroneously believed that indigenous language is out of place and out dated to be associated with at that level of Nigerian educational system. This belief however, fails to take cognizance of the fact that national development cannot take place without adequate consideration of national culture, which includes indigenous language/languages.

However, The Military Government of Nigeria in 1977 realized the importance of the use of indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in our educational system hence the emphasis on its use in the National policy.

In the light of the above, this paper will examine the vision and mission of indigenous language as a medium of instruction in the 21st century.

The Concept of Vision and Mission

A vision is an idea of what an individual, group of individuals or an organization or a nation desires to achieve in a particular area of endeavour within a particular time frame. Vision is about the future. It has to do with realizable goals for the improvement of a person, a group of persons, an organization or a nation. *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines vision as "The knowledge and imagination that are needed in planning for the future with clear purpose".

Mission as used in the theme above, applies to the objectives behind a chosen area of an endeavour, the means for achieving set goals and the ultimate performance of the beneficiaries. In

addition, it has to do with compelling instincts for the actualization of a duty. *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* sees it as "something that you feel you must do because it is your duty".

At this point, it is important to know that Educational Policy cannot be in place and expected without clear vision and mission. Indigenous language as a medium of instruction in schools is a high expectation.

The Concept of Language

Language is one of the most fundamental means of human communication and it is the primary subject of the study of linguistics. It affects every area of human endeavour because language provides the only medium of communication among people. It is what gives man his cultural identity and bearing.

Shorter (1993-96) says language is a means through which we experience the world. Thus, the dynamic, vital norms of life. Halliday (1973:49) views language as a social action, "language is considered first and foremost, a socio-cultural resource constituted by a range of possibilities, an open-ended set of behaviours that are available to the individual in his existence as a social man"

In addition, Edward Sapir (1884-1939) says that "Language is purely human and non-instinctive in its use, and that its primary and original function is the expression of ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols". This view is not different from that of Noam-Chomsky (1957:13) that "language is a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements" Therefore, it could be said that the possession of language is more than any other attribute that distinguishes humans from other animals.

In order to understand humanity, an attempt must be made at understanding the language, which makes man human. This probably explains the philosophy expressed in the myths and religions of many peoples and languages, which is the source of human life and power.

It is only by the act of learning language that a child becomes a human being. In the school system the use of indigenous language as a language of instruction in the classroom becomes very crucial since it is through education, means of man power training, upward social mobility, basis of mass participation in democracy and development, in its widest sense, of the full realization of human potentials and the use of resources for the benefit of all. At this point, it will become necessary to x-ray what is meant by language as a medium of instruction.

Perren (1967) says that "Language of instruction is a vernacular language through which students can learn other subjects...a language that provides access to technical and specialist literature and advanced studies". A language of instruction is one used as a teaching medium in a formal or non formal setting for the transmission of knowledge and skill aimed at developing the pupil's or student's mind and character'

Importance of Indigenous Language as a Medium of Instruction

The role of language used for instruction in the educational process is very important because the effectiveness of the training programme depends largely on whether effective communication has taken place between the teacher and the learner or not. Thus, for education to be effective, an appropriate-language medium (i.e. the language) must be selected through which knowledge, skills and values, necessary for the development of the learner in his environment can be acquired. The use of indigenous language is very vital to the success of any educational endeavour. Man's culture whether art, music, dance, attitude, belief, festivals, customs, games, etc., is expressed and transmitted through language.

According to Olagoke, in Ubabakwe (1979), "Language and culture are inseparable, and to separate a child from his language and his culture at an early stage of his school education is to make him have no regard for his culture". This situation might separate him from other members of his ethnic group, which may lead to an unhealthy attitude towards his language or culture. This is in line with what Robert G. Armstrong describes as the minimum of self respect which is necessary to the healthy functioning of a society".

In view of the diverse cultural and language differences of the nation, an attempt to unite the nation from its birth to the vision and mission of unifying the nation through a common indigenous

age that it became necessary to use it (Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo) as a means of instruction in our school system. "The policy stated that in addition to appreciating the importance of indigenous language in educational process and as a means of preserving the peoples, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the major languages other than his own mother tongue. Government has decided that the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba".

The pursuance of the vision and mission of uniting Nigeria through language has been the reason for which the National Institute for Nigerian languages was established in Aba as a means of actualizing the vision of the use of indigenous language as a medium of instruction in our educational system. The body is charged with the responsibility of preparing and standardizing orthographies, providing pronunciation guides, describing the structure of language at phonological, syntactic and semantic levels in order to facilitate the use of printed or written materials.

One other importance is that the effective use of indigenous language in school helps in developing the child into a well-informed individual who can socialize in his or any other language. They can speak and relate fluently especially in areas of riddles, jokes and folktales, which is the vision and mission of the policy. Instruction in a foreign language will deprive him of his right to his language, alienate his cultural heritage and introduce him to other languages maximally, which may not be so and beneficial in his day to day activities. The resultant effect of this is that children learn things taught them very easily; even if they do, they tend to forget what is in their heads, and at the end, they become, in the words of Olagoke (1979), tongue tied and ignorant.

On the part of the instructor, he will have lesser work to impact knowledge on students, as all instructions will, to an extent, be familiar to them since instruction with the use of indigenous language because they are well accustomed to it from their materials.

Another importance of indigenous language is that local resource persons who do not necessarily have gone through formal education but is well versed in their own language and culture can give talk on specific subjects from time to time. This can enable them get more acquainted with culture and tradition, thereby enhance their performance in examinations whether internal or external as in case with Ife as quoted by Fafunwa (1983) in Adesina et al (1983).

Apart from that fact, the use of indigenous language as medium of instruction helps to develop the learners as earlier mentioned. It enhances an easy development of the learner in the sense that it enables the individual to make innovations, which bring about development for the country in question.

In line with this, the United Nations has shown its concern on the slow development in nations where second language (Foreign language i.e. English) is the language of instruction in schools. In 1951, UNESCO was ordered to carry out an investigation on the medium of instruction in such nations. In its report entitled "Vernacular Language in Education", UNESCO discovered and said "In learning a foreign language, a child may find difficult in mastering the alien vocabulary as a language belongs to a wholly different culture, he is faced with added and multiplied difficulties"

If a foreign body like United Nations can identify such a problem with a country using a language that is strange to its citizenry and which has enforced it as the medium of instruction, then what else is left to be said? Nigeria as a nation needs to seriously rethink on the issue of the medium of instructions in schools.

Therefore, if learners are thought in the indigenous languages, the language will develop like that of other countries like China, France, etc. For instance, Fafunwa reports that "through the use of Yoruba language as a medium of instruction in the past, new ideas and concepts springs out. Certain courses or curriculum contents have been discovered of new registers, lexis and language structure which helped tremendous development of the Yoruba language". In order to achieve the vision and mission of the National Policy of Education on language policy, it is imperative to use indigenous language as a medium of instruction in our school system.

Problems

Despite the advantages accruable from the use of indigenous language as a medium of instruction in school system, there are some challenges or problems confronting it. They include the following:

1. Linguistic problems.
2. Societal problems.
3. Implementation problems
4. Students' problems
5. Lack of motivation.

1. Linguistic Problems

As language is the most powerful tool of learning, the child learns very little until he has mastered the language of instruction, because he comes to school with an expectant mind ready to accept information. But, the learner is confronted with linguistic confusion, most especially, from the foreign language (English), because prior to that time, he has been thinking in his mother tongue but tries to express himself in a foreign language which he hears from teachers and other people around him. Therefore, they become victims of language deprivation, they are unable to pin concept in the foreign language to the indigenous language.

2. Societal Factor

Societal attitude is negative. This is seen in the attitude of teachers, religious leaders, family members and others. Parents don't encourage their children to learn their mother tongue or indigenous languages because they feel this is largely due to inferiority complex and this explains why parents prefer to send their children to private schools where, if possible, more than one foreign language are learnt. The private schools' proprietors are eager to please parents for their patronage by laying more emphasis on foreign language thereby losing touch with language of culture and national identity.

The section of the language policy, which emphasizes on indigenous language as medium of instruction in schools is left out which tends to make the vision and mission of the policy unachieved.

3. Student Attitude

Learners studying indigenous languages most especially in higher schools more often than not express their lack of interest in the discipline because they always argue that it is unmarketable and not lucrative. The reason for this poor attitude is the fact that the use of indigenous language does not start from the early stage of the learner's educational life. The learner or child should not be given opportunity to form a bad opinion about a particular language as a medium of instruction.

4. Inadequate Implementation of the Language Policy

There is always a deep gulf between proposal and implementation in the developing nations, which Nigeria is one. Emenajo (1991) states that problems of implementation are more or less teething challenges in the use of indigenous languages in Nigerian Educational system. The multilingual nature of the Nigerian society brings about resentment by some speakers of other minor languages especially in the present democratic dispensation.

5. Lack of Motivation

Another problem associated with the use of indigenous languages is lack of motivation. There is no motivation from both the educational sector and the society for those who have graduated in the indigenous languages and have attempted to use them as languages of instruction in schools. The teachers are seen as archaic and not in tune with modern civilization.

Solutions/Recommendations

The following suggestions are put forward as regards the use of indigenous language as the medium of instruction in our school system.

1. The language of community/indigenous language should be used as medium of instruction as cited in language policy instead of foreign language (English, French, Chinese, etc.), which is strange to the learner's culture. The use of indigenous language should commence at the primary level and should be taught by competent instructors.
2. Enlightenment campaign that can positively change societal negative attitude towards the use of indigenous language in educational set up should be regularly carried out on radio,

- television, and market places by the government and other concerned agencies on local languages.
3. There should be proper funding for continuous up-keep of training and provision of relevant materials for indigenous language teachers in Colleges of Education so as to produce more qualitative teachers.
 4. There should be proper research in the standard phonological and phonetic symbols system of the identified languages (as with the case of famous languages of the world, e.g. French, Japanese, Chinese and others).
 5. Parents and guardians should de-emphasize interest in foreign languages such as German, French, and those that are not Nigerian official languages and emphasize on and inculcate the indigenous languages in their children and wards.

He who is ashamed of his indigenous language is ashamed of his culture and thereby has lost his identity.

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