

## THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN BRIDGING THE GAP IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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### Abstract

*The role of language in bridging the gap in Education in Nigeria cannot be over-emphasized. For any nation to achieve its development, it requires highly competitive teachers in various fields. These teachers must use language in order to communicate effectively with their students. In Nigerian educational system, the use of English language plays a prominent role in the creation and sustenance of the country. The transfer or exchange of ideas, thoughts, and feelings can be done through the use of language. This paper therefore tried to discuss the role of language education in bridging the gap in Education in Nigeria. The paper also discussed some problems of languages of how language has helped and gave instances on how language has helped to facilitate Educational development needs in Nigeria.*

Language is the vehicle of communication and expression used all human interactional situation; political, commerce, Education and culture (Abdulkarim, 2008). Language is a tool for communication and a means for creative expression and ability. Language Education gives the individual the skills to assimilate and synthesize information about events and life (Egeonu, 1999). This implies that for an individual to understand life events he needs language.

Language Education is the process of planning, developing and implementing the language arts curriculum in such a way that one is trained to acquire language skills that will facilitate his ability to cope with other life skills. Language is communication between the sender and the receiver. Both the sender and his receiver are literate as a result of language Education. English Language is the language of instruction in Education that must be properly used to enable students think properly in order to help in nation building.

English language is seen as the language that will bridge the gap in Education its effective use in imparting the necessary skills for national development. It will help in bridging the gap created by multilingualism. (Otagburu, 1999) stated that "the Nigeria national language dilemma makes the use of English as a bridge language fore -ethnic.

Being able to read and write is a function of language and through it is through language, literacy instruction is given. Therefore the curriculum for functional education is the one with comprehensive language art curriculum especially in Nigeria where English is used for teaching and learning. This is why the teaching of the use of English and communication skills for 1<sup>st</sup>-year undergraduates in higher institution where man-power skills are learnt.

Every human being in all field of human endeavours learn their field through language instruction. If there is any missing link along the line or during the training periods, this may be attributed to communication gap. Learners find it difficult to learn when the language of instruction does not match the level of the learners.

Language education should be taken very serious in Nigeria educational system to enable the nation meet the globalization needs.

Language specialists who have the oracy and literacy skills of learning, speaking, reading and writing can adequately articulate words in their correct forms and possess the linguistic and

communicative competence. They have enough vocabularies and the basic language register of different field of human endeavors. They equally possess the mastery of the language curriculum and the professional skills and methodology of teaching the language to student teachers and cope with other skills.

### **Language Policy in the National Policy in Education**

Considering the role language plays in the lives of her citizens in nation building, the Federal Government of Nigeria has made some language policies especially at the primary and secondary school level. At the primary school level, the language curriculum shall include:

- a. Language of the environment
- b. English language and
- c. French

The policy maintained that the language of instruction should be the language of the immediate environment, while English should be taught as a subject. At the senior primary (4-6) English language should be the language of instruction. At the secondary education level, English and French languages, languages of the immediate environment will be taught as first language ( $L_1$ ) and one major language (Hausa, Igbo, or Yoruba) to be taught as second language ( $L_2$ )

### **The Role of Language Education**

English language is the language of instruction in our education system. It has served as the only means to adequately co-ordinate teaching and learning at all levels of Nigerian educational system. Hence, English language is to be tested in all certificate examinations. It has become a pre-requisite for employment, admission into any higher institution, technological development and the language of the learned. All school subjects are taught in English language except the native language.

English language is equally seen as the language of national stability. The retention of English has eliminated the political tension that would have arisen in choosing one of the ethnic languages. Political problems like mutual suspicion and fear of domination would have resulted in choosing one of the ethnic languages. Nwachukwu, (2001) has this to say "if we remove English from our educational system and our polity (and replace it with an indigenous Nigerian language), we have cut the strongest string that holds the country together). In the words of Emonyionwu (2000) quoted in Osuafor (2002).

The choice of a national language has been a more political issue. Ethnic groups in Nigeria interpret the language as the country's lingua Franca as a way of conferring political domination on that particular group. They maintain that the best option is to live with English, notwithstanding its colonial reminiscence than to delve into "the explosive issue" of making a choice from one of the ethnic language in the country.

English language therefore is used as a natural language as a result of its neutrality. In another dimension, Ogu, (1992) reaffirmed the role of English language as:

The English language brought into one linguistic umbrella people of diverse language and ethnic group. Hence was a language that was based on one ethnic group or one geographical area. People found in it the unobtainable linguistic unity that they so much crave for. Its non-ethnic nature provided them with a means of peaceful co-existence and communication.

The role of English language is so pervading and total that one may begin to battle in his/her mind whether English is still a foreign language in Nigeria. This is because English language has been adopted and appropriated by Nigerians, used as the language of education and has been made to fill the roles reserved for the native language. Without language skills, it will be impossible for an

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instructor to transmit instructional knowledge and train certain skills .when instructions are understood because of acquisition of language, the learner is filled with joy and this motivates him/her to acquire both mechanical and technical manpower. The mastery assures an individual of being productive in other spheres of life. It equips an individual for a better tomorrow.

### **Role of Language Education in Bridging the Gap in Education**

According to Akindele and Adegbite(1999),there is no doubt that many of the country's numerous languages are at present ill-equipped to serve the role they are expected to perform in the educational system because they do not yet have a standard orthography. This implies that there is the need for our continued use of English language in Nigerian Educational system for a very long time. In any development in education skills is involved. Communicating is part of intellectual skill. Without intellectual skill the world of business and other economic activities will fall. In other to realize the nations dream of becoming "a united strong and self-reliant nation and a great and dynamic economy, courses were provided in the national policy of education for monotechnics, polytechnics, universities and teacher education. The dream will only come true through the use of appropriate medium of instruction- hence English language.

Gyuse ,(1991) carried out a research on science teachers in Jos. She concluded that:"Awareness should be created in teachers by teaching them communication skills as part of their method course..... The growing teacher is the communication teacher,be it in science or other school subjects".

Language education is a quintessence for national development any curriculum geared toward producing manpower needed for national development is functional education. Skills are inculcated through language. Language education trains one in literacy skills for life-long educationwithout language, it will be impossible for an instructor to transmit instructional knowledge and train skills. When instructions are understood because of acquisition language, the learners are filled with joy and this motivates him to acquire more knowledge for a better tomorrow.

Language is the engine of all human information dissemination, no doubt it serves a crucial role in all human life, its knowledge and how to effectively use it to achieve individual and national objective is a necessity.

### **Barriers to the Role of Language Education**

#### **A. The Situation Factor**

Nigeria is a multilingual society and this was as a result of British colonialism. The problem of multilingualism is such that the victims are to learn the language of their colonialists formally. It is clear that language is an embodiment of culture. Therefore, in trying to be acquainted with the language of the colonial masters, Nigerians ended up learning another people's culture to the detriment of their <sup>indigenous</sup> culture.

In addition, the problem of interference of the mother tongue is predominantly evident in the use of English. The reason for this is mainly found in the Efficiency of language acquired to the language learned. So since the level of language learning is low in Nigeria and learning English language is a matter of going to school, those who have limited access to schoolare prone to problems. As a result of the multilingual native of Nigeria, learners' language background differs. In a class, you can find learners from ten different language backgroundsdepending on the number of learners per class as regards their ethnic group. Njoku and Izuagba 2001 maintained that "this causes a lot of problems for language teachers no matter how efficient he is in teaching the target language

### **B. The Learner Factor**

In Nigeria English is learned in a natural way. Children learn in a confined environment becomes a problem for them because they must first process the linguistic information before understanding the actual communication. Supporting this view Oluwatosin (2006) in Osuafor (2001 P5) also stated thus;

If new concepts are taught to the child in the mother tongue, the only new thing the child will be learning is that new concept. If it is in English which is not the mother tongue, the child will be learning two things simultaneously, English and a new concept.

The absence of high verbal aptitude in a learner hinders language learning. If the learner attitude towards English language is positive then the language learning will be facilitated. In some areas, learners have negative attitude towards the learning of English, probably have been immersed into their native language, they find it necessary learning the English. And this affects negatively in education. Since English is the language of instruction.

### **C. The Teacher Factor**

Teachers are the transmitters of knowledge. They are known as role models and their personality influences the learners a lot. Poor and inadequate training adversely affects language learning. It is believed that one cannot give what he/she doesn't have.

Teacher's proficiency in the language he/she teaches is very important in learning the language. English language is poorly taught and learned in our schools by students in Nigeria especially at the primary school level which is the bedrock of all educational system. This poor foundation goes a long way in affecting them as they progress to other educational level. Poor teaching is sequel to poor learning and it is good input that brings about good output. Njoku and Izuagba (2001) affirm that:

"If the teacher is not competent in the target language, he ends up teaching the learner incorrect form. If he is not up to date in the methods of teaching English, he uses the wrong method or a method not suitable for the learners and the subject matter. For a language teacher to be effective, he must take into consideration the socio-economic and cultural setting in which he is teaching".

A situation where the least qualified and those who failed to gain admission for courses of their choice in the university later find themselves in the classroom as the last option. What happen to the learners who now find themselves in the hands of unprepared teachers? Worst still, these so-called teachers are given every subject to teachers irrespective of what they can offer to these children.

The poor linguistic performance of the Nigerian students at all levels of our educational system today has yielded the poor fruit of low manpower production in language education.

Lack of training language teachers to fill the gap for the English language manpower needs of our educational instructions at all level has been a general concern.

### **Conclusion**

For functional education in Nigeria language English should be taken seriously. There is no doubt that the development of sound English language can assist in bridging the gap in education in Nigeria. The language teachers is expected to be versatile in knowledge resourceful and discreet in his selection of both course content and teaching materials and verse in his application of methodologies and this will yield the expected result.

### **Recommendations**

In order to enhance good performance in English language in bridging the gap in education in Nigeria the following recommendations are made:

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1. Adequate measure should be taken from the grass root i.e. from the primary school level to ensure that learners communicate effectively in English language. When learners are given adequate training in English at their early school age, they will be better even in other subject later.
2. For a better performance and good result language teachers must be adequately retrained through workshops, seminars and the likes to keep them abreast with innovations in language teaching and learning.
3. Learners must be made to see the need for learning the language (English) though they already have a language for communication. Teachers and language teachers should motivate them to get them interested in learning to speak English. This can be done through;
  - a. Learning task should be made relevant to the learner's social experience and environmental background.
  - b. The learner should be shown the immediate use of the language within the classroom for him to see the pragmatic need for learning the language.
  - c. Learning should be through activities and practical practice.A skillful language teacher who is versatile in the language and its procedures in lesson delivery is the only one to guarantee good performance in the subject should be provided in school for a better.  
Good instructor aids such as latest and relevant textbook, electronic gadget, cassettes for teaching should be made available.  
Students should be encouraged to interact freely in English language by organizing quiz, debates and dramas.

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