

# VISION AND MISSION OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGES IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

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## **Abstract**

The ancient philosophy asserts that an unexamined life is not worth living. This also applies to the language policy of the National Policy on Education. The vision and mission of Nigerian language were highlighted in this write up. The vision and mission of Nigeria language policy of NPE were re-evaluated. The obstacles to realization of the vision were highlighted. The way forward to full realization of the vision were proffered.

## **Introduction**

Language education is as old as formal education in Nigeria. In 1926, the first milestone in language education was laid in the education ordinance. This policy on Mother Tongue Education echoed itself in National Policy on Education (1981) and revised in 1998. The nation's future needs in terms of food, shelter, transportation, communication, energy and power have direct link with the mode of communication and awareness to the populace. Our vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century for a virile country may yet remain unfulfilled if we tarry longer. We now have to do some assessment. How far have the aims and objectives of Nigerian languages been achieved? What are the strength and weakness of the vision and mission of Nigerian languages? What are the factors that propel or thwart policy thrust of the language policy of the National Policy on Education? What further action can we take to improve the vision of Nigerian languages? We need to review the past, make projection into the future and suggest pathways for the attainment of the vision.

## **Concept of Vision and Mission**

Vision is often about new realities, futuristic, idealistic aspirations. Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of Current English defined vision as "power of seeing or imagining, looking ahead..." Vision has in-built time frame and a broad guideline of actualizing factors. El-Namaki (1991) sees vision as "a process of direction, setting. Direction setting connotes the identification of something in the future". The vision of Nigerian languages is a mental image looking ahead or dreaming of what the future of Nigerian language will be in this 21<sup>st</sup> C.

The Webster New Collegiate Dictionary (1980) sees mission as "a specific task with which person or a group is charged". Mission represents the processing of the raw materials provided by vision into the finished product. Mission deals with the concerted efforts to establishing the dreamed ideals of vision. Vision is conceptual while mission is more practical. Mission is an alternative expression to the term philosophy which was described as a system of principles for the conduct of life. Mission is based upon one's own value. Mission therefore remains a vision if there is no attempt or effort at implementation. Fluctuation in political, social and economic fortunes may militate against mission. The problem is not with the vision but rather with the implementation. It is within the framework of the vision of Nigerian languages that the mission is immersed.

## **Historical Development of Nigerian Languages**

As earlier stated, language education dated back to 1926 education ordinance. The development of mother tongue education has passed through a lot of metamorphosis till its present stage. In 1952 and 1954, provisions were made in the primary school syllabus for Igbo, Efik and Yoruba. Later separate syllabus was made for these languages.

In 1965, the Joint Consultative Committee on Education (JCCE) was to hold a National Curriculum Conference on production of truly relevant system of education for the country. The conference in 1969 published "a philosophy for Nigerian Education edited by Adaralegbe in 1972. A national seminar under Chief S. O. Adebayo was mandated to prepare the draft based on the recommendation of 1969. The outcome was the government white paper entitled National Policy on Education in Nigeria in 1977. Other regimes produced a revised edition in 1981 aka: 6-3-3-4. This means 6 years of primary, 3 years of junior secondary, 3 years of senior secondary and 4 years of tertiary education. The evolution of this policy spanned for 16 years. This policy was based on the government vision of the Nigerian society as stated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Development Plan. At primary level, the medium of instruction should be in Mother Tongue for the first 3 years, later English will take over.

At secondary level, English language and one Nigerian language is compulsory. Each child should learn at least one of the 3 major language as core subjects (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) other than his own language. How far these have been achieved will be discussed later. There are no such language policy planning programmes that are

meant for bringing us together for unity educationally, which is in practice all over the country. It could be in theory but not in practice.

#### Vision and Mission of Nigerian Languages

The Holy Bible in Proverbs 29: 18 states, "where there is no vision, the people perish," in 21<sup>st</sup> century, Nigerian population has increased, engendering a higher rate of unemployment and increasing the number of people seeking, specialized saleable skill. Without vision for these teeming population, the nation stands at risk.

The vision of all aspects of education in the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Development Plan and endorsed as **the foundation for the National Policy on Education are the building of:**

- (i.) A free and democratic society (ii.) A just and egalitarian society.
- (iii.) A united, strong and self reliant nation.
- (iv.) A great and dynamic economy.
- (v.) A land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens. The vision is universal for all the aspects of education and to make for a neater focus, each aspect has its specific vision expressed in terms of aims.

Section 1.7,2.1 ( c), section 4. 17b, 19 a (iii) and 20. 17 (li) all provide the language needs in the National Policy on Education. The implication of all these sections in the production of Nigerian language teachers, its teaching, production of orthography, primers and reading materials in the major Nigerian languages as both LI and L2 and the learning of another major Nigerian languages L2.

Section 1 paragraph (a) states in addition to appreciating the importance of languages in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers 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. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigerian to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba" (NPEP. 5).

In section 2 paragraphs 11 it states that at pre-primary level, the medium of instruction will be principally the MT or the language of the immediate community and to this end will:

- a) Develop the orthography for many Nigerian languages; and
- b) Produce textbooks in Nigerian languages, section 3 paragraph 15 (4) states "Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the MT or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage English" (NPE, P.8).

The objectives of teaching Nigerian languages in junior secondary school level as spelt out in the national curriculum for J. S. S. Vol. 3 include:

- a) Express himself correctly in the appropriate Nigerian language employing appropriate lexemes and figures (Vocabulary, idioms, proverbs, witticisms and metaphor).
  - b) Demonstrate familiarity and acquaintance with and ability to discuss and explain elements of the oral tradition of the language (folktales, riddles, games, songs etc.)
  - c) Read and appreciate literature written in Nigerian Languages without difficulty and at a reasonable speed.
  - d) Carryout continuous writing in Nigerian languages, employing correct usages of grammar, idiomatic expressions, orthography, punctuation and other mechanics of the language.
  - e) Manifest creativity in Nigerian languages through composition of short stories, plays new- sheets, word games, songs etc. in the languages.
- 0 Acquire the necessary tool to cope with further studies in Nigerian languages if so desired.

At senior secondary level as earlier stated, a Nigerian language is a core subject Section 55 of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria states “the business of the National Assembly shall be English, and Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba” when adequate arrangements have been made therefore” As regard State Assembly, section 91 stipulates” the business of a House of Assembly shall be conducted in English but the house may in addition to English conduct the business of the house in one of the three language spoken in the states as the house may by resolution approve.

At the tertiary level, the developments of manpower in Nigeria languages who will help contribute to national development and promote national unity. The common goals for Nigerian language are to:

- (a) Transmit the cultural heritage and serve public interest
- (b) Teach, and do research.
- (c) Help individual development and the nation by fostering unity through dissemination of information in the Nigerian languages. How far these laudable vision and mission are realized will be X-rayed.

### The Journey So Far

Has the mission been accomplished? We need to assess the performance of the language policy of the National Policy on Education. Since the language policy was established, what are the strengths and weaknesses?

On the production of Nigerian languages teachers in quality and quantity a lot of progress has been recorded. More systematic and sustained efforts have been made to produce Nigerian language teachers. The Federal Government established National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) at Aba in 1992. The aim is the promotion of the study and teaching of the variety of functional Nigerian languages as well as the training of language teachers. This is to complement the efforts of Colleges of Education and Universities that produce them. Some state governments are committed and they have virile language planning agencies to produce Nigerian languages teachers. Some of these schools are Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe; College of Education, Warri; College of Education, Ikere Ekiti; and Adeniran Ognasanya College of Education, Ijanikin. Most Federal Colleges of Education study 2 or 3 of the Nigerian languages. The pace setter for studying the L2 programme is Federal College of Education, Abeokuta. Other schools are Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Federal Colleges of Education in Pankshin, Eha-Amufu, Okene, Oyo special, and some in the northern part of the country, Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri started offering Igbo in 1974, now they have Hausa and Yoruba for their L2 programmes. These students are admitted through sandwich, Poly JAMB and Pre-NCE programme. Notable Universities that offer some Nigerian languages are: University of Lagos, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, University of Ibadan, University of Calabar, University of Uyo, University of Benin, University of Maiduguri, Bayero University, Kano etc.

The government has produced 6 manuals in 30 languages through NERDC. These according to Yoloye (1998 ) are:

1. Hausa, Efik, Igbo, Yoruba.
2. Edo, Tiv, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Izon
3. Ibibio, Nupe, Berom, Kalahari, Idoma
4. Ebira, Igbala, Isoko, Kaye (Baju) Gbaye
5. Bwatye, Esan, Bura, Ikwere, Urhobo, Wukari (Jukun)
6. Mbembe, Obolo, Tarok, Igede, Mumuye, Loka

These are the most widely spoken languages.

Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba account for 50% of the population. Additional 9 major languages make up to 86%. With the 30 languages, 90 % of the population have almost being covered. Still there is need to produce for the remaining 370 languages.

The Nigerian language teachers have articles in reputable journals. They conduct researches; attend conferences and author well-researched books. The government established National Language Centre. NERDC, and Book Development Council to help boost Nigerian languages. In 1991, the NCCE produced the minimum standard for all subjects including the Nigerian languages being studied in Colleges of Education in the county. Obanya (2001) opined that the more evolved

languages are those with standardized orthographies, those with an abundance of reading materials for school instruction, general reading and inter and intra generation transmission of knowledge, information, culture through documented history and literature.” These languages are few. Nigerian languages have roles to play as media of instruction, subjects at the secondary level and as a means of eradicating illiteracy. Eradicating mass illiteracy is best effected through literacy in the Nigerian languages. Information on government policies, rural needs, patriotism, nationalism and development should be given to the people in the language they understand. Government through National Youth Service Corps programme also promote the learning of Nigerian languages through posting to different states. These are some of the efforts by government to fulfil the vision laid down.

Language policy is replete with good vision; the lack of match between vision and mission poses problems. The government lacks systematic action and programme for enforcing the policy. There is no known federal government machinery for monitoring the implementation or otherwise of the policy. There is no enforcement of another learning Nigerian languages in schools. The multilingual nature of Nigerians in which several languages compete for supremacy and the continual dominance of English and of recent French that have powerful technological backing militate against the vision.

There is absence of reliable planning data. How many Nigerian languages teachers we have at present and the number required is non-available. How then can we implement without planning? There is staggering demand for Nigerian languages teachers in all tiers and level of formal education. This is unconnected to the low respect accorded Nigerian languages. There is no incentive, motivation and sponsorship of the students and the teachers. The acculturation programmes are not adequately funded. Foreign languages have more facilities and higher admission quota than Nigerian languages. This shows the supremacy of foreign languages to Nigeria languages. The elite are not helping, these policy makes are the worst offenders. State Government cannot absorb trained Nigerian language. Some states government even retrench the Nigerian languages teachers in their employment, how can parents allow their children to study these languages when they will not be employed? This government in ineptitude to adequately train NCE teachers and create jobs for them negate the language policy. Most of them veer to teaching their second subject, work other places or do business. There is no upward mobility in university for second language programme. Most Nigerian languages have no candidate with certificate. How do we admit them in higher institution to study these language?

Incompetence in the languages skills is another hindrance. The curricula are rich but most of the products are weak in the language skills. Most native speakers of LI cannot speak or write their language. There is no uniform graded textual materials for Colleges of Education. There is lack of uniformity in the primary schools. The country find it convenient using English, the colonial language. The parents especially the elites discourage their children from learning or speaking Nigerian languages. They therefore send their children to private schools where only foreign languages are taught leaving the public schools to teach the Nigerian languages as the policy demands. The elites raised a vicious uproar against Nigerian languages being compulsory. No wonder the diffidence and lack of commitment to Nigerian language studies.

There is lack of adequate scientific training in linguistics, literary criticism and stylistics. To produce textbooks in sciences and mathematics in the Nigerian languages is still a mirage. Though the Ife six years primary school studies report showed that pupils taught in Yoruba performed better than those taught some subjects in English. There is no follow up, replica or full implementation of that finding in other languages or even to bring it to limelight as a policy to be implement.

This pronouncement in Nigerian language has been on for over 20 years with no visible efforts to make this arrangement realizable. The escape clause “when adequate arrangement have been made therefore”, is a condition which is not intended to be fulfilled. Not willing to implement this policy by past present governments led to non

appreciation of Nigerian languages, the culture and heritage of the people and finally the lack of interest in using languages as a uniting factor. For the vision of Nigerian languages to be realized, certain drastic measures will be taken before the vision dies.

**Recommendations**

Nigerian languages must be repackaged. The objectives, curricula, delivery and evaluation procedures of Nigerian languages should be restructured to respect national aspirations of the times.

There is need for training and retraining programmes for Nigerian languages teachers, to develop appropriate skill to be useful in seeking employment or re-employment. Education must engender a sense of future so that both learners and institutions are prepared for change and constant renewals and it must facilitate the development of flexibility adaptability teachers of Nigerian languages should possess higher degrees specializing in linguistics of Nigerian languages or oral, written literature, aesthetics or its methodology to the confidence in their teaching or research activities and relate with other colleagues. This will remove indifference, antagonism and cynicism in the institutions and the populace in general. These teachers should be confident, proud, happy, knowledgeable, radical, professional and academic in their attitude to teaching and learning Nigerian languages.

Government should increase the admission quota of Nigerian languages in Universities and Colleges of Education. Willing and interested students should be given incentives. These schools should be equipped with standard laboratories, facilities and equipment. Government should provide orthography, materials in some minority languages. There should be scientific terminologies in Nigerian language to help teach students.

There should be more airtime in electronic media for Nigerian languages for information dissemination to the masses.

There is need to create in Nigerian society positive recognition of the status and role of Nigerian languages in fostering our national unity, pride, awareness and cultural identity.

The government should indigenize the terminology hitherto expressed in foreign official language through translation, semantic morphological integration. For this bilingual dictionaries will be compiled, interpreters and translators trained.

Textbook writers should promote positive attitude towards producing adequate textbooks in the mother tongue in the area of science, if the mother tongue medium in education is to be implemented effectively. The onus of implementing the policy lies with the government. Government should intensify efforts to enlist the support of international organizations and agencies like UNESCO, UNDP, ILO, UNICEF, World Bank and African Development Bank, in the area of financial grants.

There is need to raise Nigerian language above cynicism, indifference and antagonism in the society at large. The Government through the National Assembly should pass a bill for full implementation of the Nigerian languages policy. Nigerians should benefit, politically, socially, technologically, economically, health wise and other areas using the Nigerian languages.

Social status of Nigerian languages teachers need special attention by government. No virile nation thrives with inefficient, disgruntled and unemployed builders. Finally, until teachers of Nigerian languages are employed, well motivated and course offering attractive, language policy fully implemented, everything about the vision and mission and the role of Nigerian languages will be a mirage.

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