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CORE COMPETENCIES IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND VALUE RE-ORIENTATION FOR DEVELOPMENT AND CHANGE

By

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Abstract

Language teaching and learning has an important part to play as an interdisciplinary approach to a positive culture of value re-orientation and change. Whilst language learning by itself does not necessarily reduce or remove prejudices, when accompanied by other well-conceived educational experiences, it can be a powerful contributor to a culture of human rights, equity, value re-orientation and change in our national life. Based on this, this theoretical paper examines the core competencies in language education, democratic citizenship, peace education, language rights and value re-orientation for development and change. It finally made suggestions that language education remains a viable tool for inculcating core national values that could lead to value re-orientation in our society that has today been

eroded by social vices that have almost left Nigerian citizens appear unpatriotic and democratically bereaved of proper language and value principles.

Keywords: Competencies, re-orientation, citizenship, prejudice and value principles

Introduction

Language is one of the most important social and cultural marker of identify and Nigeria just like the international community is multilingual. Although relations between language communities can be a source of tension within and between nations, the achievement of equality of citizenship in multilingual communities is a demonstration of the possibility of success of democracy and may be considered exemplary of the very essence of democracy. Although language is sometimes perceived as a marker of difference, the linguistic capacities of human beings are a unifying feature, distinguishing humans from other species and bringing with them an automatic entitlement to human rights which ultimately leads to value re-orientation.

The problems of man's development and growth become increasingly complex and intricate when the individual is not monolingual and monocultural (Afolayan 1979). The failure of any development programme becomes greater and more dismal when the individual has got to operate within a multicultural and multilingual community. In such circumstances, the individual operates, at least, at two linguistic levels which are very essential for the growth and development of not only the individual but the community and the nation at large.

Finally, whilst language learning by itself does not necessarily reduce or remove prejudice, when accompanied by other well-conceived educational experiences, it can be a powerful contributor to a culture of human rights, equity and value re-orientation.

Language Education

Language education means teaching and learning a language. It also includes the efforts made by a learner to improve his/her native language. It is also a branch of applied linguistics (Wikipedia).

Language education can help learners acquire an understanding of the often, subtle, mechanisms of tension in a multicultural and multilingual

Nigeria. Although the country, Nigeria has consequently spent a considerable proportion of her national economy on education, the desired growth and development has not materialized because the educational programme of the country has never been properly development-oriented (Afolayan 1979 in Fafunwa 1989). This lack of proper orientation has been due largely to the wrong utilization of languages in Nigeria for educational purposes, particularly the neglect of indigenous Nigerian languages and a wrong and only emphasis on English Language.

Language is so uniquely a human property that the proper development of any individual human being, or even in community of such individuals, cannot be effected without the proper utilization of it. This is because language is intricately, and inevitably involved in with the distinctively and uniquely human properties and functions man possesses and performs respectively.

Language is the instrument of society. Man is acculturated into a given society through language. He gets to identify himself and what is his contrast with others and what are others through the instrumentality of language since education is indispensable to such growth and development of the individual or the community and since language is the only road to acquiring such education in a meaningful way, it follows that language planning is the most important activity needed for the development of the individual and the nation. The failure to have the proper rate of growth and development for the Nigerian individual citizens as well as the community at large is, therefore, attributable to either the neglect of proper language education and planning or the inadequacy and or the ineffectiveness of the execution of the planning that has been attempted.

The Nature of Democratic Citizenship

Democratic citizenship has been described as a “polysemous and contested concept”. At the core, however citizenship is always a matter of belonging to a community, which entails politics and rights: citizenship always has a political dimension, because citizens have the capacity to determine the law (Audigier, 1998). In Nigeria as in Europe, citizenship is based on respect for justice, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

Citizens belong to communities, defined as groupings of people who recognize that they have something in common. What unites them may simply be an acceptance of the legitimacy of the state within which they live. The

rationale has been that active participation in governance is an essential condition "...both for effective functioning of democratic societies and for the well-being of the individual" (McCowan, 2009). In Nigeria, states have the obligation to respect the rights of all those who come under their jurisdiction. This means that those who come from other states, in theory, living within a state can exercise citizenship. That means that they can participate in the economic, social and political life of their community.

Thus, although citizenship is often closely associated with nationality, it is a free standing and independent concept. The nation is only one possible (imagined) community within which citizenship is exercised (Anderson, 1991). Citizenship is most commonly experienced at the local levels and it exists at supranational levels such as Europe. Recent discussions on citizenship posit a new term "world citizenship" or "global citizenship" reflecting the new context of the communication age (Cates, 1995, Audigier, 1999).

Diverse language communities can live together harmoniously within a state or a wider political entity. However different language communities may not have equal powers. Citizenship stresses the nation of equal respect and dignity even where there is inequality of power. Departing from the premise that there are universal human relations and obligations beyond any particular local or national connections, global citizenship advocates empathy and solidarity with all peoples, along with rights and responsibilities that are valid across national boundaries (McCowan, 2009).

Languages are particularly important component of our rich cultural and linguistic heritage. The diversity of language contributes to the richness of Nigeria's culture, though a bit of constraint to our unity, the preservation and development depend on common understandings of citizenship.

And in terms of education for democratic citizenship:

It is also acknowledged that global citizenship is intertwined with local, regional and national forms of citizenship, all of which are mutually reinforcing (Peterson, 2016).

This expresses what is sometimes referred to as 'political literacy'. Citizens need to know about institutions, problems and practices of a democracy and require skills and values which enable them to be effective and exercise influence locally, regionally and nationally (Crick, 1998).

Core Competencies and Skills for Democratic Citizenship

The Council of Europe's project on Education for Democratic citizenship produced a statement of core competencies:

Thus the core competencies associated with democratic citizenship are those called for by the construction of a free and autonomous person, aware of his rights and duties in a society where the power to establish the law, i.e. the rules of community life which define the framework in which the freedom of each is exercised and where the appointment and control of the people who exercise this power are under the supervision of all the citizens (Audigier, 1998).

Three broad categories are distinguished: cognitive competencies; and effective competencies and those connected with the choice of values; and those connected with action. They are described as follows:

Cognitive Competencies

- ❖ Competencies of a legal and political nature i.e. knowledge concerning the rules of collective life.
- ❖ Knowledge of the present world including a historical dimension and a cultural dimension.
- ❖ Competencies of a procedural nature; the ability to speak and argue, connected with the debate and the ability to reflect.
- ❖ Knowledge of the principles and values of human rights and democratic citizenship.

Affective Competencies and Choice of Values

Citizenship cannot be reduced to a catalogue of rights and duties, it is also belonging to a group or to groups. It thus requires a personal and collective affective dimension.

Capacities for action, sometimes known as social competencies

- The capacity to live with others, to co-operate, to construct and implement joint project, to take on responsibilities.

- The capacity to resolve conflicts in accordance with the principles of democratic law
- The capacity to take part in public debate, to argue and choose in a real-life situation.

The greatest gain of language in citizenship education is that all these competencies and skills are developed through the study of languages. Indeed, many of them are listed in the common framework of reference for languages.

Contributions of Language to Democratic Citizenship Education

Language teaching is potentially a most important site of learning for democratic citizenship. Even where citizenship education is a formal curriculum requirement which is increasingly so, the relative small amount of time allotted and the prestige of more traditional, examined disciplines tends to minimize its impact. Language teaching, on the other hand, requires and is given substantial curriculum time and benefits from the prestige of an established university discipline. Moreover, the content of language teaching has for long been flexible, including literature, cultural awareness, media studies and debates of topical issues. Whereas not all teachers of languages are aware of their potential contribution to education for citizenship, including human rights education, many often inspired by participation in Nigerian projects and meetings, have pioneered citizenship education through language teaching.

In many educational systems, the programme of study for languages is determined more by process and linguistic concerns than by a specific content. There is therefore potentially scope within the languages curriculum to cover three of the cognitive competencies for citizenship which are explicitly or implicitly included in the common European Language framework.

The second area of contribution of languages to citizenship is that of the pedagogy associated with language learning since the development of communicative methods is in itself democratic. The skills developed in language classes are directly transferable to citizenship education.

The notions of multicultural citizenship, global citizenship, post-national citizenship and radical democratic citizenship are among these new conceptions of citizenship in this post-modern era (Cemlyn & Ryder, 2016; McCowan, 2009):

Teachers will be concerned not just with linguistic achievements but with communicative competence as an end in itself skills (savoir faire) such as ability to listen, to reformulate the words of another the better to understand them, put a different point of view, produce a valid argument, conceding are all life skills (savoir etre) with applicability elsewhere in school and in the outside world (Tardieu, 1999).

In the communicative language classroom learners are often required to speak and discuss in pairs and groups, having freedom to express their own opinions and develop ideas and new ways of thinking. This contribution to the overall project of democratic citizenship can also be recognized and developed. In particular it can help develop ‘competencies’ of a procedural nature’ what is more, since the topics chosen may involve personal choices and require a consideration of values, there is much scope for work on the effective dimension of citizenship. Furthermore, since discussion and debate require working with others, taking part in public discourse and working to resolve conflicts, language teaching can contribute substantially to capacities for action and social competencies. Language teachers will recognize the assertion that:

Argumentation and debate call for knowledge of the subject under discussion, the capacity to listen to the other and acknowledgement of his point of view, as well as the application of these capacities to the precise situation in which the people find themselves (Audigier, 1998).

A third and equally important dimension of language teaching is the consideration of culture. Studying other cultures and one’s own culture enables learners to descend from their own world-view, accept relativities and develop multiple identities. To acquire the ability to communicate in a new language is the first step to identifying with other speakers of that language community. This linkage between language education and citizenship foregrounds the role of educational institutions in assigning value to linguistic and non-linguistic

resources as well as in regulating access to them. (Martin-Jones, 2007; Stroud, 2003).

There are however, a number of approaches to learning about cultures, one of them being **critical cultural awareness**, which is an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

This involves the ability to:

- Identify and interpret explicit or implicit values in documents and events in one's own and other cultures, using a range of analytical approaches to place a document or event in context and be aware of the ideological dimension.
- Make an evaluative analysis of the documents and events by reference to an explicit perspective and criteria such as human rights, liberal democracy, religion and political ideology.
- Interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges, being aware of potential conflict between one's own and other ideological positions and attempting to find common criteria. Where this is not possible, to negotiate agreement on places of conflict and acceptance of difference (Byram, 1997).

In spite of their substantial differences, the approaches outlined here share some core features, including the legal (legal right and/or duties), top-down (state-centered or globally-centered) and universalistic construct of citizenship. In contrast, decolonial notions of citizenship, including the notion of citizenship within the Linguistic Citizenship framework, tend to account for and foreground informal, grassroots and context-bound "acts of citizenship" (Isin, 2008).

Languages and Peace Education

Linguapax, which started in 1987, is an international project for teaching foreign languages and literature fostered by UNESCO to:

- promote the culture of peace through plurilingual education
- Protect linguistic heritage

- And understanding and co-operation between peoples (Cunningham and Candelier, 1995).

The project considers that:

Education is a fundamental part of the process by which individuals are socialized, thereby acquiring values, attitudes and behavioural patterns. By presenting the learner with communicative practices different from his/her own, language teaching offers an excellent means of promoting values and representations favouring the development of a culture of peace.

In a society where numerous central factors increasingly co-exist, language teaching can thus contribute to the development of solidly responsible society which is respectful of individual identities. Not only does it allow us to trace the coloniality of citizenship discourses across historical time to the present, it also offers a way of understanding linguistic citizenship (Stround, 2001, Chimbutane, 2018).

The Concept of Value Orientation, Language Education and Democratic Citizenship

It is true today that in Nigeria, there have been great issues of erosion of values and all we need is attitudinal change. We are today, more than ever before, confronted with problems that threaten our very existence and we are daily sliding on the precipice of social and political upheavals as a result of social and political vices. Value reorientation therefore, means restoration or a change of attitude towards a number of things that have been identified as wrong actions or wrong attitudes. Nigerians are suffering a great number of social and political malaise in the form of criminal activities such as Boko haram insurgency, herdsmen/farmers crises, banditry, regional agitation or secession on a large scale.

Iwere (2014) believed that impunity is another factor contributing to moral decadence in Nigeria. He also averred that impunity occurs when people willfully, brazenly do what is wrong or neglect to do the right thing with the confidence that there will be absolutely no consequence to them, no price to pay, no punishment or sanction. Tide (2012) submitted that the Nigerian

society now looms large with kidnapping activities, unemployment, bare-faced banditry, corruption, blood-letting, restiveness, religious and ethnic intolerance, and other forms of unethical dispositions. Clearly, there is a dying culture and an ethical failure leading to total collapse of societal values. All these total up to high rate of moral and behavioural rottenness.

Aremu (2014) claimed that our value system is grossly eroded, parents no longer have time to take good care of their children. Aremu (2014) stressed that inter personal contacts have been replaced with e-parenting. A situation where a parent asks the children on phone: Have you eaten? Are you in bed? What are you doing? Etc. simply shows e-parenting and the children in return will put up e-behaviour and that usually results in e-consequences.

Abah (2014) was of the opinion that early exposure of pupils to values would elicit in them a local and national consciousness of societal values and respect for public property. Youth can constitute a nuisance or threat to national survival and stability if they are misguided, unemployed, indisciplined, allowed to drift away and be morally bankrupt (Egbunefu, 2014). In his own view, Olaopa (2016) as quoted in Oluwagbohunmi (2017) disclosed that the whole nation needs widespread reorientation on national values as basis for re-engineering of fundamental governance institutions to infuse public institutions with cultural and spirituality service. Olaopa (2016) further added that National Orientation Agency (NOA) should be elevated to create values, attitude guidelines, and practical initiatives that could be integrated into development policies, planning and programmes. The Change Catalyst (2013) opined also that NEEDS is anchored on the imperative to restore the fundamental values of Nigeria, which have been weakened over the years.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated and illustrated the many opportunities available to language teachers to contribute to education for democratic citizenship. Language teaching through democratic citizenships could lead to the type of value reorientation we so desire in our national life to build a greater and better Nigeria that is devoid of socio/political vices that threaten our daily lives and our collective existence.

Furthermore, citizens in a democracy need cultural skills and values for living in communities where cultural and linguistic diversity is the norm. We need cultural, social and political awareness to be able to acquire values that

will enable us to live as individuals and collectively as a nation with hopes and aspirations (Starkey, 1997).

Suggestions

For the purpose of this study, the following suggestions were made:

- Communication as an aspect of language is fundamentally intercultural, in the course that each participant in an act of communication brings to it a specific repertoire of identifies, positions and expectations formed through complex relationships with their own and other cultures. Here, culture, is understood in the widest sense as an acquired or constructed pattern of values, beliefs, skill and knowledge which shapes and is shaped by the learners as participants.
- Effective communications through language and democratic citizenship is closely related to the participants cultural identifies and positions. Social progress and the building of relations of peace, equality and inculcation of right values and attitudes between individuals, groups and tribes depends on the development of awareness of such cultural variety and difference which could bring about change and national development.
- Language education and democratic citizenship is between individuals and people as active members of society, with a need to participate in educational, social and political developments and to work towards shared approaches to issues arising from them. People need to reciprocally aware of the knowledge and values shared or not shared, by members of particular cultural groupings, and be able to situate their own knowledge and values in retention to those of others for a peaceful and developmental change.

Finally, in this context, citizenship is to an important extent mediated through our institutions. Language education remains a viable tool for inculcating core national values. Egwuatu (2013) also added that the leaders should walk the talk. That is leaders should allow the followers see them do what they advocate.

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