

# RE-PACKAGING NIGERIAN LANGUAGES PROGRAMMES FOR ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION

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## **Abstract**

Education is the technique employed by any society to introduce to and integrate in youths the values and accomplishments of the civilization within which it exists. However, no functional education is practicable without the use of the language of the beneficiaries. Life is dynamic and the realization of this dictates the direction a society tailors the educational system. In order to empower the graduates of Nigerian languages to accommodate themselves to the changing situations of life, this study advocates more relevant, purposeful and practical Nigerian language programmes that will make beneficiaries job creators instead of waiting endlessly on the government for jobs that are not available. **Introduction**

Language is a crucial factor in human existence. It constitutes a major tool of communication among humans which is one of the indispensable elements for social integration and relationship. Language is equally central to the teaching-learning process. All subjects in the school curriculum are taught through the medium of language. In addition to its use as a medium of instruction in schools, language is also functional in the realization and implementation of the overall political, and socio-economic development of any nation. No activity of the government can be realized without the effective utilization of language.

In any multilingual and multicultural society like Nigeria, the place of language in education and development is given much attention. This is inevitable as the acquisition and the use of language constitutes a major key to the storehouse of human achievements (Bolorunduro, 1994). The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights (UDLR) (1996) of the United Nations Organization (UNO) in Emenanjo (2000) endows every individual with certain inalienable personal rights in language matters which include the right:

- (a) To be recognized as a member of a language community;
- (b) To the use of one's own language both in private and public;
- (c) For the individual's language and culture to be taught;
- (d) To interrelate and associate with other members of one's language community of origin; and
- (e) To an equitable presence of one's language and culture in the communications media and the right to receive attention in one's own language from governmental bodies in socio-economic relations (P. 18)

The implication of the UDLR to the Nigerian situation is that every child should be educated in his or her mother tongue because his thoughts, and ideas are expressed in his own language. It also implies that Nigerian languages must play a crucial role in the provision of functional literacy and numeracy in the current Universal Basic Education programme being championed by President Obasanjo's administration.

The dawn of the new millennium has been greeted with efforts being made in different parts of the world towards reviving and revitalizing indigenous languages (Akinbote, Odolowu and Ogunsanwo, 2003). This writer also agrees with Awoniyi (1982) who noted that no foreign language can take the place of a child's mother tongue and any system of education that disregards it does that to the detriment of the cognitive development of the child. Empirical findings have proved that children who were taught different subjects in Yoruba (Fafunwa, Macaulay and Sokoya, 1989; and Akinbote 1996), Igbo (Okonkwo, 1979) and Hausa (Umaru, 1983) cited in Akinbote et al 2003 found the Nigerian languages to have facilitated more meaningful learning than instructions received in the English language medium.

In spite of the expected goals and benefits of the present 6-3-3-4 structure of education in Nigeria, since its introduction in the 80s, the nation is still grappling with the problems of unemployment, corruption, inter and intra-ethnic strife, over-dependence on foreign goods and services. There is no doubt that urgent steps need be taken towards educational and social

reconstruction especially at a time when Nigeria has just celebrated her 43 Independence anniversary. To prevent the nation from being seen as "a fool at forty" every well meaning Nigerian must 'arise' as a "compatriot".

**Relationship Among Language Education, Economic and Social Reconstruction in Nigeria**

Attempt will be made here to discuss the relationship among language education and economic and social reconstruction in Nigeria. Economic and social reconstruction in this paper means socio-economic development of the Nigerian populace and the efforts being put in place by the government to improve the state or quality of human welfare towards a more optimum condition of living for the people. According to Chumbow (1990), national development has to do with the nation's human resources acting on its natural resources to produce goods necessary to satisfy the economic needs of the society. Experience has shown in Nigeria that it is not sufficient to have both natural and human resources for development to take place. The quantity and quality, that is level of education and training of the human resources are indispensable factors to national development. The role of education and life-long training for the production of the needed skilled manpower can therefore be appreciated since the quality of the available human resources depends on the calibre of products from the nation's educational and training institutions.

Education in the sense used here is not merely a social service but a necessary national investment (Chumbow, 1990). It (education) transcends formal scholarization to include all forms of training programmes and apprenticeships aimed at imparting knowledge and skills as well as awareness and developing the intellectual potential of individuals in both formal and non-formal contexts. These are realizable through language. The language of instruction is crucial to the educational process since effective communication between the teacher and the learner is an important factor in the teaching-learning process. The relationship between language, education and a nation's socio-economic development could be apparent since education is vital to manpower development for national growth and language medium is equally crucial in the educational process, it is therefore obvious that language is indispensable to economic and social reconstruction.

According to UNESCO (1953), the best language for educating a child that lives in his own linguistic environment is his mother tongue which is the language in which that child first learns to express his ideas about himself and the world in which he lives. It is the language in which he has the highest linguistic facility to communicate. It is pertinent to know that the colonial educational and language policies were unmindful of the educational needs of the Nigerian populace.

Okeke (2003) observes that African nations had been at the forefront of the race for technological development and they had contributed in no little way to world technology. According to him, the slave trade and the subsequent European/Arab colonization "sapped Africa of its dynamism and traditional values were relegated to the background." He also noted that indigenous languages had in the past adequate provisions of vocabulary and grammar to express emotions, thoughts, points of view and ideas in science and technology but the technologies were smashed by colonial ruthlessness. Ogunsiyi (2001) notes that the dominance of English in the field of education is the appalling rate of educational failure due to failure in English language especially at the Senior School Certificate level. It is therefore incumbent on Nigeria and other African countries to evolve a viable national development plan that is truly national, indigenous as well as redemptive in approach by redefining the goals of education in the direction of producing citizens who will be productive, creative and be assets to the nation.

In the traditional system of education, the curriculum was more utilitarian in nature. That is, it catered for needs of the individual in the society. Every citizen was skillful in one traditional vocation or the other. The medium of instruction was the mother tongue. There was no problem of unemployment and individuals in the society feared to have his or name tarnished as the individual was trained to conform with the norms, beliefs, traditions, etc. of his society and is also being professional qualified, intelligent and well behaved in his society (Majasan, 1967). Although, Ubahakwe (2002) observed that the traditional educational system produced personality that was educated, stable but superstitious, a lot of gains from the traditional system could be incorporated into the present system towards ensuring economic and social reconstruction in Nigeria. Making Nigerian Language Education Programmes More Functional

When one of the southwestern governors retrenched some teachers in his state shortly after he assumed office, and asked the victims to go and find something to do as related to their teaching subjects, it was greeted with utter condemnation. Perhaps some of us would have done the same thing if we had ourselves in his shoes. The scenario made this writer to reflect critically on the need to make Nigerian educational certificate holders more empowered for the future.

Presently, degree holders in Nigerian language are employable as teachers in primary and post-primary institutions and as lecturers in tertiary institutions. They are also employable as editors in publishing companies where books in such Nigerian languages are published. Electronic media establishments also employ them as newscasters and presenters of programmes. Some of them find themselves in the entertaining industries as poets, singers, actors, film producers, etc., but there is still

the need to make these degree holders of Nigerian languages more functional and relevant. This became necessary in a situation where unemployment rate is increasing astronomically and many public servants who are still youthful are retired without being paid their benefits promptly. Many who are still in the service of government are having many months of unpaid salaries. Many elders of pensionable age go around the streets and motor parks to beg for alms. It could be seen therefore that so much needs to be done in re-packaging the current curricula in order to make them more relevant to the social needs of Nigerians. This writer therefore suggests the following:

- (a) Integration of vocational or technical courses into the language education programme. In the non-literacy or traditional systems, there was no unemployment because children were made to undergo as many vocational occupations as possible. Such graduates of Nigerian languages should be made to be skillful in the type of agriculture that is practicable in their states of origin or places of abode. This could be any of fishing, poultry, cattle rearing, piggery, snailry, bee-honey production, etc. Other vocational occupations include groundnut/coconut/palm kernel/palm fruit oil production; traditional/modern soap making; weaving of traditional wears, traditional medicine, drumming/singing, blacksmithing/welding, traditional hair dressing, dyeing (e.g. Adire clothing materials), carpentry, clay block making, to mention just a few. Indeed, graduates of other courses could be made to run such vocational programmes.
- (b) As an alternative to the above, those who have the flair for teaching should be made to learn an additional language- preferably a foreign language. This will make such graduates relevant in countries where such languages are spoken.
- (c) In addition to the above, the curricula of Nigerian languages should be re-packaged to make the graduates computer literate and possessing the skill of using the computer to produce textual materials in their language of specialization.

### **Strategies for the Realization of the Above Suggestions**

Curriculum experts and school administrators should work hand-in-hand towards earmarking at least a period of six weeks per session for every Nigerian language student to be apprenticed to any vocational "schools" of his choice in the relevant locality. The government can revitalize the technical colleges to meet the challenges posed by such needs so that such students are sent there for such programmes. The tertiary institutions sending out these students should closely monitor the students' activities and participation at such centres. Every student should also come up with a practical evidence of such acquired skills.

The government should provide bursaries for such students and the government should be ready to provide the necessary facilities for the beneficiaries for the establishment of small scale business organizations and closely monitor the initial take-off of such business organizations.

Relevant language villages like the French village in Badagry should be established in the country where students studying such languages could go for acculturation programmes. The teaching of all Nigerian languages in schools should also be pursued by relevant stakeholders in education. Those undeveloped or unwritten languages should be developed by language experts and\* instructional and textual materials should be produced in the languages.

According to Akinbote et al (2003), the former USSR had a similar problem of multilingualism and multiculturalism but it was not allowed to affect the use of local languages as the language of instruction in primary schools. Also in the United States of America, there has been an increasing success in the teaching of some of the native languages. Akinbote, et al (2003) therefore assert that "it is not a plausible argument to say that the many indigenous languages in Nigeria will not allow the use of any of them as the medium of instruction in schools" (p.420). Experts in relevant fields are needed to work with language experts. A bold step in this direction is the publication of a book by Fakinlede, a nuclear Physicist, in 2001 titled "Modern Dictionary of the Yoruba Language; The Translation of Modern and Scientific English Terms to Yoruba Language." According to the author, "concise and precise terms have . . . been given to many words that are frequently encountered in the study of Physics, Chemistry, Biology, Mathematics and other scientific disciplines"(i).

### **Conclusion**

The writer has considered the need to empower the graduates of Nigerian languages so that they might benefit maximally from the educational system and be fully equipped to face the challenges of the new millennium. In order to achieve and realize the gains of the above given suggestions, all educational agencies: the home, school, government, mass media, clergy, experts in relevant fields must be involved. Educators should no doubt re-examine the gains of traditional education and integrate them into the modern system for the purpose of empowering the Nigerian

youths for their present and future needs.

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