

LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR THE EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE U.B.E. PROGRAMME: A CASE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Ideas, interest and occupations of many in Nigeria, have reference to the world in which English is the chief medium of communication. Ideas, interest and occupation expressed in language rule the world; the world and ideas are acquired through language in education. The primary concern of every nation, Nigeria inclusive in this modern age is how to eradicate ignorance completely through literacy. This explains why we need to equip our children and make them literate by giving them a sound language education that will equip them to become effective agents of change that will lead to the development of our country. This paper examines the national language policy on education (NPE) at the primary level. It posits the prospects for such a policy in relation to the successful implementation of the UBE programme. The summary, conclusion and recommendation that would enhance the manifestation of an effective education in the millennium is also suggested.

Introduction

The government perceives primary education as the foundation on which other levels of education are built. This view describes primary education as the key to the success or failure of the whole system. In view of this, the government in the National Policy on Education (NPE) states that among the general objectives of primary education is:

The inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and the ability to communicate effectively (Section 3, paragraph 14);

The Formal School Education

Awoniyi (1978) defines formal school education as 'the systematic or organized schooling in planned institutions of learning at whatever levels, (quoted in Umukoro, 1999). This definition indicates that the formal school education unlike the informal one is not only systematic but also planned. This explains why we have various levels i.e. the primer or kindergarten level, (below 6 years), the primary level (6 - 11 years plus), junior secondary school level (12 - 14 years) and the senior secondary level (15 - 17 years plus) all other things being equal.

At the age of 17 years, the child is physically and mentally developed enough to ascend the ladder of education to tertiary institution. The National Policy on Education (henceforth NPE 1981 the revised edition) gave the above grading for formal education and named it, the 6-3-3-4 system. The focus of this paper however is the early primary education.

The National Language Policy At The Formal School Education

The language used as a medium of passing knowledge and information to the learner in formal school education vary from lower to higher levels. The language of instruction at the pre-primary and the early years of the primary education is the mother tongue (MT) or the language of the immediate community (LIC).

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1981:3.4) stipulates that "government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the MT or the LIC and at a later stage English". Still emphasizing the importance of native language to formal school education, the NPE further recommends in Section 1.8 that:

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the pupils' culture, the government considered it to be

in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own MT - Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

From the above statement, the recommended language used as a medium of instruction in formal school education is initially the MT or ETC and later, the English language, so that 'every Nigerian will eventually become a multi-linguist or at least, a tri-linguist' (Agheyisi, 1986).

Between 1981 and today, the National language Policy on Education has been a focus of a number of studies by linguists and educationists. Irrespective of government's 'sound intention' in relation to the development of indigenous languages in the country, progress has been highly limited. This of course is attributed to a lot of factors.

English Language Or Mother Tongue/Language of Immediate Community (MT/L1C) In This Millennium

The decision to make an indigenous language for formal school education or a national language in Nigeria of this millennium was more a decision of intention than of fulfillment. Obviously, the choice between English and any of these indigenous languages was not a choice between languages of equal status in the modern context. The decision implied that our MT/LIC was potentially capable of becoming a formal language for education and a national language in the fullest sense, not that it already could fulfill its new role in every sector of educational and national activity.

Maleene (1980) was quoted in 'The Nigerian Education Forum' (1987): 'We do not support reforms which prescribe the use of African languages in some classes and up to a certain level, beyond which foreign languages would keep their privilege. Such a limitation can be arbitrary and implies that we develop, promote or revolutionize our languages only to a certain extent¹. The implication of the statement above, is that Nigerian languages are placed in a position of ineffective competition with English since they are allowed a medium function in the first half of primary education and left out of the rest of the education system. This irrational utilization of our indigenous languages in our education system or process has rendered the Nigerian bilingual education extremely subtractive.

Agbo (1998:7) reiterates the further back-up of the national language policy by the then Minister of Education, Prof. A. B. Fafunwa in 1990 when the Minister said that the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction through primary school level should be with immediate effect. However, this policy statement has since then remained at the paper declaration level. Its translation into functional school practice is yet to be feasible. For instance, the practice of public and private schools in the country gives rise to a haphazard implementation of the policy. While the public primary schools haphazardly implement the policy, the private schools start off their pupils with English from the first day of school life. Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa languages are taught as one of the schools' subjects. For some of the private schools still, the assessment of Nigerian languages is not considered as one of the core subjects that is counted in their overall assessment.

Some selected schools were observed within the months of June and July, 2002, in Sabon-gari Local Government Area of Zaria in Kaduna State, The objective of the survey was to:

a. Study the implementation of the NPE on language at the lower primary level of education.

b. It was equally aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the implementation.

Ten (10) schools were visited in all. Five (5) of the schools were private schools and the equivalent number were public schools. One hundred and thirty teachers were seen altogether. This number include student teachers on leaching practice exercise. The respective teachers taught either the same or different subjects to the same or different classes. All classes observed were primary one to three. Below is the result of the observation presented in tabular form.

Table \: Result Of Schools On Implementation Of NPE On Language At The Lower Primary Education

Name of School	Total Percentage of Teachers	Total Percentage of Teachers Seen	Percentage of Teachers that Instructed Subjects other -than Hausa with LIC	Percentage of Teachers that Instructed in English
2-C-S	15	100	0	100
Therbow School	20	100	0	100
1 st Baptist Sch,	5	100	0	100
Vintel Nur.P.Sch.	10	100	0	100
Williams Sch.	15	100	0	100
Ja'afaru L.E.A.	25	100	60	40
Aminu	26	100	43	17
Ntsugugi	16	100	63	37
Gaskiya	8	100	75	25
Magume	8	100	100	0

Discussion and Analysis Of Data

The mother tongue educational policy is the process of education in which the local language (the MT or the LIC) is used as a medium of teaching all the subjects except the English language or any other language as a subject in the specified classes. The result tabulated above shows that all the private schools instructed their learners in English right from the start of their educational pursuit. In the public schools the story is different. While a majority of the teachers seem to implement the policy, others do not. This is because some of the teachers are non-Hausa speakers. That is, they belong to the other language speaking groups. While Ja'afaru L.E.A. had 15 (60%) out of the 26 (100%) teachers observed making an attempt at implementing the policy, 5 i.e. 40% of the teachers who were either Yoruba or Igbo taught the learners straight in English. Aminu L.E.A had 12 (43%) of the teachers taught in Hausa while 14(57%) out of the 28 teachers observed taught in English. At Ntsugugi, majority of the teachers, 10(63%) out of the 16 teachers observed taught in Hausa. All the teachers observed in Magume L.E.A. School, that is 8 (100%) taught in Hausa. In Gaskiya L.E.A., 75% (6) of the teachers were making effort at implementing the NPE on language education.

However, it should be mentioned that even the attempt at implementation was haphazardly done because the teachers were simply trying to translate the content of the subject being taught from English language to Hausa language. This is not surprising since the teaching materials are available in the English language. In other words, these contents are not yet written in our indigenous languages. The MT/LIC instruction was further hindered by the fact that most of the learners are not Hausa speakers. This is because, Zaria is an urban city, a microcosm of the heterogeneous setting of our linguistic environment.

It is a factual statement that there is no qualitative primary education without qualitative language of education. Olaofe I. A. (2000) notes that it is not accidental that the developed nations of the world have the most sophisticated and developed languages. That the seriousness put into the development of languages such as Norwegian, Hebrew, Korean, Japanese, American English and the languages of the 'Asian Tigers' no doubt, contribute immensely to the development of the nations (Emenanjo, (1996), quoted in Olaofe, 2000).

From the survey of the implementation of the NPE on language at the lower primary level, it is obvious that Nigeria has not given the development of languages of education, may it be English, Hausa, Yoruba, main and minority languages the priority it deserves. There is still a lot of policy formulation largely not backed up by rigorous language policy implementation efforts.

Of course, effective primary education development solely depends on effective language policy implementation. The haphazard nature of the implementation of NPE on language has given way to creation of double standard in performance in our primary schools. The foundation handling is very important and would undoubtedly affect the general and final performance at the primary level. The private

schools have left a land mark yet to be caught up with by public schools. The reason is that they use English language; a language that is more effective, more functional and prestigious. English is an intra and international language,

The Place Of English Language In Nigeria

English was introduced into Nigeria by the first missionaries who arrived at Badagry in 1842. Tomori (1981:59) observed that people were motivated to learn English because of the desire to speak the type of language spoken by the white men, the desire to read and write in English especially the Bible and remotely the desire to get employment with the colonial masters.

At independence in 1960, the Nigerian constitution entrenched English language as the language of parliament i.e. the official language of the nation, the language of administration, the law court, the mass media and business transaction. In fact most of our private and official interactions are done in English language. To crown it all, it is the language of education and prestigious employment. Adekunle (1985:4) has captured the place of English language in Nigerian in his reference: "English is referred to as a second language, official language, a lingua franca, a world language, a foreign language, national language, language of high education, language of inter-ethnic communication".

In fact, there is no doubt that English language in Nigeria has so many roles that vary from group to group, individual to individual and from/social context to social context.

Adekunle (1985) further states that: "The English language acts mainly as a vehicle for that aspect of contemporary Nigerian culture which is now reflected in our history, educational system, administrative set-up, our industrial and technology efforts, our political experiments, our international alignment preference, our pattern of dressing and, to a large extent, in the attitude of Nigerian elite and most likely in the way these leaders of Nigerian community structured reality — (quoted in Bidliya, 1999).

Therefore to get rid of English, you have to renounce these essential contents and outstanding features of contemporary Nigerian life. Thus, to set an indigenous language to take over the intra and international commitment roles of English effectively will not be feasible in the nearest future. A major hindrance to achieving this dream in the nearest future is also egocentrism of our linguistic

attachment, (i.e. which of our indigenous languages will be readily accepted as our national language without political unrest).

Considering the place of English language to Nigerians, it is a reality that the NPE on language will be causing a disequilibrium to the young learners. The solid foundation they need to be able to move up strictly in their future educational pursuit is shaken. Evidence abound of the performance of graduates of private schools is compared with those from public schools. The disparity in performance is very obvious.

Afolayan (1977:14) made a similar observation when he said: the sociological of acceptance English in Nigerian education has been nearly complete, more so probably than in any other aspect of national life. Thus, formal education is taken to be synonymous with knowledge of English. Whoever has not assessed to English has no access to formal education.

Summary And Conclusion

From the exposition above, it is very clear that the implementation of Nigerian language policy on education has been ineffective. Reasons are because of the heterogeneity of the nation itself and other political and social problems not discussed. In addition, the functional nature of English as a language of intra and international communication has affected the attitude of Nigerian elites toward the acceptance of the policy generally. To the majority of educated Nigerians today, formal education is taken to be synonymous with competence in English language. Many privileged individuals, companies and even state and federal governments have sent wards outside the country in search of knowledge, wisdom and expositions that would eradicate ignorance through literacy. This laudable move cannot be achieved immediately through our language policy. Our indigenous languages are capable of becoming our formal language of education and a national language given time, but they are not yet ready to fulfill the desired role in education and other national activity.

Recommendations

The issue of creating an indigenous national language in Nigeria has penetrated into the very heart of Nigerian politics. This has constituted a pressing current issue which has stirred up deep regional, communal and cultural divisions. The ramification of language problem has reached unto the inmost of the country in literature, the arts, journalism, education and public life. Given the heterogeneity of the Nigerian nation, the diversity and unpatriotic attitude of Nigerians generally, the first step in the right direction towards fulfilling the indigenous language policy is to patriotically resolve and agree on a common indigenous and national language. This should be one of the Nigerian languages, not two or three. This step will definitely bring down the cost of setting up other machineries that would help-make for the effective achievement of this dream.

Having agreed on one language, all study material especially at the lower primary should be reduced to the language. This will control the method of trying to translate study materials from English language to mother tongue or language of immediate community by teachers who lack the skills to do this effectively. This is necessary as there is no one to one representation in two languages. The teachers and the learners are to operate directly with the learning/teaching materials. This step would definitely make the policy more meaningful.

In addition, there should be enough study materials developed in different fields of study, be it science, arts, or the humanities in the chosen indigenous language. This will boost the image of our indigenous language in and outside the country. This is necessary since education is for all and not just for Nigerians.

Besides, the image of a chosen language should be promoted at home and abroad. This will equally help to raise the status of the language towards recognition.

For the above recommendations to be practicable, there is need for trained personnel in the indigenous language accepted; for this reason, concerted efforts must be made by both the government and corporate organizations to enable the training of teachers in Nigerian languages. This could be done through organization of workshops, conferences, seminars, short-term courses and special in-service training in Nigerian languages.

Finally, popular is the saying that Rome was not built in a day. Therefore, we should aim at developing our indigenous languages presently, by studying them as one of the core courses of study in schools. At the primary school level the three Nigerian languages (Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa) should be studied. At the secondary school level, the chosen indigenous national language could be made compulsory to all students. Study materials should be made available in the language and concerted effort should also be made to improve the image of the chosen language at home and abroad. The intention to make it a language of instruction at the lower primary level should hold on until the language has gained general acceptance by all Nigerians. This consideration the writer believes will make for a more effective implementation of UBE programme in preparation for the challenges ahead.

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