

# LANGUAGE OF EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC REHABILITATION AND RELIANCE

## Abstract

*Asonibare Johnson Bimbo*

Olaofe (1997) reveals that it appears appropriate to assume that a high proficiency and effective maximization of the language of education in Nigeria can assure substantial developmental - oriented programmes. The crises generated in the realization of education through English are therefore mainly pedagogical instead of the innate incompetencies of the learners. This conviction does not disassociate English from colonialism and neocolonialism. If Nigeria is to move forward in the 21st Century, in information, communication and globally, it is expedient to accord English pedagogical consideration. Nigeria cannot relegate English to the background if indeed she wants to be attached to national and international affairs. Thus, Olaofe (1997), confirms that "the emphasis on the complementary roles of English and other indigenous Nigerian languages is not misplaced at all. Among the foreign languages Olaofe revealed are English and French; major Nigerian languages (Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo), semi major languages (Igala, Nupe etc.). Thorough application and development of language of education to enhance economic rehabilitation and reliance is the consideration in this paper.

## Introduction

There are several definitions to language, but this paper's main concern is not definitions. The complexity and intricacy of language also contributes to the inability to have a single definition. Quirk (1967) defines language as "human instrument of expression through sounds as released by the vocal chords". Tinuoye (1994), also observes it as "ubiquitous, human specific and unique... an instrument of thought or concept... (a) subtle activity that human beings engage in, using the vocal chords in interactive communication or when one talks to oneself.

Osisanwo (1994), also describes it in this manner: language is human vocal noise or the arbitrary graphic representation of noise, used systematically by members of a speech community for purpose of communication.

From the few definitions, it is observed that all these writers agree that language is strictly for humans and of great significance to man for the sake of communication. Frankly speaking, language is an artificial and conscious use of symbols or conventions of utterance to produce meanings.

The history of English Language in Nigeria dates back to the colonization of Africa, and specifically, Nigeria by Britain. In the first instance, contact happened consequent upon the slave trade. Later on, the missionaries arrived to propagate the gospel in English Language. To support this claim, Bamgbose (1971), reveals: of all the heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of colonial administration, probably none is more important than the English Language.

It is undoubtful that English Language plays a significant role in shaping the life of Nigerians. The language has indeed formed a tap root in the Nigeria speech community - the nation holds much of its existence and survival to English Language.

Adetugbo (1987: 65) reveals its significance "the English Language performs a multiplicity of function: it is the language of education, the language of national politics and government, banking, commerce, of mass media, of most written communication and a virile literature".

## Language of Education for Economic Rehabilitation and Reliance

Aje (1994), describes that "English Language is probably the world's most adventurous language, the most colonized and the most colonising. Although the language have their base in Britain, it has changed to an international language wherein many countries all over the world today, has it as its medium of education which is employed for economic rehabilitation and reliance. It is observed as the first language to many countries. Among such nations are America, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. It is a second language in Anglophone African countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Uganda, as well as India, Singapore and Malaysia. English Language has become the foreign language in countries such as China, Spain, Germany, France and Russia.

It is observed that in Nigeria of nowadays, English Language plays several significant roles. These functions can be classified under three main categories. It is employed for the preservation of several ethnic groups together as a nation. This is what some writers like Olasehinde (1990) call nationalism function; Iloka (1979) describes it as language of unity; Asonibare (2002) confirms language as a medium of unification, English inclusive. It is when there is unity, that a nation or its citizenry can enjoy economic rehabilitation and self-dependence. For Nigeria to remain as a single entity, it is mandatory to have a common instrument for communication within the several ethnic tribes. There is no doubt that English Language can solely perform the function of national language in Nigeria of nowadays. The existence of several tribes in Nigeria today calls for a resolve to utilize English for mutual understanding. This also becomes indispensable because where there is no mutual understanding, there cannot be economic rehabilitation and reliance. English Language is equally a weapon of solidarity in a country, providing unity in the existing diversity.

The observation of Olasehinde (2002), that despite the clamour for replacing English with any of our languages due to cultural revival, English still plays a significant role in the life of Nigerians, is indeed a fact.

She also observes it as an instrument for mutual understanding and unity among the several languages in Nigeria. She at the same time observes that even amongst the linguistically homogeneous groups, the educated in Nigeria continue to utilize English as the weapon of communication. Bamgbose (1971:103), also observes:

This is often the case even when the guests have a common language often than English. The feeling seems to be that a party can only be formal if the official language of the country is used. The many send-off parties, naming ceremonies, wedding receptions, house-warming parties which are a regular feature of life in the towns and at which English is invariably the medium of communication are a testimony to the role of English in the social life of educated Nigerians.

The observation of Bamgbose as stated here and many others are real to life and existence of man in his community.

The second role is that English is employed as the official language of the nation. Olasehinde (1990) call this nationalism role. It is observed that all official transactions carried out in government office, work and administration are all in English. All formal documents are all released in English both in the government and judiciary. English possesses this significant role in the nation as a medium of political integration which leads to economic rehabilitation and reliance. English has become so strong that it is superimposed on the existing local languages. To support the pre-eminence of English, the Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979: 1981, (Chapter V Part IB Section 51 and 53 respectively) confirms that English will continue to be the official language of operation pending when Nigerian languages are fully developed: The business of National Assembly shall be conducted in English and Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made.

Olasehinde (2002), affirms that it is the language of mass media, national newspapers, radio news, announcements, reports, talks, features, television films and dramas. It is observed that several literary works short stories, novels, poems, plays are all written in English, This is

also confirmed by Asonibare (2002). All these are for economic rehabilitation and reliance.

Although English Language has been accorded the language of education, it is ethical to agree with the view of Olaofe (1997), that if any Nigerian language should be accorded the same recognition like English language, it must be fully developed so as to assume the same status with it. Such development will enable Nigerian languages to develop to serve at all educational levels, develop in terms of demographic/numerical strength to the extent that it would compete favourably with English Language or replace it across national and international levels, functional and utility spectrum of the language, attitudinal, accessibility, pedagogical and material gains associated with English language.

Since the economic and political strength of a country is determined by the significance it attaches to language, Nigeria cannot afford to toy with her destiny. Therefore, to wield greater socio-economic and political standard so as to be able to relate nationally and internationally Nigeria has no option than to solely depend upon English language as the language of education.

It is pertinent that there must exist a relationship between language of education and development of the by-product of education. Olaofe (1997: 3 - 4) therefore suggests that language of education should be based on the assumption that the comprehensible input - output should be greatly developed to a stage which learners will be able to acquire, critically evaluate and maximize information, knowledge and skills obtained for self development and development of the entire country.

Nigeria has a national language policy contained in the Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education formulated in 1977. In the document which enunciated the consciousness of the importance of language in the education of the citizenry the following pronouncement was made in (National Policy on Education, 1977):

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the Government considers it to be in the best interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue.

The document goes on to state that Education at the pre-primary and the primary school levels will be principally secured on the following factors:

The medium of instruction will be principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community.

- ✓ The medium of instruction is initially the mother - tongue or the language of the immediate community, at a later stage English.
- ✓ The procedures for the realization of this programme will be from the commitment of Government to:
- ✓ Develop the orthography for many more Nigerian Languages, and produce textbooks in Nigerian languages.
- ✓ Set up a language centre as part of the educational service complex under the Federal Ministry of Education.

The policy remained unimplemented until it was revised in 1981. According to this revision, in the Junior Secondary School (ISS), English and two Nigerian languages are to be learnt by the pupils: It goes on to state that:

In selecting two Nigerian languages, students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages, Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba, subject to availability of teachers (Federal Republic of Nigeria: National Policy on Education).

Furthermore, the revised policy states that for the Senior Secondary, English and one Nigerian language should be offered.

The 1977 National policy was entrenched in the Federal Constitution of 1979 and Sections 51 and 91 referred to the application, the language policy to politics. Section 51 concerns the National Assembly:

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made there for.

Section 91 relates to the conduct of the affairs of the State House of Assembly:

The House of Assembly shall be conducted in English but the House may in addition to English conduct the business of the House in one or more other languages spoken in the state as the House may by resolution approve.

In short, the stand of the Government policy is that English is the National language in Nigeria and is to be used in political administration and for education purposes.

This writer agrees with the view of Ogu (1992: 93) that the 1981 revised Education Policy is aimed primarily to serve as a 'National Symbol'<sup>1</sup> because it introduced Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as possible national languages. Not that these are more important than other indigenous languages in social or political status. The deciding factor seems to have been the number of speakers of these three languages. If the aim of choosing three indigenous languages instead of one is based on the hope that as the languages develop side by side eventually one will be selected, then we had better think again. Can there really be equality between the languages of a big ethnic group and that of a small one? In the Nigerian situation the problem is confounded by our penchant for imbalances in almost every aspect of our lives. Nigeria is riddled with so much fears of ethnic political and economic domination that any balanced decision will be hard to come by. In this question we should study the experiences of a country like India and some East African countries who have tried to impose one indigenous language on a country of many languages.

This writer also affirms according to Ogu (1992: 94) that as long as Nigerians from the other language groups and other ethnic groups feel marginalized by the adoption of the three main languages of Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, so long will a lingua franca elude us and so long will English continue to gain dominance. The widespread agitation by these other language groups for a parallel development of all the Nigerian Languages, a task they know is physically impossible at least for the immediate future, is not helping matters either.

Theoretically, according to Jespersen (1954: 16) "all languages are efficient for purposes of communication within a particular culture and no language is to be regarded as more expressive than others". Every language can therefore become the national language; but as things stand in Nigeria none of the over 400 languages spoken here is likely to qualify as the national language. Already the English language as the lingua franca is going to be hard to replace. Those who want it replaced have not provided Nigerian people with reasons why any other language will not have the same difficulties English has.

Those linguists who agree with Jespersen that "as the language is so also is the nation" will have to realize that the statement is today linguistically indefensible and at best an exaggeration. Assuming that for the sake of argument, we concede the statement, Nigeria has no one language and no one culture, unless we talk of the Hausa nation, the Igbo nation and the Yoruba nation which is why Onuigbo (1987) points out that:

It has since become clear that this language (English) which used to be a taunting reminder of our colonial past has no immediate connection with the political and economic supremacy of the past. Gradually but significantly English is getting into every home. This gradual development is a response, to a change, a change over which nobody can exercise control, a change from

the strong village ties of the past to the demands of modernity.

English is no longer a foreign language to Nigeria. It has been adopted and appropriated by Nigerians and is used as the language of education and made to fulfill all the roles normally reserved for the mother-tongue.

The 1981 version of the *National Policy on Education (NPE)* states the following expectation from the government. To ensure "that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community in the pre-primary.

Whereas the medium of instruction .... is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage, English, "for the primary".

While "each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his mother tongue" i.e. Hausa, Ibo or Yoruba.

The national report of Federal Government/UNICEF confirms the role of English Language as a medium of instruction/communication. The report reveals that the programme of the nursery school was found to be broad and the range of the subjects offered was really wide. It focuses on English Language, Mathematics (Arithmetic), indigenous language, writing, reading, poems/rhymes, social studies and music/singing and elementary science/nature study. Six 30 - minutes periods are devoted to the teaching of English Language in a week. This the report confirms is the maximum periods for any subject. The local language is allocated two periods. This revelation shows that great premium is put on the learning of English rather than the local language. It would therefore appear that the local language teaching is devoted as much as possible, to the home.

It also affirms that the medium of communication in 93.2 percent of the schools is English. Just only 6.8 percent of the cases in the language of immediate community is used for instructional purposes. French is taught in 17 out of the 629 schools sampled. The distribution of most of these schools in Local Government Areas close to the boundary of the Republic of Benin, a Francophone neighbour and in metropolis of Lagos is not unexpected. It is necessary to point out that the policy of provisions of using language of the immediate environment for instructions is not strictly adhered to in nursery schools.

From our discussion and reality, English will probably remain as the main medium of instructions for a length of time in Nigeria, at least in tertiary institutions like Colleges of Education, Polytechnics, Monotechnics, Universities of Technology, Colleges of Technologies and the conventional Universities, where it equally functions as the language of science and technology. This gives a wider access to knowledge as a whole for economic rehabilitation and reliance. It also appears that undoubtedly, that English is the language of international communication wherein most scientific, technology, arts, social science papers among others are written. Adekunle (1976), affirms:

At the higher level of academic, technological and professional activities in any nation, especially in the developing countries, the most practical and realistic approach is to adopt a major world language, either English, German, French, Chinese or Russia. This is necessitated by the need to get in touch with the latest scientific and technological developments, for international exchange, programmes and technical co-operation.

English is equally used as the language of business. The more you receive instruction in English, through education, the more successful you are which will result in economic rehabilitation and reliance.

Olaofe (1997) also confirms that although it is seemingly correct that there are some Nigerian languages that may supersede English in terms of demographic and numerical strength of speakers nationally, but English no doubt excels any Nigerian language considering the total demographic and numerical strength of speakers internationally. That is, according to his

revelation, English is widespread in the world than any other language, including Nigeria. English is therefore observed from the functional perspective as more pronounced in the world's socio-economic, science and technological, cross-cultural, inter-ethnic perspective than any Nigerian languages to the extent that it is the promoter of education.

Olaofe (1997), again confirms that Language of Education is much more accessible than any Nigerian language. It is observable that it has more national and international accessibility than any other Nigerian languages through the massive print and electronic mass media, inter-continental telecommunication and computer technological systems and all other information. The development of English and its functional role will consequently result to economic rehabilitation and reliance of the citizens and the entire nation.

The third function of English through educating or passing instruction to the citizenry is external communication as identified by Olasehinde (2002). Adegbija (1994), equally identifies English language as a language of "world currency". That is, it is described as the window of the world in Nigeria. English language makes practicable for Nigeria to have a free exchange and interaction with the international community. This is as a result of the usage of English for education and it is among the living languages used in the whole world nowadays. English Language is required for access to at least one half of the world's scientific literature. It is intricately related with technological and economic developments and it is the major language wherein international assistance are negotiated. Quirk and Breenbauzan (1972: 58) describe the significant role of English as a medium of instruction and or lingua franca. They say:

About sixty percent of the world's radio broadcast and seventy percent of the world's mail are in English. The great manufacturing countries: Germany and Japan, use English as their principal advertising and sales medium, it is the language of automation and computer technology.

### **Conclusion**

English Language as a medium of Education, lingua franca from the foregoing plays a significant role in the economic rehabilitation and reliance (self-dependance) of a nation. It is also an international language which is very crucial for aviation, sports, commerce and several interactions, diplomacy and creativity at the international level which can restore the battered economy and dented image of Nigeria. Confirming this important function of English Language, Adegbija (1994: 220) affirms that

The present international status of the English Language is both self evident and incontrovertible. Many other languages in the world such as Hausa, Yoruba, Chinese, Russian, Spanish, German, French, Portuguese, Swahili etc. perform some international roles, but none of these languages is comparable to English in some of international calibre, status and prestige.

Consequent upon these enumerated functions of English Language to Nigeria both intra-nationally and internationally, there is great recognition accorded to the language. It should be emphasized that greater premium is placed on the language at all levels in the country. Olasehinde (1990) says that although it is discovered that it is no longer mandatory to pass English Language so as to obtain the West African School Certificate (WASC), it is still mandatory to offer it as a subject at the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (SSCE). Success in the language determines the decent employment for economic rehabilitation and reliance. Admission to post primary and post-secondary institutions, including Colleges of Technology, Polytechnics, Monotechnics, Colleges of Education among others is dependent on ones' performance in English. Apart from this, Nigerians are expected to acquire proficiency in the usage of the language so that there could be intelligibility and mutuality. It equally assists the learners to have a thorough grasp of other subjects and on graduation it enhances a decent job anywhere in the world for economic rehabilitation and reliance.

In summary, in Nigeria of nowadays, English Language plays political, economic,

educational and inter - ethnic dominant roles. Therefore, it could be stressed that English Language has come to play indispensable roles in Nigeria. Although it looks like the present dominant roles may fizzle out in the nearest future, it will continue to play this dominant roles for long.

From this paper, it is also seemingly sensible to conclude that development should be the ultimate priority of all educational programmes. Despite the fact that education is not the only medium for development (among others include good leadership, proper utilization of human and natural resources) but it is definitely right that education is the major instrument. There should therefore be a re-organization of our educational programmes to the extent that they would inform not misinform. And more also, they should no longer be designed for merely accumulation, regurgitation and recycling of overworked facts for certificate purposes. Therefore, for the full development of the society, language of education should be beyond the superficial level of facts accumulation. In effect, for language of education or the educational system to attain greater heights, it must not only reform, but rather transform (the beneficiaries of the education and the entire society they reside in — this results into economic rehabilitation and reliance (social and political inclusive). Language of education that will transform should therefore begin right from the nursery to the university level. Language of education should be devoted very much on the mastery of language for high intellectual thinking activities — creativity, innovation, renovation among others which will enhance economic rehabilitation and reliance rather than just depending on mastery of the structures of the language of education alone.

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