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Language: An Indispensable Tool for Education and Human Resource Development in Africa

By

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Abstract

Communication is the assignment of meaning to the messages and events that surround the individual, or groups of individuals. Communication has been classified into personal, group and mass communication. What makes communication possible is language. The relationship between two or more individuals is moderated by language. When groups of individuals do not have a common language, communication breaks down. There becomes the need to communicate either by signs or adopting a common language. It is within this context that English appears to have come to stay in many countries in Africa. This paper is an attempt to discuss the role of English vis-a-vis African languages in the education and manpower development in Africa. It appraises the current position whereby many Africans do not understand themselves and identifies problem areas in human resource management. For human resources to be developed in Africa there is need for the adoption of what may be called a continental language as the language for unification which in effect will foster development. Though English and French serve this purpose,

The Intuition there is the need to adopt a language while the African languages should be developed to cater for low and medium manpower development with the hope that ultimately one of them will replace English or French.

Language has always been a contentious issue in education in Africa due to the drive for mother tongue education and the ever pressing need to be able to use international languages such as English. One of the reasons why the language issue has not featured well in Africa's development discourse is because the nature and role of language in the society is often misunderstood due to the presence of many indigenous languages in the continent. The languages of Africa are grouped into five language families: Congo-Kordofanian, Nilo-Saharan, Afro-Asiatic, Khoisan and Malayo-Polynesian. The Congo-Kordofanian and the Afro-Asiatic groups have many common cultural and historical ties and they account for almost three-fourth of all the languages of Africa.

However, African countries that were British colonies had the same developmental background and similar literature in the area of language. Their colonialists imposed their own languages and demonised the languages of the people that they colonised, thereby discouraging and sometimes forbidding natives from speaking their mother tongue. In some cases, the colonialists systematically effaced African languages.

It is obvious that the heterogenous language situation in African countries like Nigeria, Cameroon, Gambia, Ghana, South Africa and others did not facilitate inter-ethnic communication. It constituted a major problem or handicap to linguistic trans-national communication in view of the absence of national and inter-national lingua franca, hence, the need for the adoption and development of a language that will serve as a common language in Africa (continental language). According to Abdulaziz (1993), the abundance of languages in Africa has meant enormous problems of communication in education and politics. It is demanding too much of human and material resources to produce newspapers, radio programmes and teaching materials in several languages in each country. Therefore, multilingualism is a threat to development. Contrary to this, some countries see the colonial language as a more practical alternative to the insular and restricted native languages. The use of English and other foreign languages in Africa was not brokered by the Africans but by a coercion of the power of British armoury and political and economic rhetorics. Though it is serving the purpose of international communication, it is at the same endangering the lives of African languages and or apportioning to them restricted use.

Cameroon has two official languages, namely English and French. The citizens are encouraged to learn the two official languages in addition to their native languages.

Language: An Indispensable Tool for Education and Human Resource Development in Africa. B. Learning a multiplicity of languages poses more problems for human resource development if a single or two languages were to be adopted.

Language Situation in Africa

Africa possesses regional languages that enable different contiguous communities to communicate and do business. If they are encouraged to develop, they will spread widely, gradually becoming culturally widespread. This process will make them diffuse resulting in their acceptability across and beyond boundaries of modern states. Examples of these common languages are Hausa, and Kiswahili, Amharic and Berber. Currently, linguistic research has not provided a comprehensive picture of the language situation in Africa. Since this is the case, the emphasis of this paper will be on few African countries.

The first people in Southern Africa were the San and Khoe followed by the Bantu speaking people. Little is known about the ways in which language was transferred by these people. Most written evidence of language in education comes from the arrival of Europeans in the cape, in particular the Dutch settlement in 1652. It is important to note that European languages such as English also spread amongst the local South African people through the missionaries. Dutch and English were used in schools. The African languages only got a degree of recognition in policies during the apartheid era in South Africa where mother tongue education was proposed for at least the first couple of years

Language Education in South Africa

The main aims of language-in-education policy in South Africa are to promote and develop all the official languages to support the teaching and learning of other languages used by communities in South Africa, including languages used for religious purposes, languages which are important for international trade and communication, and South African sign languages. The South African language-in-education policy also makes for the following statements: that the parents exercise the language choice on behalf of the minor learner; the learners choose their language of teaching upon admission in school; governing bodies of schools stipulate how the school promotes multilingualism through using more than one language of learning and teaching (<http://salanguages.com/education.htm>).

Language Education in Central Africa

In East and Central Africa, Swahili is the lingua franca; it has a long written tradition that has been used as a medium of education at different times in history. A couple of hundreds of thousands East Africans who settled in Yemen, Oman and the Gulf region also speak Swahili as their mother tongue. In many areas of activity, attempts have been made to replace the former colonial language with a native one with some success. Swahili is the language which has succeeded in most countries of the

~~The Intujiqu~~ ~~Sahara~~ It is now a national and official language in Tanzania and it is also a national language in Kenya and Uganda and one of the six national languages in Zaire. It is also used in Mozambique, Rwanda, Burundi parts of Somalia, Malawi and Zambia.

Mujuru (1997) asserted that the use of African languages is the best way of ensuring active participation by the people in national development programmes and projects affecting their livelihood. She further opines that in Zimbabwe, as in many other African countries, you find that as a more sophisticated and wealthy urban society develops, so does the usage of English or other colonial languages. Zimbabwe has three official languages: English, Ndebele and Shona, and a number of other languages.

Globally speaking, the linguistic scenario in Cameroon like in most sub-Saharan African countries is characterised by dense multilingualism, the official dominance of ex-colonial languages, the official neglect of indigenous languages, the unsevered colonial umbilical chord and socio-politically interwoven language problems (Adegbija, 2000). Both French and English languages came to Cameroon in 1916 when Britain and France shared Cameroon into two unequal parts after the defeat of German forces in the country. For the avoidance of language conflict and unwarranted financial cost, Cameroon opted for a neutral foreign language as official language.

Generally, the language situation in French speaking Cameroon during the colonial period was heavily characterised by perpetual conflict between missionaries who persisted in the use of indigenous languages and the French colonial administration. The languages of wider communication in Cameroon are Fulfulde, Ewondo, Duala, Hausa, Wandala, Kanuli, Arab Choa, Cameroon pidgin, English and French. In Cameroon today, the issue at stake is basically that of grappling with its highly multilingual situation, resolving with the official language, bilingualism option as well as its implications.

Language Situation in West Africa

Ghana, like other African countries, is a multilingual nation. Ghana's indigenous languages can be categorised into ten major language groups which include: Akan, Mabia, Gbe, Ga-Dangbe, Gurma, Guang, Nzema, Grusi, Buem and Nafaanra groups. There are other West African languages spoken in Ghana such as the Chadic language, Hausa, and some Mande. The above shows that African societies are highly multilingual and that Africans themselves are rather polyglottic by making use of their mother tongue and other inter-ethnic languages in addition to their lingua franca.

Place of Language in Human Resource Development

Tracy in The Human Resources Glossary defines human resources as, "the

and material resources of an organisation. Human resource is also the organisational function that deals with the people and issues related to people such as compensation, hiring, performance management and training.

People are asset that must be hired, satisfied, developed and retained. Human resource development is regarded as the framework for helping employees develop their personal and organisational skills, knowledge and abilities. It includes employee career development, performance management and development, coaching, mentoring, succession planning, key employee identification, tuition assistance and organisational development.

The fast paced world of human resources (HR) management, development and utilisation requires human resource professionals to fill many roles and speak many languages. For human resource to be developed, language is highly imperative and indispensable as it promotes good practices and transactional cooperation.

Emenanjo in Jowitt (1995) asserted that development needs to be fostered by deliberate language engineering which assumes five major forms:

1. Graphisation (designing and standardising the orthography)
2. Standardisation (the evolution of a standard dialect)
3. Modernisation of the numerous systems (by the incorporation for example, of the decimal principle)
4. Creation of metalanguage (so that a language can function as a medium of study and instruction).
5. Production of material related to these.

Many language experts have stressed the need for unity amongst African nations (Anyadiegwu, 2008) and the importance of language as a tool to achieve this much desired unity can never be over emphasized. It is obvious that the first step towards achieving this unity is by evolving effective means of communication amongst all the different nationalities in the continent. In this regard, language easily comes to mind. For complex ideas to be communicated effectively with clarity and understood without any ambiguity, then it follows that the users of a particular language must be skilled in its use. One of the main goals of language teachers is to provide students with the tools to be effective communicators. Their lack of practical tools for learners becomes an issue of concern.

In order to ensure effective human resource development, communication through language is imperative for success. Effective communication generates the desired effect which consequently promotes human resource development. It is clear

~~The language~~ plays a key role in the achievement of literacy which in turn develops human resources. If there were no language, human civilisation and development would have remained impossibility.

Need for a Common Language

Language is central to the development of individuals and resources in a nation. In Africa, a peculiar problem of multilingualism exists and majority of the indigenous languages are underdeveloped, reason being that they lack orthography, adequate teaching staff to teach the local languages and inadequate literature to develop these languages. The only viable way out is to adopt English. This suggestion rests on the premise that many Africans would not like to lose their language to another African language. This rivalry is healthy because it ensures that no African language is lost in favour of another and that each of them is given the opportunity to survive or efface demoncratically. Theoretically, with positive loyalty to African language, one of them will eventually emerge as a pan-African lingua franca.

But to bridge the gap in communication with its negative impact on resource management, in the meantime, Africans can adopt a language that will give her access to wider communication, without stifling the survival of the indigenous languages. Under this condition, English language is the best alternative language that can play this role in Africa because, currently, it is the window to wider world.

English in many British colonies around the world is the official language in which all government businesses are conducted. The English language has been influenced in different parts of the world as a result of its contact with other languages hence the term 'New Englishes'. This is natural but there is need for a standard of English that will make for international intelligibility. The importance of English language or official language in multilingual countries cannot be over emphasised since it serves as the only medium of contact and exchange despite its resounding lack of success. Laying emphasis on this, Adejare quoted in Jowitt (2000) has it that the nation's huge investment in the English Language appears not to be yielding any substantial dividends. The percentage and quality of passes in the subject at the primary and secondary school levels are disconcertingly low nationwide. This may be attributed to lack of instructional materials, inadequate motivation of teachers, inadequate teaching staff etc. Nwofor (2009) has it that the use of English language acts as a means of national cohesion and integration. This is a very important function in a pluralistic society like Africa.

The English language is recognised as a world language so it performs international functions. It serves as a link between people of multilingual societies of

Africa and the outside world. It is the language of international politics, trade and sports. For instance at the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), United Nations *Language: An Indispensable Tool for Education and Human Resource Development in Africa* - B. M. Mbah; R. C. Onuorah and R. I. Okoye

Organisation (UNO) and the common wealth, Nigeria and other countries of Africa have no other language than English for taking part in the deliberations. English also opens the door to high technology, science, trade and diplomacy. All these are made possible because of the large number of English speakers (Akindele and Adegbita, 2005). The current number of speakers of English worldwide increases and the language spreads extensively.

English is currently the language most often taught as a foreign language. It is a fast growing language and its global spread now means that a large number of dialects and English based Creole languages and pidgin can be found all over the world. It has also really gone far into countries of the world. There is also no doubt that Africa's foremost trading partners are English speaking nations. Africa only has to take a step further by intensifying efforts to standardise the English language spoken in the continent. This in effect means preparing the humans in the country to usher in development in all spheres of life in the continent.

Ways of Developing the English Language for Human Resource Development

The actual implementation of any education policy takes place in the field (schools) and teachers are at the centre of this job. They are the first group of humans in the continent to be developed. It is funny that most teachers in the school do not know what a language laboratory is. It is obvious that one does not give what one does not have. Something serious has to be done in this area.

Developing programmes for the English Language Learning - Since language is dynamic, there is the need for flexible English language programmes in order to accommodate diverse species of learners in schools and in turn develop them. The teacher can include programmes like "native speakers' day" where he will employ real native English language speakers who could be considered role models to enlighten learners. Another is by organising "second language speech competitions". These could help re-engineer the English language to develop individuals.

Involving Technology in English Language Teaching- ICT and other aids such as audio and visual materials can speed up the language learning process by offering opportunity for practice outside the classroom. Technology provides for the language teacher a relatively safe environment and a strong realistic use of the English language. The use or application of technology in language teaching will help facilitate the intercommunication of teachers and English language native speakers. Communication

technologies can facilitate global interaction between language users, providing opportunities for language use and participation in the second language communities.

The Intuition

Changing Pedagogies - Pedagogical approaches to English language teaching are constantly changing and evolving, therefore teachers need to be abreast of recent trends in innovation and development which could be either social or technological. This could promote purposeful interaction and extend students' learning and equally require them to use language in ways that are beyond the superficial.

Other ways of developing the English language for human resource development include: communicating the importance of language with passion, organising language contests and refining the instructional materials.

Conclusion

English language has been described as world language and a window to the wider world, so it is the view of this paper that as far as this 21st century is concerned the best language for wider communication, science and technology, government businesses, politics and education is English language. Judging from the underdeveloped nature of most African languages, this language can serve as what may be termed continental language which will go a long way in developing our indigenous languages. This is because they still have insufficient literature, underdeveloped orthography and inadequate indigenous language teachers.

Recommendations

1. The use of English language in classes should be stressed and emphasised in schools across the continent to make its adoption as a continental language a reality.
2. Provision of the English language learning facilities is highly imperative.

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