

LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC REHABILITATION AND RELIANCE: THE CLASSROOM PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This paper looks at how language education enhances economic rehabilitation and paves the way for self-reliance. Using the classroom example, the paper demonstrates how language education makes a man what he is, arguing that language education gives man (the ability to read and write). It further posits that since language is an exclusive possession of man, effective language education rehabilitates man economically thereby making him self-reliant. Knowledge, they say is strength and to be knowledgeable in one's field of endeavour, adequate language training is a sine qua non. Using the classroom as a platform, the paper asserts that knowledge is handed down and instruction imparted through language. Demonstrating that language education makes a man professionally relevant, the paper further reveals that language is a panacea for individual progress and development in the modern society. It concludes by making suggestions on how to encourage language education for economic rehabilitation and reliance.

Introduction

Man is therefore the prime mover in every economy. Without him nothing at all can be produced. In other words, the resources of nature are negative and inert. Man, on the other hand, is positive and dynamic, he is the determinant of all economic and social change, and the generator of all, he is at one and the same time, the initiator, innovator, accelerator, prime mover, producer, distributor, exchanger and consumer in every economy.

The above submission as cited by Enoh (1996) sums up Obafemi Awolowo's philosophy of education. It throws its search light and telescopic lens on man around whom every economic activity revolves, Man is the most important agent in all economic activities. This accounts for why it is often said that there is no incident without character and no character without incident. This is because character makes incident what it is. Thus, language education makes any conceivable meaning when there is the existence of the key player, man who is referred to as the "prime mover". We can therefore, talk of language education for economic rehabilitation and reliance in so far as it affects an individual in the society. Language itself is as old as man himself.

Apparently, it is against this understanding that Halliday (1978:9) asserts that language makes the social man what he is as "there can be no social man without language and no language without social man¹". In this view, the existence of language implies the existence of social man. Language is thus the most important tool in a child's growth and development. It is the only channel through which the patterns of living are transmitted to him. A child uses language to act and relate with those around him, including his family, peers and neighbours.

Having in mind, Awo's description of man as not only a positive, dynamic and determinant of all economic and social changes, but also the generator of all the impulses of progress through initiation, innovation and necessary acceleration of the economic activities, this paper examines how man is able to achieve this through language education, the classroom perspective. What then is language and what is education? In which ways will these affect the growth and development of a child (man)?

Language

Language to Gimson (1980:1-4) is "a system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community". This pattern of communication covers a system of significant sound units (Phonemes), the inflexion and arrangement of words and the association of meaning with words. For Egonu (1988:47,59) language is seen as an "arbitrary code of symbols by which people communicate with each other". These two definitions of the term, language appear similar as long as they concern human beings and communication.

This understanding of language seems to agree with the view of Fowler (1971:8-22) who sees it as "abstract system of rules which enables a speaker to communicate with others". This is in consonance with the way *Advance Learner's Dictionary of Current English* looks at the term. This Authority looks at language as "human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideals, feelings and desires by means of a system of sound symbols". All these definitions depict the imposing stature of language as a medium of communication and interaction for man. This by implication reveals that language is a sine qua non in the life of a man if he is to function effectively in his social environment.

Education

On the other hand, education has been defined in a variety of ways by education experts, According to Enoh (1996:242-243), Fafunwa defines education as:

The aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, altitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives . . . it is a process of transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth, for disseminating knowledge either to ensure control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both.

This definition is embracing as it covers both formal and informal education. He however tries to distinguish informal education from formal education, which to him revolves around the classroom, an aspect central to this discourse. To him then, formal education is "the sum total of all the processes by means of which an individual develops abilities, altitudes and other forms of behaviour of positive (and sometimes negative) values in the society of which he lives". Although this paper intends to lay emphasis on the classroom as an institutional setting in which knowledge and skills are imparted to the individual (man) for the purpose of economic development and reliance, Fafunwa seem to argue that education takes place both inside and outside the classroom.

In the view of Okonkwo (1996:1-4), education is "a set of techniques for imparting knowledge, skills and attitudes" as well as a set of "theories which purport to explain or justify the use of these techniques". He also sees it as a set of values or ideas embodied or expressed in the purpose for which knowledge, skills and attitude are imparted. Citing various education experts, and examining education in a variety of ways, Okonkwo sums up by asserting that any given nation may look at education as:

The study of its history, traditions, literature, languages, beliefs, values, habits, climatic conditions, forces, factors and attitudes governing its social organisations, including the political, economic and religious conditions that determine the pulse of its development.

The question that thus arises is, who is to impart (hc.sc knowledge and skills? On which language is these to be imparted? Since it has been verified that an acceptable language is to be use in imparting educational skills and knowledge. This will necessarily make it imperative to examine the role of the teacher as it applies to education of the individual (especially the classroom perspective) and (he language of education.

The Role of the Teacher

The teacher is the most resourceful personnel through whom [caching and learning can be imparted. This special function of the teacher accounts for why Davwar and Bewereng (1999:9) assert that the "teacher is the most expensive and important resource in the classroom". The government and public are therefore, called upon to invest in the training of teachers to enable (hem cope with future challenges in their profession, especially the classroom. Indeed, both the government and general public expect the teachers to be faithful, functional and productive. Looking at the monumental function of the teacher in the upbringing of a child, Halliday (1978: 9) describes him as "a creator of social man", seeing the teacher as "a midwife in the creation process".

The teacher is thus the most resourceful tool of education that any nation can boast of

Commenting on the functional role of the teacher in education, Enoh (1996:261) writes that Fafunwa opines that the teacher occupies a "strategic position in all aspects of development" including economic reliance and rehabilitation of man since he trains the manpower needed for nation building. He asserts that a qualitative and up-to-date teacher is very important since teachers are *primus inter pares* in nation building. The role of the teacher transcends every facet of development. Standing between the old and new culture, and ensuring that perfect interaction occurs, he trains the manpower needed not only for social change but also moral growth and political and economic development. How does (he teacher carry out these monumental functions before him? The teacher carries out these functions through teaching and learning and imparting skills for a particular trade and profession in the classroom.

The Classroom Setting

The institutional classroom is perhaps the only places designated for imparting educational instructions. This accounts for why Kallerman (1980) posits that "the school classroom is the only place" officially situated for teaching and learning. Even though it may be argued that a child is trained not only in the classroom as the essential qualities, norms and nature of the society are imparted to him by parents, family relations, peers and neighbourhood children, according to Halliday (1978: 9), these are but complementary roles to the teacher's. The teacher's classroom activities begin from the nursery school onward to the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education. National Policy on Education (1981) recognizes the nursery as effecting a transition from the home to the school and preparing the child for the primary level of education. During this period, the spirit of enquiry and creativity are inculcated in the child, just as the rudiments of numbers, letters, team spirit and other good habits are taught to him. Enoh (1996: 249) writes that Fafunwa observes that the first six years are the most formative years in the life of a child as these, which also cover the nursery school period are vital to the progress of a child. He therefore requires "appropriate and intelligent guidance" in his mental, emotional and social potentialities which are very sharp.

Furthermore, a child is inculcated during the primary education, permanent literacy and numeracy, the ability to communicate effectively, basis for scientific and reflective thinking among others. It is at this level of education that a child learns how to read, write, speak fluently, calculate adequately and acquire mastery of other subjects. O'Connor (1971:1) realizes the need for special teachers in the classroom at this level in the training of the child when he asserts that: We know something of the language of mathematics and how to read maps, charts and other symbolic materials. We... learned much about all that surrounds us in (the world and how to set about solving certain kinds of problems. We have gained understanding of a number of subjects as well as rules and theories . . . physics, morals and politics, through the functions and activities of teachers who specialize in these areas.

Apparently, the primary school is not only the first stage of the child's education (as the awareness of the nursery education is still lacking in most families) but also the foundation of the entire educational system. Its collapse is therefore, the collapse of the entire developmental efforts of a nation. No wonder Enoh (1996) posits that for Fafunwa, this is the basis of all the development as no country can expect to develop to its maximum so long its masses remain ignorant, poor and disease ridden. Obviously, the onus of bringing into effective materialization, the noble objectives of education be it at the primary, secondary or tertiary rests with the teachers. The teacher embodies the central values of the society which he in turn transmits to the students in the classroom. Invariably, the teacher has been seen as the corner stone of every educational system. He is the pivot on which any meaningful educational development rotates.

Hence, when we talk of professionalism and specialization, we look at the teacher who in his endeavours brings into being, the professional lawyer, medical doctor, pharmacist, architect, technologist, accountant, journalist, chemist, political scientist, poet, dramatist, engineer, novelist, administrator, educationist, economist and professionals in other fields of human endeavour. In this way, the teacher is one among equals. Counting himself as one of (the teachers, Achebe (1978:1-4) lends his voice to the special role of the teacher when he declares

thus:

I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past with all its imperfections - was not one long night of savagery from which the first European acting on God's behalf delivered them.

Language Education

The question of what kind of language to be used in imparting educational instructions for comprehension and adequate application has been a major point of discourse over the years. This is so because language makes expression possible and communication easy. It is often said that words are the vehicle of thought, but without appropriate language, even utterance will be totally impossible and communication impeded. The shift of language in Nigeria's education has actually drawn policy comments from various educational minds in the nation. One of such minds, according to Enoh (1996) is Fafunwa who asserts that the imposition of an alien language as medium of instruction is among the factors militating against the dissemination of knowledge and skills as well as social and economic emancipation of the developing countries. Insisting that alien language is not the language to develop the enterprises of the mind, Fafunwa attributes the high standard primary school drop-out rate in Nigeria to premature introduction of English as a language of instruction at the primary school. The argument is that continuity in the thought process is guaranteed in a child instructed in his mother-tongue during his primary school education as this will permit more learning at the secondary school where the individual is trained to play leadership roles in the social, economic and political development of his nation.

Naturally, when instruction is given in a foreign language, a distorted prepositional relationship is established between grasp of the language and acquisition of knowledge. It is against this backdrop that the National Policy on Education (1981) provides that a child should be taught in the mother tongue or language of his environment at the nursery school. He is to be instructed in English during the next five years while he studies the mother tongue as a subject. While English continues to be the language of instruction, two of Nigeria's three major languages have been made compulsory subjects at the secondary school. Appraising the nation's language policy at the primary and intermediate levels of education, Nwana (1988: 20) asserts that the aim is to make the mother-tongue important and respected as well as promote national consciousness and unity.

The controversy surrounding the language of education and communication did not begin today. It has been a major national and continental issue since 1962 when African writers gathered at Makerere University to decide the language on which African literature should be written. Wali (1963:6) views it "unscientific to formulate theories of African literature in terms of the aesthetics of other languages", Arguing that true African literature "must be written in African language", he stresses that the organic unity of Nigeria as a nation and African identity cannot be realistic until they can "communicate in their own language". Young (198: 24 - 48) also observes that a lot is lost in both semantic and syntactic during translation from English to African language as the translation involves "transference" not only from one language to another, but also from one medium to another and from "a spoken to a written culture".

Nevertheless Achebe (1975:55 - 62) defends the use of English as the language of instruction and interaction. According to him, international language such as English offers a lot of possibilities, including economic rehabilitation and reliance. Pointing out that English Language offers "most exciting possibility", he advises that the African writer (and indeed the teacher) should aim at using "English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost", This is indeed, an open message for the teachers and lecturers at the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions on whom the onus of training the citizens for the needed manpower personnel for economic rehabilitation self-reliance, social and political changes as well as technology lie. It is only through this that the nation will realise the needed advancement in technology.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that language is a panacea for economic rehabilitation and reliance. Through vivid discussion, it has been able to prove that language education holds the key for individual progress and national development. This paper also demonstrates that man is little less than a beast without language. Finally, it proved the importance and resourceful roles of the teacher as the agent of education in all ramifications. The classroom has been depicted as the official setting for teaching and learning as well as imparting of moral instructions for the development of man. Language is therefore, the only instrument for educational advancement, individual expression and national and international communication and interaction. It also holds the key for domestic and international trade and commerce.

Recommendations

Based on the understanding that language education is a necessary study as language affects all areas of human endeavours, the following recommendations become imperative:

The government should give adequate attention to the training of language teachers. Government should also sponsor conferences, seminars and workshops on Nigerian languages.

There is the need to formulate an indigenous national language to serve as the language of educational instruction, communication and interaction. Government should therefore, encourage efforts in this direction. The government should also give incentives and motivations to the study and learning of Nigerian languages. In this view, there is the need to create a conducive learning environment. There is also the need to create awareness on the need to formulate a Nigerian National Language. The government should therefore employ more graduate language teachers with proven abilities in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. The pupils and students should be made to develop interest in studying Nigerian languages through awards and scholarship. Language teachers should endeavour to provide tutorials to discuss problems associated with languages. Language teachers should endeavour to make corrections after marking tests and assignment on languages so that students should know their mistakes. Government should also make the teaching of language attractive by giving incentives to language teachers. This will encourage commitment to the teaching of language. Language policy of the NPE should be encouraged and rigorously followed. This will make students develop love and interest to study languages at the higher levels of learning. Since English Language is at the moment, the language of instruction, communication and interaction, as well as international trade and commerce, efforts should be made to study it at the primary, intermediate and tertiary levels.

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