

ACHIEVING RELATIVE PEACE FOR ENHANCEMENT AND INNOVATIONS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN NIGERIA: THE ROLES OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE

Cecilia Nwodo

Abstract

Absolute peace and unity have remained illusive to Nigeria since, before and after independence. This is as a result of conflicts emanating from inter ethnic competitions for the control of power and available resources, religious crises, boundary disputes, mistrust and other forms of civil unrest. Likewise, in our institutions of higher learning, conflicts also arise due to one unsatisfactory condition or another. This is because the schools or institutions are products of the society. A peaceful atmosphere is an essential ingredient for learning, researches and other innovations. This paper sought among other things to highlight the roles which the English language can play in achieving relative peace in our institutions of higher learning for a better academic exercise and performance.

Peace is necessary in every facet of human endeavour and organization. Every individual or organization desires peace for growth and development. It is disheartening to observe that since independence Nigeria has been bedeviled with internal conflicts and problems which had made the presence of peace in the country a mirage. Unemployment, poverty, economic and political fraud, terrorism, violent crimes and other civil disturbances have become the order of the day.

As has been mentioned earlier, development is greatly hampered by an atmosphere of conflict and strife. A nation that is not peaceful lacks development and progress. The education system is not left out as it has had its own fair share of the nation's problem. This is because what goes on in one area affects the other directly or indirectly. In other words, the education system is a victim of the conflict in the larger society. It is a well known fact that education is an instrument of change and development for an individual and the society, socially economically, politically and technologically.

The firm belief in the power of education as a veritable tool of achieving the national goals informs Nigeria's Government's huge investment in education annually. The Federal Government stated in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2013) that education shall continue to be highly rated in national development because education is the most important instrument of change; any fundamental change and social outlook of any society has to be preceded by an educational revolution.

Jimoh (2003) also affirms the importance of education in the life of an individual in his concept of education thus: "education is the activities and experiences put together to assist the all round development of the students as an individual and as a members of society. It is to help him to think clearly and independently in fields of knowledge and experiences outside his narrow specialization

and also to assist him to gain an understanding of people and of the society in which he lives.” In other words, education is an eye opener and a change agent. Education should in all, produce a human person not a terror. With education man will be able to access information directly, process it independently and use it for his own betterment and that of his society without being a nuisance.

It would be important to contemplate on the medium through which the entire education Process is transmitted. Considering the multilingual and multicultural nature of Nigeria, there is a need for a neutral language to be used in such formal situations as education. Thus the Federal Government in the National Policy on Education (NPE) (2013) stipulated that:

- i. The medium of instruction in the primary schools shall be the language of environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject.
- ii. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of the environment and French shall be taught as subjects.

In view of the above, this paper sought to highlight the role which English language as an important language in Nigeria can play in the achievement of peace for enhancement and innovations in higher education in Nigeria.

The Concept of Peace

Peace can be described as freedom from war or violence. It also means quiet or tranquility. Conflict could be physical, verbal or psychological. The World Book Encyclopedia (1971) defines peace as a state of being calm, quiet and being free of disturbance. A condition in which there is no war between nation, a state of friendliness or agreement among people etc.

Hornby, A.S (2012) saw peace as quietness, tranquility, mental calm, sincerity, freedom or cessation of war as well as freedom from civic disorder. Oderinde (1997) opined that peace is beyond lack of violence but includes all forms of injustice, inequality, hunger and poverty.

From the foregoing, definitions peace is simply the absence of war, cessation of hostility, a state of concord, harmony and tranquility. Put in another way, peace denotes absence of acrimony, presence of understanding, fellow feeling, love, consideration, security, accord, tolerance, spirit of oneness and brotherhood, forgiveness and selflessness.

Reasons for Breach of Peace

Unequal Distribution of Resources

Resources are usually distributed based on population. In Nigeria the national census, a statistical exercise through which we could ascertain the accurate number of citizens for even distribution of resources has always been unsuccessful and many times end in serious controversies in which protagonists pitched their stand along regional and ethnic divides. This results in inequitable distribution of resources and power at all levels.

More of this is the issue of quota system and federal character which have been introduced to cater for some disadvantaged areas but have not been properly managed. A lot of abnormalities are found as figures are manipulated and conditions exaggerated.

Unemployment

Most Nigerian youths are unemployed. They roam the streets in search of white collar job since such people cannot even find enough funds to start up a business. The result is usually frustration as they find no meaning in life. An idle mind is the devil's workshop is a popular saying and this dictum comes into manifestation as the jobless youths engage themselves in numerous crimes like robbery, kidnapping, prostitution, ritual killing, bombing, thuggery and what have you.

Poverty

This involves lack of basic needs of man which are needed to satisfy the basic necessities of life. Nigeria ranks the 26th poorest nation in the world; a condition in which income is insufficient to meet the subsistence needs despite the abundant national and human resources. When people cannot meet their needs, they easily get angry and react violently to any slightest provocation.

Broken Homes

When children are not well parented, they grow up to be terrors to the society. Children from broken homes lack love, care and training which make them see everyone they meet as an enemy. The family is a small unit of the socialization in the society, and what goes on in different families are injected into the larger society.

Religious Differences

This has a high potential for separating people from one another. Throughout history, this difference has been the basis of tension, animosity, hostility and even war. Nigeria has not been exempted from religious crisis which have claimed lives and resulted in destruction of property.

Ethnicity and Multilingualism

Nigeria has recorded incessant inter ethnic clashes in recent times. During such clashes, many deaths are recorded and properties destroyed. The education of students and pupils from such conflict zones are normally affected, as schools are burnt down and the lives of both students and staff are usually threatened. The multiplicity of languages in the country is also a factor in the breach of peace. This is because there is usually misunderstanding and mistrust when people do not communicate properly as a result of language barrier.

As has been mentioned earlier, the education system itself is a victim of the affected larger society. In recent times, there have been incidents of violence and riots in many Nigerian universities. Causes could be attributed to cultism, protest against hike in school fees, poor sanitary conditions, lack of social amenities and other learning facilities.

When one or more of these situations arises, students look for outlet by engaging in riots or disturbances which are unfavourable to academic environment as it does not enhance or encourage learning, innovations or researches.

On the part of the personnel, there are also many instances where leadership problems arise in the school. In some institutions the policy of the heads may not be appreciated by their academic colleagues. Problem usually erupt as some of their colleagues rather than offer constructive criticisms use destructive comments, thus creating unhealthy atmosphere for attainment of educational goals. In some institutions, staff and students are usually divided along ethnic lines in matters where academic ability and competence should be the main consideration such as in the appointment of Vice chancellors, Provosts, Rectors and presidents of students union. The result according to Nwanyanwu (1977) is that university dons and their students who would have set the pace for other Nigerians to follow on the part of national integration, national consciousness, justice and fairness to all, tolerance of, respect for the right of other citizens irrespective of their tribe or religion, now offer bad models of ethnic strife and rivalry.

Given the above situations, there is need to achieve and sustain peace culture for enhancement and innovations in our higher education through a unifying medium (English).

The Language Situation in Nigerian: An Overview

The language situation in Nigeria and the problems associated with it have become an old story which must be retold often and as long as they continue to exist. Emenanjo in Okafor (2005) describes the language situation in Nigeria to be as big and complex as the Nigerian nation when he estimated the number of indigenous languages in Nigeria to be about 400. Since other studies show that the number could be more than 400 one can imagine the magnitude of linguistic confusion that might emanate from this.

Until one common language is adopted in Nigeria absolute peace may not be achieved because there will continue to exist a wide communication gap between the various peoples, with each group seeing their language as more important thus creating a hindrance to any meaning development. The choice of an indigenous lingua franca would have been the best option as there has been a continuous demand for it but many unanswerable questions continue to rear their heads up concerning the option. Such questions include: which of the languages? What criteria should be used in the selection? How would the choice be received by the other language groups? The list is endless. It is just natural that no linguistics group would like to give up its own identity (language) in favour of another. In view of this many attempt made in the past to choose one out of the numerous indigenous languages had often been met with suspicion and stiff oppositions. Enahoro's view as sited in Yusuf (2005) explained this vividly:

all the languages of Nigeria have equal validity... equal lack of validity, before the law and under the constitution. No linguistic group has the right to impose his language on any linguistic group in the country... any attempt to impose any particular tribal language or languages on the country in fraught with grave danger for the peaceful development of the federation. Government should not confer on some Nigerian languages the potentiality of the

Achieving Relative Peace for Enhancement and Innovations in Higher Education in Nigeria: The Roles of English Language

instrument of domination over other Nigerian groups. Over one billion people speak Chinese and nearly one billion people speak Hindi, yet it has never been suggested that these two languages should be imposed on the rest of the world or that UNESCO should promote them as world languages in preference to English or Arabic.

This powerful and well-articulated view of Enahoro has expressed the view of many ethnic groups in Nigeria whose languages have been classified as minor in favour of the so-called major ones. It also sums up the controversies involved and the sensitive nature of language issues in Nigeria. History has provided many examples on how language differences led to conflicts, divisions, demand for separate government and even secession. Bamgbose (1992) also affirms this when he observes that language differences between individuals or groups keep people apart, perpetuate ethnic hostilities, weaken national loyalties and increase the danger of separatist sentiment. Worthy of mention about the language situation in Nigeria is the position of government; prior to 1979, Nigeria's sole official language was English with the promulgation of the 1979 constitution, however, the three major Nigerian languages; (Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba) were added to English as languages to be used in the national assembly with the provision that these Nigerian languages could only be used as official languages "when adequate arrangement have been made thereof". (Section 51). A parallel was also made in the state houses of assembly for the conduct of government business in English as well as "one or more other languages spoken in the state as the house may by resolution approve" (section 91).

Also the National Policy on Education (NPE 2013) stated that the medium of instruction to be adopted in the primary schools shall be the language of the environment in the first three years. During this period English shall be taught as a language. From the fourth year of the same level of education, the policy states that English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment shall be taught as a subject. (Sub-section 17).

Any right thinking individual would see that it is the vital role which English has been playing in all the facets of the country's economy that has given it its pride of place, otherwise the English language which was introduced in the country by the colonial masters more than 100 years ago would have died a natural death.

From the foregoing discussions, it is obvious that English language stands out as the only language that can help to bring the numerous ethnic groups together until such a time when a better alternative is found.

Achieving peace through English Language

The overall philosophy of Nigeria as state in the National Policy of Education shows that Nigerian government is aware of the need to foster unity and peaceful co-existence among the multi-ethnic and multi-religious groups bound together as a country. It reads:

1. to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible, indissoluble democratic and sovereign nation founded on the principles of freedom, equality and justice
2. promote inter-African solidarity and world peace through understanding.
3. Her philosophy of education is also based on

4. the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen
5. the full integration of the individual into the community
6. the provision of equal opportunities for all citizens of the country at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels both inside and outside school system. (NPE 2004 p 6).

Based on this philosophy, the national goals of education include among others the inculcation of national consciousness and national unity and the inculcation of right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and Nigerian society.

Towards these ends, the Federal Government had since introduced many education policies which are specially aimed at forging unity among Nigerian. -- The prominent ones include; the establishment of two unity secondary schools in each states to ensure that children from all states of the federation live and study together for the period of 6 years in order to promote friendship and understanding of each other

1. quota admission system not only in unity schools but also in public universities ensures that admission is spread through all states of the federation.
2. Educationally disadvantaged states policy is aimed at equalizing educational opportunities and fairness among all segments of the society.
3. The establishment of agencies like centre for peace and religious studies in universities.

It is obvious that education is a veritable instrument of reform, development and achievement of goals. A neutral language such as English is needed as a medium to realize the above goals and foster unity among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. English language has more than anything else united Nigerians to this day as it has enabled interactions between the various groups and between Nigerian and many other countries of the world.

Moreover, some linguists argued that in the Nigerian language situation, English is so neutral that it passes for no one's language and as a result, every form of discrimination or judgment based on ethnic or tribal lines is removed, paving way for meaning development to take place. English language has also united people especially in the urban areas of Nigeria where people from different linguistic background live together in harmony.

The continued use of English language in Nigeria as a common language will undoubtedly foster unity not just between the various ethnic groups but the world at large by extension. By so doing, a culture of peace will be gradually built. As can be deduced from the discussion made earlier under language situation in Nigeria, the only language which act as a unifying factor and which can solve the problems of multilingualism in Nigeria for now is English. It serves as a "bridge" language in the country. The role of English language in both inter and intra national communication has been acknowledged by some scholars. Quirk (1975) and Anyidoho (1977) as cited in Seweje (2005) described English as the most popular of international languages and the language of global power respectively.

Achieving Relative Peace for Enhancement and Innovations in Higher Education in Nigeria: The Roles of English Language

The primary function of any language is communication. The role of English language in information and communication technology cannot be over emphasized. With the growing trend in information and communication technology, English has acquired fresh currency in the world wide communication network. With the increasing world demand of the provision of ICT and internet facility, English apparently allows for international networking (Onuigbo and Eyisi 2009). The language of networking continues to be the front line linguistic code. The computer speaks other languages but English accounts for about 80% of the message in the information super high way. Awonusi (2013) in line with this pointed out that “today information on the web is over 80% in English” in order not to be excluded from the global family of the web linguistically, it becomes an imperative of inestimable value of international participation to communicate in English. By this act, our value and belief system can be shared with the global community.

If English language serves a common denominator in Nigerian situation and performs the functions stated above, there will be effective communication and mutual understanding. Not only would there be political stability but also our economy will be viable as there will be strong and healthy foreign relations. Above all our education system will be sound and productive.

Conclusion

Conflict and violence are counter-productive in any system or organization and could destroy indefinitely good and well-articulated programmes, processes and products of such programmes. Peace is therefore a basic necessity for enhancement and innovations in our higher education and in the country in general because under chaotic atmosphere people cannot think rationally. When people who work together in an institution or organization can interact and understand one another using a common medium, the sky will be their limit; they will see one another as brothers since there will be no suspicion of any kind rather mutual understanding will be enthroned.

The researcher therefore recommends that General Studies Education courses (GSE) should be intensified in the areas of English language. In some universities, where GSE English courses are studied only in the first two years, efforts should be made to extend the study to a four year programme.

Peace resource centre should be established and charged with responsibilities of promoting peace through publications, researches and seminars.

Poor performance in English language affects performance in other subjects areas since English is the medium of instruction in most areas of study the higher institution. Government should therefore give incentives to both teacher and students of English language and as well provide instructional materials and facilities that enhance the study of English language.

Recommendations

Having discussed the role of English language in achieving a peaceful atmosphere for enhancement and innovations in higher education in Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. The English language will remain for some time the common language in Nigeria rather than look for its replacement with an indigenous language which will generate more conflicts, language experts should seek for a way of improving its study in Nigeria so as to enhance mutual and international intelligibility.
2. In as much as government efforts should be commended more efforts is still required from the government to ensure that more facilities and infrastructures are adequately provided in the tertiary institutions.
3. Peace resource centres should be established and charged with the responsibilities of promoting peace culture through researches, publications and seminars.

References

- Awonusi, S. (2013): "English language as a tool for wider communication and Development in Nigeria" in Ozo- Mekuri Ndimele, Michael Nwala, Omeh Obasi Ngwoke and Joseph Onyema Ahaotu (ed). *Language; literature and literacy in a developing Nation*. M&J Grand Orbit Communication Ltd. Port Harcourt Nigerian.
- Bamgbose, A (1992): *Speaking in tongues: implication of multilingualism for language policy in Nigeria*. Kaduna. Wemilore press Ltd.
- Nwanywawu O.J (1997). *Education for socio-economic and political development in Nigeria*. Abeokuta visual resources.
- Oderinde, BB (1997). Pedagogy of violence: cardinal solutions to global survival through peace education. In M.O Odusina (ed) *educational challenges in Africa for 21st century: The road ahead. A Book of Readings p.225*.
- Okafor, A M (2005) "English language a veritable instrument for fostering peace in Nigeria" in *Journal of women in Colleges of education* Vol. 9 Lagos. Raytel Communication Ltd.
- Onuigbo S and Eyisi J (2009) *English language in Nigeria: Issues and Developments*. Calabar: Nigeria Paclen Publishers Ltd.
- Seweje, E.O.(2005). "English language as an interactive medium of promoting peace culture in Nigeria". *Journal of women in Colleges of education* vol.9. Raytel Communication Ltd.
- Yusuf, J.C (2005) "Language as a vehicle for promoting peace culture in Nigeria" *Journal of women in Colleges of Education* Vol 9. Lagos Raytel Communication Ltd.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria, (2013) *National Policy on Education*. Abuja: NERD Press

Achieving Relative Peace for Enhancement and Innovations in Higher Education in Nigeria: The Roles of English Language

Hornby A.S (2012) *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 8th Edition. London: Oxford University Press.

The world book encyclopedia (1997) *Peace*: Chicago Field Enterprises Educational co-operations.