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Volume 3 Sept., 2005.



Amamihe®

Journal of Applied Philosophy

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RE-DESIGNING NIGERIAN LANGUAGES PROGRAMMES FOR ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

By

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of education in any society should be aimed at helping every member of the society to realize his or her full potential towards living a more useful life. To be fully integrated into his society, the individual must be exposed to his or her cultural heritage, the values of the past and ways of ensuring the continuity of the people. Only a functional educational programme can ensure this. Functional education cannot be divorced from the language of the people concerned. To empower the graduates of Nigerian language for adaptability to changing conditions and circumstances, this study, calls for a more relevant Nigerian language programme that would make them (the graduates) job creators.

INTRODUCTION

Language is of great importance to man as there is hardly anything that man can do successfully without the use of language. Every activity of man, be it educational, economical, social, religious, political etc is undertaken with the use of language. According to Gomwalk (2000), language performs certain communication functions which include: serving as a tool

for social-co-operation, self-reflection and individuality as well as a means for social cohesion and interaction.

It should be noted that language is crucial to the teaching-learning process. In this regard, language functions as a medium of teaching all the subjects in the school curriculum. Language itself can also be studied as an instructional area. Oderinde (2003) observes that language is the meeting point between curriculum and communication, noting that the curriculum has to be communicated through language. It can therefore be seen that language is crucial to national development and according to Odumah (1989), there can be no development without cultural unity and political stability.

Multicultural and multilingual societies are often faced with the problems of language policy in education (which language(s) should be used as medium/media of instruction in schools? Which language(s) should serve as the national language(s) and the choice of an official language?) In Nigeria the number of languages range between 200 and 500 (Ayilara and Oyediji, 2000). Among these many languages, only three are classified as major Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), while so many others are classified as ~~minor~~ or minority languages.

Going by the language provisions in the National Policy on Education (1977), which has been revised in 1981 and 1998 respectively, it is noteworthy that the government appreciates the importance of the indigenous languages for national cohesion and cultural preservation and reproduction. Apart from the provision of using indigenous language in the pre-primary and the first three years of primary education, Nigerian languages (those developed) are to be studied as subjects up to the secondary schools. At the tertiary levels especially colleges of education and universities courses leading to an award of National Certificate in Education (NCE) and Bachelor of Arts with or without Education (B.A./B.A. Ed) are run. Masters and Doctoral degrees are equally available in the various languages at the university level. One can therefore rightly agree with Akinbote, Odolowu and Ogunsanwo

(2003) that the dawn of the new millennium has been greeted with efforts being made the world over towards reviving and revitalizing indigenous languages. This writer also holds the same view with Awoniyi (1982) who observes that no foreign language can take the place of a child's first language and any educational system that disregard it does so to mar the child's cognitive development.

Language is a vehicle of thought that helps a child to understand whatever knowledge is being imparted to him and to prevent a child from stunted intellectual growth, he or she must obtain a certain degree of communicative competence in his first language or mother tongue (MT).

It is also necessary to consider the possible meaning of economic empowerment. Adesoji (2001) opines that the concept of empowerment is loaded socially, psychologically, economically, and politically. It does not require the redistribution of power, but it awakens the power that should be in every individual who is responsive and responsible. He further explains that empowerment is not directed towards distributive justice but towards removing the obstacle which might have been placed before individuals who have suffered injustice and discrimination at one time or the other. Economic empowerment can therefore be seen as the ability of an individual to exercise control over the economy - trade, industry or wealth of a given society. In this paper, economic empowerment refers to the ability of individuals to generate or create job opportunities and being able to meet one's financial needs and obligations in the society.

TRADITIONAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

Traditional education in Nigeria predates the coming of the colonialists. Different nations that existed before the entity called Nigeria was "born" had their traditional educational systems. According to Majasan (1967), the objectives of traditional education among the Yoruba people is well defined in the concept

of Omoluabi, that is, a person that is brought up to conform with the norms, beliefs, traditions etc, of his society and is also being professionally qualified, intelligent and well behaved in his society. Among the Igbo people, the objective was "to produce a man of honour and discipline with a visible means of livelihood and a family of his own to take care of" (Ubahakwe, 2002:2).

In the traditional dispensation, there was no unemployment and individuals in the society tried hard to defend the good name of his family. There was no unemployment because the traditional educational programme was utilitarian in its approach. That is, it took care of the needs of the individuals in the society and it made the beneficiaries fit into the mainstream of the society. However, Ubahakwe (2002) observed that the traditional education produced people who were educated, stable but superstitious in their dispositions.

EDUCATION UNDER THE MISSIONARIES

The aim of the Christian missionaries was mainly religious conversion and the curriculum was characterized by the three Rs (Arithmetic, Writing and Religion). They equally worked hard to study the peoples' languages in order to use them as vehicles of conversion. Products were expected to be God-fearing, employable as clerks, translators, cooks etc. However, they only succeeded in disorientating the people against their cultural values including the indigenous languages which were regarded as vernaculars. That is to say the beneficiaries of the educational practices under the missions were deficient in orientation in spite of their education.

INDEPENDENCE AND POST-INDEPENDENCE YEARS

Abe (1999) observes that before 1981 and prior to the introduction of the 6-3-3-4 system of education, the bane of Nigerian educational system had been that of curriculum irrelevance. With the introduction of the new system, as expounded in the National Policy on Education (1981), secondary

school students are expected to be exposed to both academic and pre-vocational subjects which provides for academic and technical versatility. The junior school curriculum was well-packaged with pre-vocational subjects like introductory technology, business studies, home economics, local crafts, practical agriculture etc. According to Abe (1999), the curriculum is expected to prepare the beneficiaries for specialized activities in the ever-changing world of work.

In spite of the laudable aims, objectives and aspirations, of the well-intended curriculum, youth unemployment has been on the increase. Obayuwana (1997) cited in Abe (1999) noted that 70.6 percent of Nigerians were unemployed and the number was largely made up of young secondary school leavers and young adults of working age.

A greater part of the period 1960 to 1999 was ruled by the military. The military who took over power from the politicians of First Republic accused them of nepotism, ineptitude, tribalism, graft and corruption. The military due to its orientation used education as a tool of coercion and products of the system were miseducated, disoriented and disillusioned. The regimes were characterized by unpleasant behaviours such as examination malpractices, certificates forgery, high dropout rate, public show of power, drug abuse, child abuse, girls' trafficking, cultism in schools, aggression and violence and total fall in the standard of education (Ubahakwe, 2002:24).

Some problems which are still persisting include unemployment especially of graduates from tertiary institutions and early retirement from public service without prompt payment of retirement benefits. Not only that, some streets of major cities are filled with social miscreants in the name of "Area Boys" who extort money and valuables from the citizens and motorists. Adesanya (2000) observed that the school had been at the receiving end concerning the various problems bedeviling the

nation. It is being blamed for being irrelevant and out of touch with social realities. Adesanya also notes that the number of school leavers without jobs, and dropouts seem to justify the criticism of the people and the government on the relevance of the school.

It is laudable to observe the good intention of the present democratic system when it launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) in 1999 in pursuance of Education for All (EPA) by 2015 programme which was launched in Dakar, Senegal between 26-28 April, 2000 by the World Education Forum. According to JAMB (2002), Nigeria now has twenty-four (24) Federal Universities, nineteen (19) state universities, six (6) private universities and fifteen (15) degree awarding institutions. Most of these tertiary institutions run part time programmes in many courses thereby turning out graduates in those courses. It is however, unfortunate that most of these products only end up expanding the unemployment markets rather than being job creators.

REDESIGNING NIGERIAN LANGUAGES CURRICULAR

There is no doubt that a repackaging of the existing curricular of Nigerian languages at the Colleges of Education and university levels should be made in order to empower the graduates for the future. As indicated in an earlier study Makinde (2003a), the retrenchment of some teachers in one of the south-western states by a governor shortly after assuming office with his advice that they should go and create jobs which are related to their teaching subjects made this writer to come up with this idea that Nigerian educational certificate holders especially at the tertiary levels should be more empowered academically and vocationally for the future.

As of now, degree holders in Nigerian languages are employable as teachers or lecturers in schools. They are also employable as editors in publishing companies and newscasters and programme presenters in media houses. Some of them work as poets, singers,

actors, film producers in the entertainment industries. However, there is the need to make these degree holders of Nigerian languages functional and relevant by re-designing the curricular of the languages in order to make them more relevant to the economic and social needs of the nation. From Omolayole's (2002) point of view, we as a nation can rediscover our time honoured public behaviour and our national ethics through non-formal and informal education especially national orientation and public enlightenment. This according to him will make a lot of economic and socio-political sense. Cookey's (1972) description of education as cited in Maduewesi (2002) in the former USSR is a demonstration of how the nation's practical needs had led to a bold shift towards functional education. The practical need of USSR then was rapid industrialization. The secondary educational programme was re-structured to make it possible for every secondary school student to participate in eight hours of production weekly in a factory (Maduewesi, 2002:2).

Curriculum, according to Oderinde (1998) is:

the bridge between ignorance and knowledge; the weapon with which education changes the learner to an individual who is skilled enough to function properly in society and carry her forward from one generation to another; in all imaginable spheres of human endeavours (p.1).

From this definition, it could be seen that transmission is a necessity for curricular objectives to be achieved. In a normal situation where things work, the present curricular cannot be totally written off. But the re-packaging of the curricular is necessary in order to prepare the beneficiaries for a proper functioning in the society.

This writer therefore propose the following:

Figure (a): At the NCE level (L1 & L2)

Education courses
General studies courses
Teaching practice courses
Nigerian language courses
Second teaching subjects
One vocational practical oriented course
- Computer Literacy

Figure (b): At the Degree level (for BA and BA Ed. Programmes)

B.A.	* Vocational (Practical Oriented Course)	(a) Language o Grammar o Phonology o Orthography o Lexis o Dialects o Historical development	(b) Literature o Texts - (collection of oral and written) Prose, Poetry and Drama o Stylistics (c) General studies courses (d) Computer literacy
B.A. Ed		o All language and literature courses o Education courses o General studies courses o Teaching practice o Computer literacy	

* Vocational or technical occupation could be any of: agriculture (fishing, poultry, cattle-rearing, piggery, snailery, bee-honey production); traditional/modern soap-making, groundnut/coconut/palm kernel/palm fruit oil production; weaving (traditional wears) dyeing (e.g. Adire clothing materials), carpentry, clay block-making, blacksmithing/welding, lumbering, to mention just a few.

- (a) At the NCE level, vocational or technical courses should be integrated into the language education programmes plus the use of computer. The choice of vocational or technical course could be made from any of those listed beneath figure b.

- (b) As an alternative to the above, those who would like to be teachers especially at the tertiary levels could be required to have a second language (i.e. a Nigerian language other than his or her language of specialization, or a foreign language at the degree level). This will help the individual to be relevant in countries where such languages are spoken.

HOW TO BRING THE SUGGESTIONS TO REALITY

The government can develop the technical/vocational colleges to meet the needs of students apprentices. The government can as well establish special institutes for various vocations like the British Mechanics Institute of Khawaja and Brennan (1990) cited in Adesanya (2000:255) while advocating for the introduction of Community Education (CE) which will be characterized by enduring culture, vocational training, value technology and so on.

Curriculum experts and school administrators should work out the modality of making Nigerian language students to be apprenticed to any vocational "school" of their choice in the locality he finds himself for at least six weeks per session. The tertiary institution sending the students should closely monitor the students' activities and participation at such centres. Every student would be required to present a practical evidence of such acquired skills.

The government should provide bursaries for students and the necessary facilities for the beneficiaries towards the establishment of small scale business organizations and the initial take off of such business organizations.

The government should establish different language villages in the country where students studying the languages could go for acculturation programmes.

In order to make the use of Nigerian languages as media of instruction a reality even beyond the first three years of primary school, relevant stakeholders in language education should ensure

that all undeveloped or unwritten language are developed and necessary instructional and textual materials are produced in the language.

The publication by a nuclear physicist, Dr. Fakinlade in 2001 titled "Modern Dictionary of the Yoruba Language: The Translation of Modern and Scientific English Terms to Yoruba Language" (words and terms frequently used in physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics etc) attests to the fact that science and technology can be taught in Nigerian languages.

CONCLUSION

Unemployment among young Nigerian graduates is no doubt due to many factors which among others include the dysfunction existing between the gross rate of school turn-out and slow expansion of occupational opportunities; the economic recession being experienced globally, and the instability of the Nigerian economy, pre-vocational subjects in the secondary schools are not well handled in such a way as to enhance practicability and usability, after completing the secondary schools education. It could then be seen that youth unemployment is one of the major economic problems in Nigeria. Many of these youths out of frustration are turning into delinquent behaviours like cultism, drug abuse, robbery, advance fee fraudsters, etc. The writer has therefore considered the need to empower the graduates of Nigerian languages so that they might benefit maximally from the educational system and be fully empowered for the new millennium as job creators instead of job seekers. The gains of the suggestions given in this paper can only be realized if all educational agencies: the home, school, government, mass media, clergy, traditional rulers and experts in relevant fields are involved. Not only that, educators should as a matter of urgency re-assess the gains of traditional education especially the promotion of cultural heritage like the African folklore, mores and literature; music, language, ethics and religions, art, social and

political institutions as well as African history and civilization (Fafunwa, 1982:292), and integrate them into the modern education system. This will no doubt bring about the most desired cultural, socio-political and economic empowerment for the Nigerian youths in order to cater for their present and future needs.

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