REVITALIZING LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR POLITICAL STABILITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
Despite other means of expressing one’s feelings, emotions and desires in communication, the verbal medium is primary. Man is endowed with the capacity to talk systematically and flexibly in his world of interaction. This flexibility leads him to use language in very many complex situations and conditions. However, with this single potential, the need to aptly use language in diverse and critical circumstances comes every now and then, hence, the need to be educated, enlightened and coached on the use of the target language, in this context, English. This affords the user the ability to appropriately and suitably sustain the ever needed interaction. However, English language has been recognized as the unifying agent of the cultural diversity which defines Nigerian linguistic position. The adoption of English as an official language has unarguably promoted cultural awareness, tolerance, and political stability among others. This paper therefore discusses the teaching and learning of English language, bringing out the effective ways English language teaching will be enhanced to attain the needed political stability which Nigeria hitherto yearns for.

KEYWORDS: Revitalization, Language, Education, Political stability

INTRODUCTION
Nigeria as a political entity is a conglomeration of diverse tribes and ethnic groups. It is a multilingual country with numerous languages and dialects. It is said to have the highest number of languages spoken in Africa. The number of languages spoken in Nigeria has been variously estimated to be about 500 languages supported by about 250 diverse cultures (Musa, 2012; Onukak & Nwaedozie, 2016). Yusuf (2012) opines that Nigeria is a multilingual country where an estimated 505 languages are spoken of which Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa are the major languages with about 18 million speakers each. 557 individual languages abound in Nigeria.
according to Simons, Gary and Charles (2018). Obi (2013) also asserts that Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural nation with about 450 languages and thousands of dialects.

Such a situation makes for a suitable adoption of the English language as the official language of government and as the language of instruction in schools. Internal politics apart, the English language affords Nigerians easy communication among the many linguistic groups in the country and with other English speaking peoples all over the world (Abe, 1991).

Given the position English language occupies in Nigeria (being the language that integrates the very many indigenous languages for unity), it is imperative then, that the language be taught well in schools so that the users will communicate effectively and freely. English language is also the language that bridges the gap in education as it is effectively used in imparting the necessary skills for national development. English language bridges the gap created by multilingualism, multiculturalism and ethnicity which hamper mutual co-existence. Presently, English is the dominant common language in Nigeria because no indigenous language is spoken by an overwhelming majority of the people as English is. Scholars like Azikiwe (2007) assert that English has made inter-ethnic communication easy and thus, facilitating contact between people of diverse language backgrounds. From this, we deduce that English is a unifying force in Nigeria. Azikiwe further added that despite the fact that every Nigerian is proficient in his/her indigenous language, letters, notes, diaries, messages are received in English even though the discussions are in the indigenous languages. Also, counting is done in English and time is said in English too. English therefore, plays a vital communicative role in the Nigerian society.

Language learning is not just a matter of acquiring the skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing but it consists of developing communicative competence where these skills are often used in an integrated manner along with several other abilities that help people engage in a dialogue. The place of English is not merely in the educational arena, but also in the areas of social change, personal advancement and national development.

THE CONCEPT OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION

We can use language to instruct others, prepare for danger, remind ourselves of past events, guide behaviour, give a sense of purpose and pride and create new ideas and concepts that give rise to a new and different world. Language is the vehicle of communication and expression used by all humans for interactional purposes such as politics, commerce, education and culture (Abdulkarim, 2008). Language is thus, an indispensable tool in education. In the words of Wolff in Alidou, Brock-Utne, Dallio, Heugh & Wolff (2006), “Language is not everything in education, but without language everything in education is nothing” (p.9).
In their book ‘Language Education and Applied Linguistics’, Nicholas and Starks (2014) see language education as a field that is used to refer to either one or all of: dominant, mother tongue literacy practices, ‘foreign’ language education, minority language education, education in multiple languages and bilingual education.

Language education also refers to the process and practice of acquiring a second or foreign language. It is primarily a branch of applied linguistics which can also be considered as an interdisciplinary field. Amadi (2014: p.1) has this to say on language education:

Language education is the process of planning, developing and implementing the language arts curriculum in such a way that one is trained to acquire language skills that will facilitate his ability to cope with other life skills. Language is communication between the sender and the receiver. Both the sender and the receiver are literate as a result of language education. English language is the language of instruction in education that must be properly used to enable students think properly in order to help in nation building.

Language education should be taken very seriously in Nigerian educational system to enable the nation meet globalization needs. Language specialists who have the oracy and literacy skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing must be able to adequately articulate words in their correct forms and possess both linguistic and communicative competence. They should also have enough vocabularies and the basic language registers of different fields of human endeavors. They equally should possess mastery of the language curriculum and the professional skills and methodology of teaching the language to students along with other skills.

Language education is an ideal instrument for national development and any curriculum geared towards producing manpower needed for national development is functional education. Skills are inculcated through language. Language education trains people in literacy skills for life-long education and without language, it will be impossible for an instructor to transmit instructional knowledge and skills to learners. When instructions are understood because of acquired language, the learners are filled with joy and this motivates them to acquire more knowledge.

English language has favourably placed itself in Nigeria. Internationally, it must be well learnt to meet with the global needs of foreign diplomacy, trade, technology, etc. In Nigeria, as earlier mentioned, the multiplicity of languages paved way for English language to be adopted as the language of instruction. Every Nigerian in all fields of human endeavour learns his/her discipline through language. If there is any missing link along the line or during the training period, this may be attributed to communication gap as learners find it difficult to learn when the language of instruction does not match their level (Amadi, 2014).
ROLE OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION

According to Akindele and Adegbite (1999), there is no doubt that many of the country’s numerous languages are at present ill-equipped to perform the role they are expected to perform in the educational system because they do not yet have a standard orthography. This implies that there is the need for the continued use of English language in the educational system. In any development in education, skills are involved and communicating is part of intellectual skills. Without intellectual skills, the world of business and other economic activities will fail. In order to realize the nation’s dream of becoming a united, strong and self-reliant nation as well as a great and dynamic economy, courses are provided in the National Policy on Education for monotechnics, polytechnics, universities and teacher education. The needful will only be done through the use of appropriate medium of instruction which for now is the English language.

Little wonder then that English language occupies a central position in the school system as it is the language of instruction in the educational system (Azikiwe, 2007). English language has served as the only means to adequately co-ordinate teaching and learning at all levels of Nigerian educational system; hence, it is tested in all certificate examinations. It has become a prerequisite for employment, admission into any higher institution, technological development and the language of the learned. All school subjects are taught in English language except the native languages. Indeed, no other subject serves the dual purposes of being a distinctive subject in the curriculum and a conventionally accepted medium of instruction than English, and this makes it unique (Galadima & Abdullahi, 2017). A credit pass in English language in SSCE, WAEC, NECO, NABTEB, GCE is a pre-requisite and compulsory for entry into any tertiary institution (Nathanael, Josephine & Ringnan, 2014; Jen & Adakonye, 2016).

There is no doubt that English occupies an enviable position in Nigeria as it is seen as the livewire for the survival, growth and unity of Nigeria.

BARRIERS TO LANGUAGE EDUCATION
The Situation Factor

Nigeria is a multilingual society as a result of the diverse and numerous languages and tribes. These indigenous languages are learnt right from infancy and the system of rules of these languages are internalized in the individual speaker from birth. As a result of this, learners of English language in Nigeria often face problems in learning English. First, most of the learners have reached the critical period of learning language in keeping with the Chomskian assertion that there is a critical period for language learning. Chomsky claimed that there is a critical period during which the human mind is able to learn language and that after this period, language cannot be acquired in a natural fashion. The Critical Period Hypothesis states that:
the first few years of life is the most crucial time for an individual to acquire a first language if presented with adequate stimuli. If language input does not occur until after this time, the individual will never achieve a full command of language.

In addition, the problem of interference of the mother tongue is predominantly evident in the use of English in Nigeria. The reason for this is mainly found in the efficiency of language acquired from the language learned. So since the level of language learning is low in Nigeria and learning English language is a matter of going to school, those who have limited access to school are prone to problems. As a result of the multilingual nature of Nigeria, learners’ language background differs. In one class, learners from ten different language backgrounds may be found, depending on the number of learners per class as regards to their ethnic groups. Njoku and Izuagba (2001) maintain that this causes a lot of problems for language teachers no matter how efficient they are in teaching the target language.

Learner Factor

In Nigeria, English is learned in a natural way. Children, learning in a confined environment, face problems because they must first process the linguistic information before understanding the actual communication. Supporting this view, Oluwatosin in Osuafor (2001) states that if new concepts are taught to the child in the mother tongue, the only new thing the child will be learning is that new concept. If it is in English, which is not the mother tongue, the child will be learning two things simultaneously, English and a new concept.

The absence of high verbal aptitude in a learner hinders language learning. If the learner’s attitude towards English language is positive, then the language learning will be facilitated. In some areas, learners have negative attitude towards the learning of English, probably because they have been immersed into their own native language; as such, they find it difficult learning English. Therefore, this affects learners negatively in their academic performance since English is the language of classroom instruction.

Teacher Factor

Teachers are the transmitters of knowledge. They are known as role models and their personality influences the learners a lot. Poor and inadequate training adversely affects language learning. It is believed that one cannot give what one does not have. Teachers’ proficiency in the language is therefore, very important in learning the language. It is however, very unfortunate that English language is poorly taught and learned in Nigerian schools by students, especially at the primary school level which is the bedrock of the educational system (Azikiwe, 2007). This poor foundation goes a long way in affecting learners as they progress.
to other educational levels. Poor teaching is sequel to poor learning and it is only good input
that brings about good output. Njoku and Izuagba (2001) affirm that:

If the teacher is not competent in the target language, he ends up teaching the
learner incorrect forms. If he is not up to date in the methods of teaching English,
he uses the wrong method or a method not suitable for the learners and the subject
matter. For a language teacher to be effective, he must take into consideration the
socio-economic and cultural setting in which he is teaching.

A situation where the least qualified and those who failed to gain admission for courses
of their choice in the university later find themselves in the classroom as the last option,
adversely affects language teaching. What happens to the learners who now find themselves in
the hands of such unprepared teachers? Worst still, these so called teachers are given every
subject to teach irrespective of what they can offer to the learners.

The poor linguistic performance of Nigerian students at all levels of education has
yielded low manpower production in language education. Lack of trained language teachers to
fill the gap for the English language manpower needs of Nigerian educational instructions at
all level, has therefore, been a general concern.

REVITALISING LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Quite a great number of views of language revitalization centre on endangered or
threatened languages from which English language is exceptionally excluded. These
endangered languages have gained the attention of linguists all over the world. Studies like
those of Tsunoda (2006), Alshehri (2016) have taken this dimension without looking at
reviving language education. However, English language, being the language in context here
needs to be looked at closely, that is how it is learnt, and highlight some of the hindrances
students face in learning the language so that learners and users attain a certain level of
proficiency to allow them adapt and be accustomed to any linguistic challenge they may face.
Despite the outcry of indigenous researchers on the hegemony of English and the constant call
for the revitalisation of the many endangered languages, coupled with the evolving advocacy
of proposal and debate from time to time of the possibility of replacing one of the main Nigerian
indigenous languages, English language continues to thrive as the language that maintains and
keeps the country as a single entity.

English language should be learned, first and foremost, through listening and speaking;
later reading and writing would follow. In other words, a second language is better learned in
this order: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Whenever learners are being introduced to
a new level of education, be it at the primary, secondary or tertiary level, they should be given
the opportunity to listen first to the language, followed by speaking, before the last two skills
of reading and writing are introduced. However, learners succeed with ease if and when the
tasks and materials used for performing the tasks are within their levels of development and
maturation. This means that all learning materials such as books, charts, records, films and a
host of others should be carefully graded and within the level of skills already possessed by the
learners so that they are not forced into making mistakes because the task and materials are too
difficult for them.

In addition to this, the learning of English demands a lot of time and patience on the
part of the teacher so that much more direct learning contact between teacher and learners exist
for practicing listening and speaking skills in particular. This is possible, however, where the
language class is small. Obviously, this is going to be difficult to observe in Nigeria with the
present teacher/students ratio of one to nearly a hundred or over in most schools.

English is the servicing subject in the post primary school curriculum since it is the
medium of instruction of all other subjects. Hence, success in the teaching and learning of
English depends so much on the cooperation of other subject teachers in the school. Language
learning therefore should incorporate the learning of all other school subjects to provide
continual correct use of English. This is realizable if teachers of English bring it to the
understanding of their colleagues that good English is also important in geography, physics,
history, religious studies and biology lessons as it is in English lessons.

Because language teaching and learning is bedeviled with myriads of problems, the
teacher, the learner, government, education institutions and parents need to play roles in solving
the problem. The core of all the efforts is centred on the learner who is the recipient of the
combined experiences of the mentioned stakeholders.

There is no doubt that teachers need to do a lot for themselves in an effort to improve
the teaching of the use of English in Nigeria. Nwanyanwu (2017) observes that effective
teaching requires that language teachers possess high levels of personal proficiency and
extensive understanding of how second language pedagogy can help learners to develop their
abilities. The teachers and students should make use of web resources. Several teacher and
learner resources abound on the internet which can make tremendous impact on the use of
English, if exploited. There is therefore, need for computer literacy and establishment of an
active website for Nigerian teachers. Teachers should be encouraged to use computers and
internet in ways conducive to their unique environment. This will expose and link them to
materials and resources available on the web. Teachers must reward efforts of learners so as to
motivate their struggle to acquire the language skills. International interaction and exposure
should be encouraged among teachers. The teachers should also attend international
conferences, subscribe to international journals or belong to national and international bodies. In addition, teachers should be motivated to appreciate the extra effort they are being asked to make (Nneka & Omeje, 2013).

It is however imperative that the government makes its aims, objectives, goals and policies in line with world trends. Government as a matter of priority should make available necessary facilities that will empower language teaching and learning and also school managements should arouse the interest of language learners by providing relevant equipment and facilities for effective English teaching and learning (Fatiloro, 2015). Nneka and Omeje (2013) maintain that the environment should be friendly and words should be backed up with actions that have taken all factors into consideration.

Essentially, language learners must read because reading improves pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing skills. Yet it is suggested that the following steps should be considered by the language learner:

1. read sentences and think about their structure
2. learn new words from a dictionary
3. write a correct sentence by consulting dictionaries, grammar guides, and the Web
4. practice the pronunciation of sounds and words

In Nigeria, the teaching and learning of English is majorly done through the use of textbooks, dictionaries, chalkboards, workbooks and posters. Most schools lack modern technological devices like audio and video tapes, language laboratories, e-textbooks, flash cards, internet facilities, newspapers, etc. Thus, as a nation, there is need to confront this issue so as to empower the teaching and learning of English. Teacher education institutions should ensure the good, functional state of facilities and staff should be encouraged to give in their best.

There should be rigorous teacher education where only the best graduates of secondary school are admitted into teacher education programmes. Pre-service and in service training are also imperative for successful teaching and should not be trivialised. Teaching research in language teaching should be encouraged to improve teaching quality. That is, facilitators of education should promote language teacher research engagement and there should be workload allocation for research time to enable teachers of English to be research active. Lastly, parents should arouse the interest of their wards by providing needed materials and conducive learning and studying environments at home.
LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR POLITICAL STABILITY

English language in Nigeria is seen as the language of national stability. The retention of English as an official language has eliminated the political tension that would have arisen in choosing one of the ethnic languages. Political problems like mutual suspicion and fear of domination would have been the outcome or consequence. Nwachukwu (2001) opines that if we remove English from our educational system and our polity (and replace it with an indigenous Nigerian language), we would cut the strongest string that holds the country together.

The choice of a national language has been a political issue as ethnic groups in Nigeria would interpret the choice of a particular language as the country’s lingua franca as a way of conferring political domination on that chosen linguistic group. The consensus is that the best option is to live with English, notwithstanding its colonial reminiscence, than to delve into “the explosive issue” of making a choice from one of the ethnic languages in the country. English language therefore is used as a national language as a result of its neutrality.

Yusuf (2012) maintains that English language is the most important language of the world being the first language of the United Nations and arguably the language mostly spoken in the world. English has helped in promoting, nurturing and uniting the Nigerian nation over the years. It can therefore, be said to be the language of integration and political stability in Nigeria. Yusuf further argues that activities conducted in indigenous languages are reprobated as being ethnic or tribal, except in cultural celebrations or entertainment displays. This explains why even during the first republic and the colonial era when English had not attained its present level of ascendancy in national and international affairs, political parties were formed in English. The political parties however, had regional bases but the fact that they were named in English entailed their collective import. The Northern People’s Congress (NPC), the Action Group (AG), the NCNC (National Council of Nigeria Citizens, after the excision of Southern Cameroon), National Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), e.t.c, were formed to integrate all Nigerians and give them a sense of belonging (Obiegbu, 2015). This trend has continued until today with all the national political parties formed and sloganeered in English.

In addition, Ogu (1992) reaffirms the role of English language thus: The English language brought into one linguistic umbrella people of diverse languages and ethnic groups. Hence, it was not a language that was based on one ethnic group or one geographical area. People found in it the unobtainable linguistic unity that they so much crave for. Its non-ethnic nature provided a means of peaceful co-existence and communication. In addition to these, Nathaniel and Ringnan (2014) maintain that the extra-linguistic factor of politics and ethnicity
have made it impossible for indigenous language(s) to serve as instruments of national cohesion, rather, the credit goes to the English language.

The role of English language is so pervading and total that one may begin to battle whether English is still a second language in Nigeria. This is because English language has been adopted and appropriated by Nigerians, used as the language of education and been made to fill the roles reserved for the native languages. Without language skills, it will be impossible for an instructor to transmit instructional knowledge and train certain skills. When instructions are understood because of acquisition of language, the learner is filled with joy and this motivates him/her to acquire both mechanical and technical manpower. The mastery thus, assures an individual of being productive in other spheres of life as it equips an individual for a better tomorrow.

CONCLUSION

Since the English language plays a very important role in the modern world (both nationally and internationally), its learning and use should be maintained. Similarly, indigenous languages play a role in national integration, and are important elements of socio-cultural identity. The linguistic situation of Nigeria has been highlighted which made the use of English to become imperative especially within the context of the contemporary status of the language. The paper found that the English language occupies a place of pride in the socio-economic and educational pursuits in Nigeria. For the unity of Nigeria to be sustained, it is suggested that the English language should continue to play its unifying role for the essentially necessary national integration and political stability, while we continue to develop and maintain our local languages so as not to destroy the beauty of our natural endowment and heritage.

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