

THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

G .O. Ojibun

*College of Education,
Ekiadolor- Benin, School of Languages*

P. O. Aihievba

*College of Education,
Ekiadolor- Benin, School of Languages*

Abstract

Language is the light of mind. Language is knowledge and knowledge is a key factor in competitiveness. To this end, the need for language education becomes indispensable. In this paper, attempts were made at defining the key words, language and education as it relates to national development. The place of the national policy of language education in Nigeria was not left out. Similarly, the role of language education in national development was also examined. Finally, a conclusion emerged on the need of our nation to harness the benefits of language education. As for instance, the advent of the internet has changed our lives in recent times, millions of people across the world who share a common interest are able to communicate with each other and exchange ideas, not only are they able to do this through technological advances but because they share a common LANGUAGE. Consequently, some recommendations were reached on how the best language education could be repositioned for national development.

Introduction

According to Okenrentie, (2007) language is the human communication amongst a given people. e.g. for effective integration among a people in the society, language must first be in place. Also, Inyang (2006) viewed language as the life wire of the society, an integral part of culture and vehicle of cultural transmission. In the same vein, Ansa (2003) saw language as vital in the process

of achieving national development in a multi- cultural and multi-linguistic nation like Nigeria. Thus blench (1998) described Nigeria as the most linguistically complex country in Africa with over two hundred languages spoken all around (most of which. Of course, are yet to have orthography).

The language complexity nature which Nigeria possesses is of great challenge to democratic sustenance of our

country. This is so because sustainability and national integration depend greatly on the capability of the citizens to communicate effectively with one another. A society without language will amount to chaos as was the case of the building of tower of Babel in the Holy Bible. It is therefore obvious that no society can succeed without language. Language to a large extent paves the way of acceptability of an individual in a community. For instance, when an Ibo man travels to Oyo state, his ability to speak the Yoruba language gives him an edge over another who can not. Also, a Nigerian traveling out of the country to France for instance, will be better welcomed in France due to his ability to speak French compared to another who does not understand the French language. Language therefore, is of immense value to any nation and must thus be recognized in our educational system. For any country to achieve development, it must place value on language as language is imperative for socio-economic advancement.

What is Education?

Education develops the mind and refines behaviour of an individual. Nwagbara (2008) defined education as the process by which one's mind develops through learning. The learning process can be carried out in a school, college of education or university (formal education). It can also take place at home (informal education). Lassa (1996) saw education as laying a solid life long foundation right from early childhood till death.

Tnoh (2000) also described education as being concerned with the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. It is through education be it formal or informal, that the average citizen will be helped to cope adequately with problems of meeting his basic needs such as food, shelter, clothing, good health and manage with ease his economic affairs, his role in the community and the family life. The main purpose of education according to Joad in Vernon (1980) includes: to enable the individual make his living, equip him to play his part as a citizen and to enable the individual develop his latent powers and faculties in order to enjoy a good life. Education therefore, enables the individual to become self reliant. With education the individual, rather than becoming a parasite to parents, guardians, or well-meaning friends, becomes a functional member of the society thereby, contributing to societal development economically, financially, socially, politically e.t.c without any doubts, education is a must for every individual in any society considering its benefits. In this present dispensation of information and communications technology, the need for education becomes more vital than ever. This is so because with ICT making the world a global village, anyone who is still educationally lame, will find it difficult to survive in such a global village.

Language Education in the Nigeria

Language plays a dual role in any educational system. It serves as both a subject in the curriculum and also a means

of communication. Without language, learning cannot take place. In all fields of learning, language is vital. In a class of computer science for instance, the teacher requires language to transfer information. In a biology class, language is also required.

According to Banjo (1976), with the introduction of western education in Nigeria by Christian missionaries, the teaching and learning of indigenous language received greater attention. This is so because it was believed that the African child could best be taught in his native language. The Christian religion would better be propagated in native language. In a bid to solve the language problem in Nigeria, the colonial government ignored all smaller languages and choose four major languages; Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and Ibibio from three linguistic and cultural regions. After independence 1960, English language was adopted as the official language of the country. This is because of its universality and acceptability. This was due to the fact that some people saw the indigenous language as been limited and that the product of educational system through indigenous language could not suit them in international issues. Therefore, the government encouraged and enforced the study of English language in schools. Thus English language was to be taught as a school subject from the first year of primary education and a language of instruction from primary four to tertiary level of education.

As a result of the introduction of national policy on education, the federal government of Nigeria laid emphasis on

indigenous language which is viewed as a vehicle to maintain and preserve culture as well as harness national integration. According to Awobuluyi (2004), people saw the need to teach the major indigenous languages to enable them serve as alternative to English and as an official means of communication. Thus, the federal republic of Nigeria national policy on education (NPE) (2004) states that:

- a) in the primary school a child must study two languages (mother tongue if available for study) for indigenous language of wider coverage in his area of domicile and English language.
- b) In the junior secondary, he must study three languages, mother tongue of wider coverage in his area of domicile and one of the three major languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.
- c) In the senior secondary school, he must study languages, mother tongue or indigenous language in his area of domicile and English language.

According to Fafunwa (1991), a child who studied a major indigenous language is exposed only to his major zone and therefore has to study another indigenous language as his second language. French and Arabic however remained option languages. According to Ajani (2005), the federal government under the late general Sani Abacha, in 1996, did not only promote and support language education in Nigeria, but also made an attempt to make French language the second official language in Nigeria

because of its international status and values. This was also to resolve the conflict among minority groups who felt cheated over the inclusion of some indigenous languages such as Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo in educational curriculum. According to Omosehin (2000), French language will help to build a dynamic nation. In the light of the above, Jinadu (2001) stated that no nation could survive without a proper promotion of language most especially a foreign language. Through it, (foreign language) a nation could link up with up with the external world.

The role of language education in Nigerian tertiary institutions of learning cannot be overemphasized as it constitutes the bedrock of all educational practices. Language education in tertiary institution with its numerous benefits is like the blood to human body. As no human being can survive without any drop of blood in his/her system, so also our educational system can not thrive without language. Language is unique and beautiful. With its aesthetic values, it makes learning a pleasurable experience. Therefore, there is the need for language repositioning in our educational system. It is worthy of note that language education is not being given its rightful place and support in our tertiary institutions today. This further buttresses the fact why the admission records over the years in the field of language education is low. Researches have shown that the numbers of candidate who on their own volition opt for courses like French, Edo, Ibo, etc is quite low compared to other fields of learning like medicine,

engineering, bio-chemistry, etc. This is as a result of decadence in the field of language education. How could this decay be remedied? The way forward, in the words of the Minister of Information, Prof. Dora Akunyili, is "Rebranding and repositioning is the answer".

Language Education and National Development

Language education is a solid foundation of national development. Any nation that invests in language education is liable to national development, socially, culturally, politically, etc. Language education forges friendship, strengthens cultural ties and economic relationship. In light of the above, Chiuye, (2007) noted that language helps the individual to be effective and efficient for overall national development. Also, that the use of language by the majority is vital for human resources training.

In addition, Benjamin (2010) stated that language shapes thoughts and emotions, thereby determining one's perception of reality. This is so because it takes an emotionally stable individual to achieve national development, as one who is emotionally imbalance will only pose problems to her society. It is worth noting that, language is not only a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, values and characteristics of a community, rather, it also represents a fundamental of social identity. It gives a sense of belonging to the individual as it serves as social solidarity for those who speak the same language. In short,

language retention helps maintain feeling of cultural kinship.

Language is a means of transferring knowledge from one generation to the other. With language therefore, there is the tendency to provide the younger generations, the tools for knowledge, for them to excel not only in their country but beyond national borders.

Summarily, the role of language education in national development is very vital as no nation can experience an all round boom in her economy if language is neglected. The Nigerian economy has so much relied on oil, what happens if par adventure, the oil stops flowing due to pipelines vandalism? There is the need to invest in language education to further safeguard the economy of our nation.

Conclusion

Language education cannot be removed from our educational system. This is so because, without language, our educational system will crumble. Therefore to save language education from its present state, there is the need for repositioning and rebranding of language education. Government, parents, teachers, and students alike, should be awoken to the challenges facing language education. This is a clarion call to all and sundry to arise and save language education from its present hurdle. As an individual as well as a nation, if we must forge ahead politically, academically, socially, economically, and otherwise, then let us embrace language education for national development. As this will make Nigeria the envy of other African countries.

Conclusively, in the words of Lionel Groulx, a Quebec historian "...la clef magique qui donne acces aux plus hautes richesses de la culture, c'est la langue." (Language is like a master key that opens the door to the wealth of any culture or nation.)

Recommendations

Odo (2000) views education as basic tool to nation building, that nations all over the world strive to make it available not only to the few who can afford it but to all citizens. Bearing this in mind, the following are some recommendations to improve the status of language education.

1. Due to the vital role of language it could be better funded by the government and some kind spirited individual for its effect to be felt in the society.
2. The need for language laboratories to be well equipped to date is essential.
3. Language teachers could be sponsored to seminar, workshops and conferences both within and outside the country.
4. Scholarship could be given to language students to encourage and motivate them in this field of learning
5. There should be an enlightenment campaign carried out at all levels of education. This is to create

awareness in the minds of the public on the usefulness of language education.

6. Parents should encourage their children and wards on the needs for language education.

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Remarks by honourable David Kilgour, secretary of state Latin American and African *.http://www.david-kilgour.com/mp/sahla.tm 2010.*

