

**A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THE LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROVISIONS IN
THE NIGERIA'S NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION:**

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INTRODUCTION:

The involvement of language in any educational programme is inevitable. This is because of the prominent roles it serves. For instance, it stands as a subject of its own in the curriculum and serves as a medium through which other subjects are taught (Fafunwa).

In addition to the importance of language in the educational process, it also functions as a means of preserving culture of a people as well as a significant force for enhancing national unity (Onibgo, 1987).

However, linguistic diversity remains one of the biggest problems of this nation and this explains the retention English, the language of our colonial masters for our major communication purposes. At first, it was made the official language of instruction at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education in order to cement national unity and national integration for its being a neutral language.

Unfortunately, English has not achieved this purpose for only 20% of Nigerian could read and speak the language (Olagoke, 1979). Even with the 20%, it does not go beyond mere communication as there does not seem to be much integration and trust among speakers of different local languages. Thus, the rivalry between our languages and people persists.

In recognition of the function of language as a carrier of people's culture and a strong uniting factor, the Federal Government came out with a National Policy on Education (N.P.E) which contains language education provisions at pre-primary, primary and Secondary level of Education.

This paper therefore, aims at critically assessing and evaluating the effectiveness of the provisions towards national unity, national integration and the development of Nigerian culture.

A REVIEW OF THE LANGUAGE EDUCATION PROVISIONS IN THE N.P.E.

The Federal Government, in recognition of the importance of language in socio-cultural development, made the following pronouncement:

"In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government consider it to be in the best interest of National Unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother-tongue. In this connection, the Government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba (N.P.E.; 1978)."

It is worth mentioning here that the Federal Government has accepted the fact that the study and preservation of the culture of a people is only possible through the study and use of their language. Indeed, this policy statement will help enhance

communication network among our people and thus clear the suspicion that we have on one another as a result of the difference of the languages we speak and understand. This will therefore allow the problems of rivalry among our languages and indeed the choice of an indigenous national language solve themselves.

However, the recognition of Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba as the major languages could make the speakers of other languages like Edo, Ibibio, Fulani, Nupe etc. feel neglected.

LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN PRE-PRIMARY SCHOOLS:

Under the pre-primary education, the policy first states that,

“Government will ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community”.

First and foremost, the use of the mother-tongue and the language of the immediate community at this stage of the child's education enable him/her to fully understand and appreciate both his/her language and culture and or the language and culture of the community in which he/she lives. This will further create in the child the spirit of self identification and self confidence and foster unity as the child could conveniently communicate and associate himself with other children of the community including those who are not opportune to go to the pre-primary schools like him. In other words, doing away with these language at this stage alienates the child from his society and culture. This is why a good number of our youth especially those in the urban centres could not read and write in their languages competently. Many of them could not even explain and display the good culture of Nigerian societies. For instance, it is quite possible to meet many Hausa boys who do not know the local crafts, proverbs, jokes and riddles of the Hausa society. This is really responsible to the attitudinal problems with our youth as the good culture of ours is finding away. Apart from that, this policy statement helps in effecting a smooth transition from the home to the school and inculcating of social norms in our children, the purpose behind which this level of education is established.

Furthermore, the use of Nigerian languages at this stage will help clear the fear of neglect which the speakers of other Nigerian languages might entertain.

However, one major problem of this provision is the inadequate of text books in our indigenous languages. This, the Government anticipates and thus bind itself to developing the orthography of many more Nigerian languages and producing text books in Nigerian languages.

LANGUAGE PROVISIONS IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL:

On Primary education, the National Policy on Education states,

“Government will see to it that the medium of instruction is initially the mother-tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage, English.”

This policy statement is in pursuance of the general objective of primary education, which include:

- i. Inculcation of permanent literacy and numerically and the ability to communicate effectively.
- ii. The laying of sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking.
- iii. Providing basic tools for further education; and
- iv. Giving the child opportunities for developing manipulative skills that will enable him to function effectively in the society within the limits of his capacity.

In fact, language could play significant role towards the attainment of the above mentioned goals. However, the first problem that seems to hinder its success is the fact that the three years training in the mother tongue and another three years training in English could hardly be enough for the child to be able to communicate effectively in the languages. Instead of the division of the years therefore, we could adopt a multi-tier media where by primary education is carried out through the mother-tongue medium without discouraging the learning of English and at a later state, a shift is made to the second language (Awoniyi, 1995). Even then, materials and terminologist have to developed in our indigenous languages so that the languages could be adequately used in laying of sound basis for scientific and reflective thinking in our children at this early stage of their education. The positive results of the experiment in mother-tongue medium in Yoruba carried out the then university of Ife showed the merits of full MTM in primary education and proficiency of English as a second language (Adeniran, 1995).

In addition, effective communication in our languages at this stage helps in no small measure towards the inculcation of unity and preservation of our culture. For instance, the more our children know themselves and their immediate communities, the more they understand and interact freely with other Nigerians they meet at the schools.

LANGUAGE EDUCATION AT THE SECONDARY SCHOOL:

Referring to secondary education, the policy first stimulates English and two Nigerian languages among the core subject of the Junior Secondary school. On the selection of the two Nigerian languages, the policy explains.

"Students should study the language of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages, Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, subject to availability of teachers".

This is in pursuance of the objectives of secondary education which include:

- i. The fostering of Nigerian unity
- ii. Developing and projecting Nigerian culture, art and language as well as the world's cultural heritage; and
- iii. Preparing students for higher education.

It is clear that these objectives seek to meet the demand of national integration and national unity which the above provision could help to achieve. That is, through the study of ones language and the language of his friends and neighbours, one will get to know and respect the views and feelings of the speakers of that language which is not his. In addition, the moment a Hausa child for example learns Ibo in addition to his

mother tongue. he gets the opportunity to communicate with his Ibo friends and develops a more positive attitudes towards the Ibo and Ibo culture (Omigbo, 1987) and most importantly, the problem of suspicious and gossip among speakers of the two languages will diminish. This is because both the Ibo and the Hausa speakers understand the two languages and as much even if one has that habit he would not get the chance and thus, harmony will reign.

However, at the senior secondary school, the core subjects include and one Nigeria language. That is to say, English is compulsory in the whole of secondary school system but only one Nigerian language is given this prominence. Infact, this Nigerian language is automatically the child's mother tongue or the language of his immediate community. In addition, there is no indication by the policy whether certain level of performance in the only Nigerian language at the senior secondary school will be a condition for SSS certificate (Adeniran 1995) admission at higher institutions or employment. This greatly cripples the whole language education policy as at last the competence in Nigerian languages is undermined. As such it is possible for students to think that even if they offer Nigerian languages at JSS, at last it is only the mother tongue they sit for at the SSS and that even the mother tongue is not all that necessary as it doesn't affect their certification, admission and employment.

CONCLUSION:

From the foregoing, it is clear that the importance of Nigerian languages in education has been realised by the Federal Government. Thus, languages Education Provisions are made at the pre-primary, Primary and secondary levels of education.

However, the policy is silent on the place of Nigerian languages in the tertiary institutions apart from those offered as academic subjects even though the policy stipulates a compulsory study of Nigerian culture at this level where it says:

"A compulsory first year course in the social organisation, customs, culture and history of our various peoples. The award of degree will be made conditional upon the passing of a paper in this course".

Indeed, the study, of the culture of a people could only be possible through the study of their language. Unfortunately, this study of Nigerian languages is not encouraged at this level of education. The only thing that is done as regards the above provision is the General studies programme which does not include the study of Nigerian languages. Instead, it should be made compulsory for students and even the youth corpsers to master a minimum of one major Nigerian language in addition to their mother-tongue before they are certificated. If our student know that before they get their certificates they will be more serious towards it and this will even motivate them to mingle with other Nigerians living in various linguistic communities in the country.

Furthermore, language is indeed a very important basis for unity and social integration. But language is not enough to achieve it. In other words, a lot has to be done by us in order to achieve the desired goal of national integration. For instance, there should be the willingness in us to come together and unite. It is only when we accept this that this policy could succeed. Our people need to be enlightened on this.

In addition, Government should strive hard to see to the adjustment and implementation of the policy. It is imperative for us to educate a new generation of Nigerians who would be brought up not only academically, but also socially (MouMouni, 1968). The Nigerian children should be given such education that will enable them to contribute to the economic and cultural development and above all the

national unity of the country. With adjustment and strict adherence to the policy, it is hoped that one day we have an indigenous national language.

Finally, it is as President Kennedy said, "only with complete dedication by us all to the national interest can we bring our country through the troubled years that lie ahead".

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CONVERSATIONS AND HOW THEY ARE STARTED

2.1 Conversation is an everyday phenomenon: It takes place in our homes, in the office, on the streets, in the classroom or cinema. It takes place between complete and partial strangers, between friends and relations. It takes place everywhere and anywhere. Schegloff, Sacks and Jefferson (1978 p. 10) have indicated that

"Conversation can accommodate a wide range of situations... (and) it is a vehicle for interaction"