

GERIAN LANGUAGES *and the* **emocratic Experience**

*lected papers from the proceedings of the
4th Annual Conference of the Association for
Nigerian Languages Teachers (ANLAT)*

Edited by

GOKE ALAMU

National Institute for Nigerian Languages

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DEMOCRATIC EXPERIENCE**

*Selected papers from the proceedings of the
IXTH Annual Conference of the Association for
Nigerian Languages Teachers (ANLAT)*

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*Goke Alamu
National Institute For Nigerian Languages
Aba.*

Association for Nigerian Languages Teachers
National Institute for Nigerian Languages
PMB 7078
Aba, Nigeria
0803-3232384
e-mail: gokealamu@yahoo.com

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It is the primary objective of the current Executive Council of ANLAT to publish a book of selected papers from each annual conference proceedings. This is to contribute in a practical way to the dissemination of knowledge about Nigerian languages.

This publication is also an attempt to satisfy the yearnings of our members, who want not only to see their own researches documented in print for posterity, but also to use the publication for their academic advancement. There are twenty-two papers in this book organized under the following sections:

- a. The Keynote
- b. The Lead Papers
- c. Democracy, Nigerian Languages and the National Policy on Education
- d. Language, Culture and Society
- e. Information Technology, Librarianship and Linguistics
- f. Review/Critique

We are full of gratitude to our group of editorial consultants. We are quite delighted by the thoroughness and the objectivity with which articles sent to them were assessed. We implore them to share in our vision of making ANLAT's publication of her conference proceedings an annual event.

It is thus with much enthusiasm that we recommend this publication to the public: to teachers, scholars, students and indeed others who have the interest of Nigerian languages at heart.

Goke Alamu Ph. D
NINLAN, Aba.

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withdrawal. Where again all these fail, they resort to physical combat or actions.

Making the Nigerian Languages Programmes More Functional: Experience from Traditional Educational System

Solomon Olanrewaju Makinde
Lagos State University, Ojo

Abstract

The fundamental role of education in the society is to serve as a potent instrument for development and changes in the society by helping individual member to acquire life skills that would make him an asset to his society. It takes a functional educational programme to achieve a nation's goals and objectives. Language is a key factor in bringing about any meaningful human capital development and national progress. This paper, a follow up to Makinde (2003 a & b) takes a look at how the Nigerian languages programmes can be enriched and made more functional in order to make graduates of the languages job creators rather than job seekers.

Introduction

Education can be described as the acquisition of knowledge, ability, skills or behaviour, which could help the individual to be functional and fully integrated into the society. According to Yolo (1996), it is an in and-out of school experience and an individual's level of attainment is dependent on his abilities, capabilities, exposures and potentialities. Education has to do with the transmission of a people's cultural values with its elements of preservation, dissemination and innovation (Omokhodion, 1996).

Education has been used over time and space from the earlier civilization to contemporary modern world as a potent weapon for change in the society. The goal of any functional educational process should be to "foster the development of the society in such areas as economic, social, political, scientific and technological enterprises"

(Okebukola, 1998). Formal education started in Nigeria some one hundred and sixty-one years ago with the efforts of inculcating in the citizens, desirable character and appropriate skills needed to promote human capital development and national progress. In the new millennium, "changes are taking place at a neck-breaking speed with the result that Africa is forever struggling to catch up" (Obanya, 2003). One wonders why other countries are succeeding in the achievement of their national goals and objectives and witnessing rapid development while Nigeria seems to be failing. While other countries are trying to reduce the unemployment figures the threats from Nigerian leaders has to do with retrenchment of workers and many are actually being thrown into the unemployment market through early retirement.

It might be further asked, why is the nation so beset by myriads of such vices as bribery corruption, certificate forgery, examination malpractice, armed robbery, ritual killings for money making, cultism in schools, mass rigging in elections, hired assassination of eminent personalities, advanced fraudulent practices, smuggling, girls' and drug trafficking, misappropriation of public funds? More still, why are salaries and allowances of workers unpaid as at when due? Why are retired officers and workers allowed to suffer due to unpaid retirement benefits and pensions?

Citing Mahatma Ghandi, Omolayole (2002) identified the following seven public related actions as cardinal sins:

- (a) politics without principles
- (b) education without character
- (c) wealth without work
- (d) commerce without morality
- (e) science without humanity
- (f) religion without sacrifice
- (g) pleasure with our conscience (p viii)

How best can one describe the present Nigerian society than this? These observed problems are some compelling reasons why the educational programmes should be reviewed, redesigned and

repackaged to make them focus on development of skills and character.

Gains of Traditional Education

Traditional education had been in existence in Africa including Nigeria before the advent of western and Islamic education. Every nation that existed before the birth of Nigeria had her system of educating her people with well defined educational objectives and goals. According to Majasan (1967) the purpose of traditional education especially among the Yoruba people is to produce a good member of the society, and individual who is kind, tolerant, patient, industrious conscientious and has a good knowledge of the tradition and culture of his people. Added to this, Fafunwa (1983) observed that:

the purpose of traditional education is to produce an individual that is respectful, honest, skilled, cooperative, and conforms to the social order of the day. (p.48).

Fafunwa (1995) also identified seven cardinal goals of traditional African education to include:

- (i) to develop the child's latent physical skills
- (ii) to develop the child's ethical character
- (iii) to inculcate respect for elders and those in position of authority
- (iv) to develop intellectual skills
- (v) to acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour
- (vi) to develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs.
- (vii) to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large (pp. 6&7).

Fafunwa (2002) also notes that with over thirty years of military rule, most of our people have lost their sense of probity, civility and traditional ethos. Discussing further, he adds that our characteristic hospitality, sense of courtesy and many enviable aspects of our daily

lives seem to have been thrown overboard for under served monetary gains and all kinds of shady deals. To show his belief in the traditional system, he argued that we can make Nigerians to rediscover our time, honoured public behaviour and our national ethos through non-formal education.

Due to the utilitarian nature of the traditional system of education, there was no unemployment as every individual in the working force is skilled in one traditional vocation or the other. Such vocations were classified into three by Fafunwa (1983) as agricultural (farming, fishing and veterinary science); trades and crafts (comprising of weaving, smithing, hunting, carving, sculpturing, painting and decorating, carpentry, building, drumming, hairdressing, boat making, pottery, leather working, soap making, singing, iron ore working, dying, esusu collecting (banking), catering, wine tapping etc); professions (i.e medicine, priesthood, divining, administration and government, viz village head, chiefs and kings, tax collectors, judges, heralds, shrine keepers, soldiers, hunters etc).

Apart from the fact that there was no employment, everyone guarded jealously the good name of the family. Stealing was collectively denounced and misappropriation of public fund was an object of public song in a satiric manner.

Nigerian Languages and Career Opportunities

Language is the principal means of communication an expression. Language according to Hegel (1969) is:

...an external manifestation of the spirit of nations. Language is their spirit and their spirit is their Language. Their identity can never be sufficiently expressed without their language.

From the above, it could be seen that language is a force that forms a nation and it plays an indispensable role in shaping the attitudes of

its speakers. These views are supported by Otakpor (2003) who observes that language is a cultural heritage to individuals and groups in the society and that the worldview of a people are created and expressed through language. The preservation, propagation of a peoples' socio-cultural values are transmitted through language, hence, it can be asserted that the most potent agent in the process of civilization and socialization is language. Therefore, to deny an individual the study and use of his language is to deny him of the local knowledge, competence, character in his community and it also amounts to dis-empowering him.

Languages in Nigeria are many as experts have given the number to range between 200 and 500 (Ayilara and Oyedeji, 2000). Among these multiplicity of language, only three are classified as the major Nigerian languages while other are classified as minor languages.

Nigerian languages were seriously stigmatized by the colonialist as they were regarded as vernaculars. English was imposed on the people as the official language and invariably the language of intellectual activity. This amounted to unwillingly placing an obstacle or barrier to the intellectual development of the people who are thereby incapacitated to embark on any serious thinking in the indigenous languages.

However, with the conveyance of the national curriculum conference which culminated in the National Policy on Education (1977) revised in 1981 and 1998 respectively, the status of indigenous languages has been promoted. The government realizes the importance of the mother tongue (MT) in promoting a child's education and national cohesion. A child's mother tongue is expected to be used in educating him or her in the nursery school as well as in the first three years of primary school. A child is to learn the mother tongue as first language (L_1) and one of the major Nigerian languages other than his MT as second language (L_2). At the senior school level, every Nigerian child is expected to study a Nigerian language as L_1 . Some Nigerian languages are being studied up to the Degree level in the Universities.

Presently, degree holders in Nigerian languages have been working either as teachers or lecturers in schools. Some of them find themselves in editing jobs in publishing industries and newscasters and presenters of programme in the electronic media. Some of them are in the entertainment industries as poets, singers, actors, film producers. Some also work as interpreters or translators in religious organizations or media houses. But then, there is still the need to make holders of Nigerian languages degree certificate more functional and more relevant by repackaging Nigerian languages programmes to make them both academically and vocationally oriented.

Towards Making Nigerian Languages Educational Programmes More Functional

According to Okeke (2003), if our culture had received universal acceptance as did those of some European countries, the Europeans would have been struggling to catch up with our own languages in order to acquire a culture which would have appeared too abstract for them as we have found theirs. Okeke also observed that Africans have had their own national technologies and basic science which they applied in building of bridges, houses, and agricultural based industries as well as advancement in pottery, sculpture, smithing and architectural technologies but colonization and attendant imposition of a completely new life perspective halted the onward development of our people in the direction of science and technology.

Functional education according to Zeilberger (1961) cited in Obanya (2003) has to do with the process of developing the intellectual and non-intellectual abilities of the child, rather than force-feeding the child with facts that are readily forgotten. Functional instruction is also aimed at helping a learner to gain thinking habits and develop the technical means needed for him which would aid in solving practical problems. So, functional education refers to education that takes care of the need of an individual in relation to the needs of his society and uses the child's interest to develop his potentials by equipping him with needed

skills within the context of making him become a fully functioning member of the society in the present and in the future.

While amplifying on the Education For All by 2015 programme, Obanya (2003) listed seven ground rules which Africans must obey in order to achieve the goal:

- ① Promoting genuine education for all
- ② Closing the artificial boundary between school and society
- ③ A functional curriculum
- ④ Teaching for enhanced functionality
- ⑤ Paying particular attention to women and girls
- ⑥ Functional skills assessment
- ⑦ Inter-African co-operation

While expatiating on making higher-education more development oriented, he opines that functional education programmes at that level should among others prepare beneficiaries to reach out to the world of work, including the world of self-employment. How can the Nigerian languages graduates attain this goal of self-employment?

In the first place, it is by making some traditional and vocational education an integral part of the curricular in these languages. In other words, apart from the normal content knowledge for these undergraduates and the pedagogical knowledge for those pursuing professional teaching qualifications, some of the traditional and technical vocations should be incorporated into the Nigerian languages programmes and this could be in form of apprenticeship into the nonformal system for at least six weeks in a session. It is to be closely monitored by lecturers from the institutions and every student will be made to present a practical evidence of what he or she had acquired.

Is there anything bad in having female graduate of Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa language who is skillful in traditional weaving, or dyeing of "adire" or pottery? Is there anything wrong in having a male graduate of Nigerian languages who is skillful in the use of computer, or any of the vocational courses like fishing, cattle rearing, horticulture, blacksmithing, goldsmithing, welding? If a graduate of Nigerian language can also use the tractor to cultivate land and have plantations of cassava, yam, rice, plantain, cocoa, it will be an added advantage to him. Such graduates will not wait endlessly for jobs that are not there. Such graduates will not be moved by early retirements.

The government has much to do in order to ensure the success of such enriched programmes. While institutions sending student for apprenticeship into non-formal apprenticeship schools must work in close collaboration with industries and professional bodies, the government should be ready to sponsor and support graduates who are skillful in these traditional vocations to set up small scale or large organizations of their own.

Conclusion

The time has come when we as a nation should move away from the practice of "monocultural educational system" (educational system that is limited in acquisition of skills) to a diversified educational system, which recognizes man as having "a wide variety of socially useful talents all of which should be developed through adaptive-functional education" (Obanya, 2003). Nigeria needs functional educational programmes that would move the nation forward to one with Employment Opportunities for All (EOFA), a Fully Integrated Nation (FIN), a nation that is Free From Corruption (FFC), a land of Equal Opportunities For All (EQUOPA) and a Technologically Advanced Country (TAC).

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