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# SUSTAINABLE LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICAN STATES: NIGERIAN SITUATION

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By

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## **Abstract**

*The importance of language to mankind cannot be over emphasized. Language controls all academic manifestations in modern world. To speak fluently and confidently in variety of situation is a central need and an important goal of education. Language is a necessary tool for the educational, economical, political and social enhancement of every nation. The world cannot do without language because it represents ideas about the world. Language is used in everyday life for the purpose of remembering the past, thinking about the future, understanding the present, giving and obtaining information, showing and changing feelings of others, telling stories, etc. it is against this backdrop that this paper examined the role of language education in the economic development of African States. With reference to the Nigerian concept of Education, language educations were discussed. Relationship between language and other discipline like science were highlighted. Problems militating against effective teaching/learning of language education in African States were enumerated and solutions proffered.*

Every linguistic domain operates within a given social environment. The social environment in turn differs in terms of level of development and industrialization. It could be emphasized here that from time immemorial, societies had been known to be either developed or under developed. This classification of societies in terms of levels of development or industrialization has given rise to the latest classification model by which countries are grouped into first, second and third world countries. Besides, this classification is based on their respective positions as “the under developed” versus “developed” and “non-industrialized” continuum (which is along the African State).

Unfortunately, our country Nigeria finds herself in the third world category, a situation that depicts her occupying the lowest rank on the development ladder. A study of the Nigerian languages and national development is expected to highlight the responsibility which the indigenous language owes the Nigerian people in the promotion of their development needs and efforts. This is in keeping with the so – called social responsibility of language.

Language education is expected not only to highlight but to also initiate and emphasize issues, comments and debates relating to the development of the nation and her people through the so called traditional function of language which is communication. The study should also be able to suggest ways by which indigenous language should accelerate the rate of the nation’s development. In doing this, the study should not see Nigeria in isolation of other African countries of the world. There must therefore, be cross-central comparison.

### **Concepts Clarification**

In order to justify the topic of this paper, it becomes imperatively necessary to define the major concepts in this paper and they are, language, language education, nation and development.

### **The Concepts of Language**

In the opinion of Enghlom (nd) Language is the key to the heart of the people. If we loss the key, we loss people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches which cannot be guessed at from the other side of the door.

The lesson to learn from the above opinion of Eghlom is that language plays a vital role in the life of a people. Hence, Ani (2007: 274) submitted that human beings cannot think without language. It is an integral part of man. It surpasses communication and social interaction. Language influences thought, and often conditions action. Also, it influences conduct. It is because of the importance of language to mankind that Ibiowotisi (1996: 28) stated that: Language is so vital in man’s life that there is hardly any situation where it is not involved: it is a vehicle of power, a means by which we control, create and preserve. This is to say that without language, there cannot be any human society, education or even human beings as we know them today.

### **Concepts of Language Education**

Language education is the process of learning a language, as well as teaching the process of a said language. It may refer to either learning a native language for the first time, or learning a second language. The term Language Education most commonly refers to learning a second or additional language beyond one’s native language; for this reason, it is commonly used as an academic term. Language learning

computer software is another type of language education that allows users to learn the language independently on their own.

The process of language education and language acquisition can differ greatly depending on the teaching style used, age of the students learning the language and whether the students are developing more in-depth skills with their first language or are attempting to learn a second language. It is common for language editors to begin with vocabulary words and verbs conjugation principles, because these form the basis of most second language education practices. Some teachers will use an immersion style of teaching a language, where students are encouraged to speak the new language as much as possible; this can be quite challenging for introductory students, but for more advanced learner, it is a very effective method of language acquisition.

There are other methods used for language education, which are considered to be forms of applied linguistics. The most effective methods are generally considered to be those used at a combination of memorization and grammar studies with natural conversation and exploration of the language. Memorizing may help one to learn a number of new words, or even develop ability to read the language, It will generally not give students the ability to actually speak the language. A language exchange program where two people who each speaks a different language, but wants to learn others language will communicate and practice with each other is another method that is much simpler now with voice and video communication over the internet.

Classroom learning was one of the most common forms of language education but it is changing to some extent. There are now a good number of different software programs available in virtually any language imaginable, and often these can provide a thorough language education up to near fluency in the chosen language, or through simulated conversation. Language programs that promise fluency tend to be fairly expensive, and not all deliver fully, but may still represent a bargain compared to the cost of traditional university language program.

### **The Concepts of Education**

Education simply means the act of imparting knowledge to mankind. What is knowledge? To philosophers among them in the mainstream are Francis Bacon and Socrates who were both English and Ancient Greek philosophers is. “Knowledge is power and virtue”. The lesson adduced from the assertion of this great two philosophers is that knowledge is a treasure source. It opens wellsprings of unfathomable insight into the world and how to improve it as well as transcend its barriers and stereotypes. Knowledge liberates one from the shackles of ignorance and unveils immense vistas of possibilities. Knowledge opens one’s horizons and broadens one’s world view. It enables one reality in a balanced perspective.

As earlier stated, the process of acquiring knowledge is described as education. It is this process that has enabled humanity to develop, to raise critical questions, to subdue nature, master it, invent new things, transmit values and sustain civilization. Education takes place in formal and informal settings. And also applies various methodologies that lead to national development.

### **Concept of the Nation**

Chima (2009b) Saw nation as committee of races, tribes or states who have common tie and affiliation, who have interacted together for some considerable period of time, possessing common institutions and accepting common values and norms which regulate their existence. In other words, a committee of states who have common attachment to a given area and who possess strong ties of identity and who are free from foreign domination. Renan (1990:19) stated that:

*The nation like the individual, is the culmination of a long past of endeavors, sacrifice and devotion. Of all cults, that of the ancestors is the most legitimate, for the ancestors have made us what we are. A heroic past, great men of glory (by which we understand genuine glory) this is the social capital upon which one bases a national idea.*

The lesson adduced from the above opinion is that, as popularly said, it takes two to tangle, this further means to say that it takes diverse heritage and various ethnic groups to make up a nation.

### **The Concept of Development**

Scholars, many a time, in a bid to define development, have misconstrued the concept with that of growth. It could be emphasized in this study that development and growth are two different phenomena. While development refers to the process of rank which is aimed at achieving self-reliance and improved living conditions for the underprivileged majority, growth on the other hand, refers mainly to the expansion of physical structures and increase in social amenities and facilities.

Furthermore, development is irreversible while growth is reversible when amenities and facilities decay. Development is holistic, affecting at least, the vast majority of the population, if not the entire population. But growth is specific and could take the form of physical structures like water supply, electricity, healthcare, etc which may not benefit either the majority of or the entire population.

### **Criteria for Assessing Development**

Chima (2011:12) indicated some major criteria for assessing development to include:

- i) Development must bring change

- ii) The change must be positive
- iii) It must involve the people by giving them the opportunity to participate in the process, make use of local talents, local initiatives and local potentials.

### **The Concept of National Development**

Chima (2011:12-13) defined national development as the management of the triple heritage (language, culture and religion) of all the ethnic groups that make up the nation for the peaceful co-existence amongst one another together with the maximum utilization of the political, economic and technology prowess of the nation for the benefit of the nation.

In other words, if development is aimed at achieving self-reliance and improving conditions of living for the under-privileged majority of the total population in developing countries, what should form the nucleus of national development should be improvement of the quality of life of the poor and the indigent rural dwellers. In this context, rural development and national development are synonymous because they can be no meaningful national development if the constituted rural communities continue to wallow in abject poverty, ignorance, diseases, and other underdevelopment indicators.

### **Relationship between Language Education and other Discipline**

Science deals with knowledge about nature. It is the aspect of human nature that deals with the contemplation and analysis of natural phenomenon. Science observes and records events in the world and tries to explain in a logical and systematic way how they operate. On the other hand, language is the medium through which science is expressed. In summation, therefore, we can posit that both language and science have power of empiricism. Both of them are tested and results found.

### **Language and Technology**

Technology simply means the knowledge of design and what is designed is nature. That is, it reduces nature to mere artifacts and this would look absurd without a defined form and this is where language comes in to settle shortcomings that have arisen from limited natural intelligibility. The lesson adduced from the above expression is that language is the only tool by which a nation sells her technology to the entire world, and that is the reason why many developed countries like Britain, France and Germany spend billions of their respective currencies to promote their language. This is because they know that language is power and power is development.

### **Language and Culture**

As Chima (2009) puts it, “Language and culture are interwoven because the later is expressed through the former”. To highlight the importance of language and

culture in enhancing our national identity; this study suggests that indigenous language be given the attention they deserve. Coming down to culture, and its attendant role in the enhancement of national development, this paper recommends those aspects of culture that stipulate the “dos and don’ts” of the society and they are the social and oral cultures. The social culture comprises such forms as festivals, dances and religious rites while the oral culture includes songs, tales, legends, proverbs, riddles etc.

### **Language Education and Economic Development**

The concept of development in this study is important because of the emphasis on attitude. This is largely because development is more attitudinal than anything else. Development involves the society’s transformation through its institutions, organizations, social role, customary usage and attitudes to the extent that makes the society more and more positively responsive to desired modern changes.

From the foregoing, the role of language education in nation building cannot be over-emphasized. The language skills which are natural language activities, aim at the task of nation building as they are the basic sources of information both verbal and written. Also, for a nation to develop, it needs peace as no country develops in the midst of anarchy and chaos. This peace can only be brought about by the use of effective and appropriate language skills. Similarly, where there is conflict, language is persuasively used in arriving at peace. This was the case of Niger Delta Militancy brought under sedation by Late Musa Yardua and the on-going peace discussion between the federal government and the Boko Haram religious sect. Here, language skills are used as powerful tool to arrive at peace and to save the nation from disintegration and to pave way for national development.

It is the skills of language that are effectively used for mobilization and sensitization of the populace for various programmes and projects across the nation. The government agencies such as the National Orientation Agency and the Mass Media are utilizing them (language skills) in propagation of the aims and objectives of both government and private organizations.

Similarly, language is the same instrument that information units at the local, state and federal government levels use in enlightening the people on the values of paramount importance. It is not an over-statement that there is no human endeavours that can do without language which is a vital tool of communication. It guarantees socio-economic, religious, political and cultural development of the nation.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has succeeded in dealing with those aspects of Nigerian lives which when maximally utilized and managed, can promote national unity and enhance the

peaceful co-existence of Nigeria and they are language, education and culture on the one side and economic, science and technology on the other side. These are panacea for national development. Nigeria has a rich cultural heritage and a rich language background which she can utilize to promote and sustain meaningful development. The only way to project our national pride is by revitalizing and tapping from our languages and cultural heritages in order to prop and edify the socio-psychology of the budding generation for the beauty of the future.

### **Recommendation**

Some strategies are recommended for advancing the teaching of local language in our schools such as:

- i) The government and education stakeholders in the country should make provision for a well defined functional educational policy that would make it compulsory for every student in secondary school and tertiary institution to possess language skills through language education before graduation.
- ii) More so, a functional adult language literacy programme should be vigorously pursued in order to develop the important skills in them so that they can also propagate the nations development projects.
- iii) Government and education administrators should make fund available for school heads to enable them purchase necessary facilities for the school language laboratories and studios.
- iv) In-service training should be given to deserving language teachers to enable them function effectively.

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