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The Role of English Language in Fostering Human Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

The language policy in Nigeria granted the English language as the status of being the sole official language, and the language of instruction in the country. This approach influenced the educated people's competence, and subsequently, attitudes towards others within their locality and global arena. The study aims to investigate the Role of English language in fostering human development in Nigeria. This paper argues that English as the Nigerian official language is well accepted due to the multi-lingual state of Nigeria. The study observes that English language is a political and social element in the process of building, unification, and maintaining the Nigerian state and as an essential element of national development. This study contributes to the understanding of multi-lingual nations and supports the research literature which showed that English language plays a significant role in unifying multi-lingual Nigeria. English language has the status of being the sole official language in Nigeria, and the language of instruction in the country. Its role in fostering socio-economic development cannot be overemphasized. The study also examined the role of the English Language in the socio-economic Development of Nigeria. The study observed that English language is a political and social element in the

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process of the socio-economic development of the Nigerian state and as an essential element of national development. This paper also recommends that grassroots language education should be given to all citizens. This, in turn, will help promote human capacity building and the socioeconomic development of Nigeria.

Keywords: English Language, Development, Role, Fostering, Nigeria

Introduction

Language plays a vital role in human development through education and education is realized through effective language and communication process in order to produce competent citizens who are empowered to perform his designated tasks in whatever form they come. With this understanding, this paper therefore seeks to assess the role that English language can play in fostering the socioeconomic development of Nigeria Bako, (2004). Human development has to do with conditions that allow individuals to improve their capabilities and achieve their maximum potentials as human beings. Human development focuses on people rather than the economy in which human beings live. It is a process by which individuals acquire skills and knowledge that will transform their lives and make them better people, able to solve their problems, live a better life and contribute meaningfully to the society where they live. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in Human Development Report (HDR, 2015) defines human development as "ability to lead long and healthy lives, to be knowledgeable, to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living and to be able to participate in the life of the community. When we relate language and colonialism, the strength of colonial empires was dependent on effective communication between the colonizers and the colonized. For example in African, it can be seen very clearly that European powers adopted different strategies. No matter how much the language policy was imposed on the conquered population, it is difficult to deny the claims of the two. Firstly, after the conquest of the territory language became the language of the colonizer power. Secondly, the language of colonized was degraded, both physically and mentally, to the role of the slave language, even primitive language. In the period before the conquest missionaries were agents of language. Introducing the teaching of reading and writing, at the same time European languages were taught. It became a symbolic act. It was the transition from a traditional to

modern society. Language has started to be treated as a powerful political instrument (Gawrycki, 2011). Language can be used in many ways; one of them is in specific purpose areas such as social or cultural communication, government decisions, political debate, media which could foster National Development Asade, (2000).

Every cultural group has its semiotic systems, experiences or values. Learning different artistic traditions or religions allows people to understand what and how they are. It involves gaining knowledge, but also an appreciation of otherness- the cultural conceptualizations- which are foundations influencing other groups' collective encounters with reality, whether it is other times, belief or values. Ideally, this has an effect of re-imagination assumptions about what is "normal" and appropriate to an enriching perspective that diversity makes intercultural awareness (Bianco, 2010). This is done through language. Language communicates and brings people close but frequently it lends support to crucial differences and thus surface conflicts, difficult to be managed which put the society or the nation in disharmony. Also, communicates on a common language can help defuse tension as well as a step in solving potential conflicts and conflicts. Due to the above reason, this paper tends to show that English language can be seen as political and social too for the process of building, unification and maintaining the Nigerian state as an essential element of National Development (Federal Government of Nigeria (2004).

The role of English language in human development cannot be overemphasized. Where there is no language there is no development, and this is a fact. However, the mere presence of a language does not entail facilitation of the primary purpose of language which is communication. In turn, effective communication facilitates development. Communication is an important prerequisite of development and this is manifested through language. Language must be seen to be communicating the intended meaning as a vehicle to achieving set goals, and not an end in itself. As economists say, a genuine choice is made on entities which are similar; not those which are not at par. To use an Economics concept, one can have things which are not equal without any opportunity cost. Specifically, socioeconomic development, on one hand, and English language use on the other, are not equal. In fact, English language use facilitates socio-economic development. Any development that takes place in any nation is executed through language Olaoye . (2004). the importance of language to man is incalculable, especially when daily human interaction is considered.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is hinged on two theories. First, on Amartya Sen"s „A more Human Theory of Development" and secondly, on Charles Curran"s Theory of Community Language Learning. In Sen"s book*, Development as Freedom,* written in 1999, he makes it abundantly clear that human development is about the expansion of citizens" capabilities. For Sen. Freedom means increasing citizens" access and opportunities to the things they have reason to value. He challenges the mainstream concept of measuring development by economic growth. According to him, poverty, unfulfilled basic needs (like food, shelter and clothing), occurrence of famines, violation of political freedoms and the neglect of the agency of women remain with us today despite „unprecedented opulence". Sen, focuses on human capabilities that is on what people can do and be. It is these capabilities rather than the income or goods that they receive, that determine their wellbeing. It is his ideas that led to the construction of the Human Development Index (HDI) which include: poverty reduction, access to education, increase in life expectancy and women empowerment. Today as never before, the rights of the poor are taken into consideration as those of the rich.

This theory is suitable for this paper because of the apparent fact that human resource is one of the most important catalysts in a nation's development. In fact it is a major propeller for development. Let an environment be created in which all citizens are opportune to improve and expand their individual capabilities and see how it rubs off on both the economy and national development in return.

This paper also draws on the theory of community language learning (CLL) developed by Charles Curran in 1972. CLL was inspired by Carl Roger"s view of Education; that all living creatures are motivated to live up to their potentials, but human beings are often impeded by their environment and personal problems. Once the impediments are eliminated, the individual can develop his full potentials. Community language learning is a language teaching approach based on counseling techniques. Here the hierarchical student-teacher relationship is dispensed with and the counselor-client relationship is adopted. The idea is to eliminate any sense of challenge or risk-taking from the emotionally delicate client, which theoretically would loosen him or her to learn a second language without difficulty. In other words, it is an approach that alleviates anxiety and threat and other personal problems a person encounters in learning a second language.

This theory is also relevant on the issue of English language education considering the importance of English language to the nation's quest for development. If the aim is for English to be used by the wider population as this paper suggests, then this approach would be suitable for teaching the citizens in both formal and non-formal settings. Once their impediments are removed, Nigerians would learn English with ease. This would enable them develop their full potentials both as individuals and as members of the society.

The conceptualization of Language

Language is known to be as old as human society whereas the concept of nation is of fairly recent origin. Language facilitates social communication and helps nurture mutual cooperation. A nation is a product of intense social communication and cooperation. Jesperson equates a nation with a linguistic community. He asserts "You must understand that the world 'nation' means a linguistic unit, a linguistic community, depends always on intercourse, on a community of life." Fani-Kayode, (2006). The development of any nation will come to a standstill without a medium of communication like language. Connor and Deutsch in an article titled 'Nationalism and its Alternatives' has defined a nation as "a community of shared meanings or more broadly still, a group of people who have interlocking habits of communication." Ige, (2000), Joseph Stalin has also held a similar view when he states "a national community is inconceivable without a common language." (Wright, 2012). Deutsch has made it clear that without communication social structuring amongst human beings would become impossible. Thus he states that "The richer their cooperation in producing tangible goods and services, in developing highly developed societies, and developing and sharing intangible treasures of knowledge, art, and values, the greater their need for rich, varied, quick and accurate communication."(Kamwendo, 2010).

According to Thomas Hobbes, language is used, to describe the world, but also to convey attitudes, as well as make promises and contracts (Ogar *et al* 2018). When human beings come together in large groups, contracts and laws must be made to maintain the well-being of the population. The making of contracts is simply to ensure that each citizen in the state upholds their promise to contribute in a meaningful way, to the provision of the needs of the state as a fully integrated whole. It is easy to visualize an idealistic, self-providing utopia, where everyone is trusting and trustworthy Ige, (2000). In Nigeria a great variety of languages were available but none could assume the role of a national language.

"These languages", are closely associated with ethnic identity and as a consequence are regarded as derisive rather than unifying elements in the work of socio-economic development" (Simpson and Oyètádé 2008). Therefore, Nigeria relies to a considerable degree in English (the former colonial language…) for administration, economic, social and educational purposes, and, as a unifying factor, in socio-economic development. It must be remembered that no nation is an island.

The Roles of English Language in Nigeria

One of the dominant and pervasive problems in Nigeria, and in Africa at large, is the language question. Language, being a potent vehicle of transmitting cultures, values, norms and beliefs from generation to generation, remains a central factors in determining the status or nature of any nation. This informs the submission of Ishima, (2004) that "language is a nation's most obvious and most important attribute. There is no such thing as a nation without a common linguistic basic". The dominant inference from Isayev's observation is that for national integration, cohesion and development, there must be a language acceptable to all in running a nation's affairs. In Nigeria, like many other African nations, multilingualism is a rule rather than an exemption, the problem of "forging ahead" is of crucial importance. Among the competing languages that scramble form national recognition or official language (the language of administration and education at some levels), the language of relevance, from the competitors to unite the nation. Fortunately or unfortunately, English has emerged as that privileged language without which the unity of Nigeria as a nation is mostly improbably, if not out rightly impossible (Tambulasi and Kayuni (2007). This article attempts to highlight the English language, of other functions, it performs in Nigeria, unites the country. This unifying role and its allied issues are discussed to show that the imposition or adoption of any language apart from English as the nation's official. Language will lead to the scenario captured by Thomas W.Cob above; and why from now till a relatively long time to come, if not absolutely forever, the continuous existence of Nigeria will be analogous to the nineteenth – century wales, the slogan of which was: "If you want to get ahead, get and English head" Isyaku, (2004).

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English Language and Development

It is important to understand the meaning of development in order to establish the role that language can play in development initiatives. But first of all, it is necessary to state that the concept of development is highly contested with scholars not agreeing to one definition. Tambulasi and Kayuni, (2007) assert that this is so because "development is multidimensional [and hence] a topic of massive disagreements" among scholars. Nevertheless, most of the scholars agree that development can be understood as the process of enlarging the capabilities, choices, and opportunities of people, especially rural populations and the poor to enable them to lead a long, healthy and fulfilling life (Sen, 2005). In other words, development is achieved when the fundamental needs of people are satisfied. Among the basic needs are: poverty reduction, food security, availability of safe drinking water, improved sanitation, access to primary health care, and basic education as well as opportunity to participate effectively in the social, economic and political affairs of their societies and nations. The development of individuals in respect of their aspiration in the society means development of a nation. Ogunranti, (2000), establishes an "indissoluble link which development has with English Language". In his view, development is critically dependent on the actualization of the lofty ideals of English Language. Therefore, the

significance of English language in promoting education in any nation is not debatable. Since education is a parameter for measuring development, English language then plays a vital role in all spheres of development; be it economics, social, political or cultural. Language plays a vital role in communication which is very important for development. This refers to the spectrum of communication process, strategies and principles within the field of development which are participatory in nature Cooke and Williams, (2002).

English Language and Socio-economic Development in Nigeria

Socio-economic development emphasizes progress in terms of economic and social factors with a geographic unit. Economic development is the process of raising the level of prosperity through increased production, distribution and consumption of goods and services. Social development, on the other hand, refers to the complexity of social dynamics and focuses on the social concerns of the people as objectives of development. Social development is about inclusiveness, social justice and the common good. Indicators of social development provide comparative information about areas such as income, poverty, employment, education, health etc. The purpose of economic development is to improve the social and material well-being of all individuals and social institutions with the goal of achieving the highest possible of human development. Socioeconomic development, therefore, requires the integration of economic and social development. Due to the scarcity of research dealing with the relationship of English language to economic development, it has not been proved that English language, at any level reduces poverty in underdeveloped countries. Referring to this neglected area of study, Cooke and Williams, (2002) pointed out that "The literature dealing with development has paid remarkably little attention to the issue of language in education". Language is an indispensable tool in national development. National development in its wider conception emphasizes on a full realization of human potentials and maximum utilization of the nation's resources for the benefit of all citizens. It is a situation where people utilize the resources within their reach in order to achieve meaningful development. In the words of Olaoye, (2007), 'National development is usually described in terms of economic growth, attainment of economic targets, growth rate, increase in gross national product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), rise in per capital income etc. In a similar view, Olalekan, (2001).sees

national development as the growth of the nation in terms of education, economic well-being, mass participation in governance etc.

Both definitions rest on economic growth, educational advancement, political awareness and full participation in government. These are achieved through effective use of language for efficient communication and development. National development thus, emphasizes full realization of human potential and maximum utilization of the nation's resources for the benefit of all citizens. Opega, (2004) cited in Upah (2008) confirms that "language plays an important role in national development as it fosters understanding, unity and sense of belonging among the various members of the different ethnic and social groups that constitute a nation." In other words, national development ranges from growth in politics to economy, science and technology, education and health. Information in these areas is transmitted through language. Language is used to achieve proper co-ordination of activities in these areas. A self-conscious and unified population working towards being economically self- reliant cannot be coordinated without effective communication. Similarly, language is used to transact trading activities between people from different linguistic, social and political backgrounds Solanke, (2006). Language is central to the growth of science and technology in any given society. Language is used in the training of technicians who work in factories where they build or manufacture high technological gadgets for national development. In the educational sector, language is used as the medium of instruction. It is used in writing textbooks, magazines, journals and newspapers. Language is also used for both formal and informal education. All these education materials help the individual to acquaint and improve himself, his community and the nation.

Language is used as a detribalizing force. Therefore, it is obvious that language is a major 'player' in issues concerning national development. This is because, "language and thought processes are inseparable entities". Wardhaugh (2006), cited in Upah (2008) confirms that; language expresses an individual's thought which facilitates positive thinking for meaningful development. In describing the economic value that language education has for the severely poor, Bruthiaux (2002) writes, "for the poor to progress beyond the most basic economic level, their assets need to be represented in writing… Allowing] the user to step from the material into the conceptual realm where capital lives and economic development begins". Language education enables one to record the ownership of property and use it as collateral, to conceive of nonmaterial capital and to participate in an asset-

based as opposed to an object-based economy. Language is not only an important practical tool for managing ownership and handling economic transactions, but it is also an integral tool in transforming the poor's perception of economic potential. Provided that the native tongue has a writing system, the most appropriate language in which to establish this skill would not be a foreign language, but the local vernacular used in the day to day transactions of the informal economy in which the learner participates Solanke, (2006).

The Unifying Roles of English in Nigeria

English is the language of integration in Nigeria as our previous discussion shows. Amidst the compounding complexities of Nigeria especially in relation to the language question, the only language that indexes the spirit of togetherness is English. More often than not, activities. Conducted in indigenous languages are reprobated as being ethnic or tribal, except in cultural celebrations or entertainment displays. This explains why even the colonial era when English had not attained its present level of ascendance in national and international affairs, political parties were formed in English (Bassey, 2019). National Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) etc. were formed to integrate all Nigerians and give them a sense of belonging. This trend has necessarily survived until today with all the national political parties formed and sloganeered in English. English is also acceptable to all – even to those who clamour against its irresistible dominance. It is the language that is not fraught with suspicions in any formal or literate context (Bassey, 2019).

During the military regime of General Abacha for instance, there was an allegation or insinuation that the apex ruling council meetings were sometimes conducted in Hausa which the second in command, general Diya did not speak, at a time that the relationship between them became frosty. It is the only language that does not generate suspicions of having a skeleton in one's cupboard or a "hidden agenda in inter-ethnic relationships or transactions. English also serves as the language of nations, concerned with political integration and efficiency Bellah, (2006). It is the language that brings all the supposed "nations" of Nigeria to function as one mention is often made of each ethnic group being a nation on its own with the Hausa nation, the Ibo nation, the Yoruba nation, the Edo nation, Jukun land, Tiv land, Urhobo land, Ogoni land, etc., as examples. But, the cohesion of all under the subsuming Nigerian nation is possible through English (Enahoro, 2002).

In other words, without English, the Ubiquitous violent ethnic groups like oodua People's Congress (OPC) Egbesu Boys, the Arewa People's Congress (APC) Ijaw Youth Solidarity (IYS), Bakassi Boys, and other militant groups would have found more justification for desiring to secede from the Nigerian Federation. Ironically, it is also the language of nationalism. This is because the love for the country as a whole has to be manifested through the language intelligible to all and sundry, lest the 'ethnic agenda' be implicated (Dorais, 2001). This reason accounts for why nationalists like Herbert Macaulay, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, Nnamdi Azikiwe had to use English language as a weapon of nationalist struggle. A nationalist is a nationalist based on expressing his patriotic views in English. If English is not used to express the same ideas for which he is known as a nationalist, he becomes an ethnic jingoist or a tribal apologist. It is the language of authenticity in Nigeria today.

As a language of wider communication (LWC), English is used for phatic communion, ceremonial purpose and an instrument of keeping records, information dissemination, self-experiment and embodiment of thought among the various linguistic groups in Nigeria. The common linguistic basis that constitutes a requisite for the existence of any nation is provided by English. So with English as the common tongue to all the ethnic groups, the collective sentiment of belonging together despite the individual or ethnic differences is forged. Related to the discussion is the fact that Nigerian Nationalism or collective identity is stamped on national institutions through the medium of English (Storm, 2016).

Conclusion

English as the official language of Nigeria contributes a lot in bringing about unity, growth and development in a heterogeneous society. As Eno-Abasi, (2003) explains that the absence of an established effective communication between the ethnic groups becomes the basis for bigotry and hatred. This means that language is actually a medium through which one can control the minds of its users, language binds a group of people together and that is just what English language does (By uniting the different languages or ethnic groups) in Nigeria. Governance entails the ability of any nation to carry out its key functions in respect to meeting the needs of its citizens and to be accountable for what it does; this is by no means a small task. The medium through which a nation aspires to achieve this task is

of great importance, in Nigeria, English language is that medium through which the various tasks of government are achieved .This study implies that acquiring competence in English is a privilege which in many contexts brings about good governance and development in Nigeria. One domain where the role of English language has been noted to be crucial for the socio-economic development is education. It has been observed that education for development, particularly at the basic level, is not likely to register noticeable advancement until the educational process is hearts and minds of the people. The main claim is that education, especially in the primary section, is best delivered in the child's first or most familiar language. Solanke, (2006) writes, "Language diversity slows down economic development, by example, breaking occupational mobility, reducing the number of people available for mobilization into modern sector of the economy, decreasing efficiency and preventing the diffusion of innovative techniques". Based on this, it will be of great benefit if Nigeria can adopt policy that promotes languages education especially indigenous language education with view to promoting socioeconomic development. Like all multilingual nations, Nigeria is faced with the language question. An artificial contraption of heterogeneous ethnic communities and linguistic groups forcefully determined by the colonial interlopers, for selfish political and economic reasons, Nigeria has to survive despite the "Mistake" of her assemblage on common linguistic ground. Based on the well-known Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (i.e. the principles of linguistic relativity (the distinctions encoded in one language), one would have expected that one of our indigenous languages of education because "the child learns better in his mother tongue and that his mother tongue is as natural to him as his mother's milk" (Ogar., Thomas and Bassey, 2018) and more developed communities use their own languages in education and technical training (Simpson and Oyètádé, (2008). But the reverse is the case in Nigeria, like many other African nations, as the colonial language of English still remains dominant as the language of virtually all aspects of national life: politics, administration, business, sports, diplomacy, communication, media, education, creativity, literacy, constitution, law, just to mention a few. We have hereby examined English functions as the language of unity in Nigeria and forms the basis of the nation's linguistic existence. For the unity of Nigeria to sustained, it is ultimately suggested that the English language must continue to play its roles.

Recommendations

1. It is very urgent at present that Universities, Colleges, schools and teachers, should work hard towards this end

2. More qualified language teachers should be trained and strengthened.
3. Teaching of indigenous languages should be given a priority .Government should find a way of encouraging indigenous language teachers in order to realize her intention on language education.

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