



THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN FOSTERING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

***JOHN BUBA JOSHUA; **HADASSAH B. MALLE;
& ***CLIFFORD OTU OBI**

Department of General studies- Gombe state College of Health Sciences and Technology, Kaltungo. **Department of General Studies, Gombe state polytechnic, Bajoga. *Department of General studies, College of Education Billiri.*

Abstract

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 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 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, Socio-Economic, Development, Role, Fostering, Nigeria.*

Introduction

The role of English language in socio-economic development cannot be overemphasised. 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. The set goal in this case is socio-economic development.

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, socio-economic 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. The importance of language to man is incalculable, especially when daily human interaction is considered. 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 socio-economic development of Nigeria.

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. Jespersen 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." (Silverman 1995). The development of any nation will come to a standstill without a medium of communication like language. Connor & 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." (Connor & Deutsch 1971). 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.

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 & 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.

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.

Chumbow, (1990), 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.

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 Bamgbose (1981), ‘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, Elugbe (1990:14) 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. Bamidele (1999) cited in Upah (2008:3) 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 co-ordinated without effective communication. Similarly, language is used to transact trading activities between people from different linguistic, social and political backgrounds. 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 (2008:4) 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.

Conclusion and Recommendations

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. Pool (1972) 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. In this regard, the following recommendations are made:

1. 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.
2. More qualified language teachers should be trained and strengthened.
3. It is very urgent at present that Universities, Colleges, schools and teachers, should work hard towards this end.

References

Anyaeibunam, C. (2004). *Participatory Rural Communication Appraisal Handbook*, SADC Centre of Communication for Development, Harare: Zimbabwe.

- Bangbose Ayo. (1981). *Language and the Nation: Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Edinburg: University Edinburg.
- Bruthiaux, P. (2002). Hold your courses: Language education, language choice, and economic development”. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 275-96.
- Chambers, R. (1997). *Whose Reality Counts: Putting the First Last*, London: ITDG
- Chumbow, S. (1990). *The place of the Mother Tongue in the National Policy on Education*. Agbor: Central Books Limited.
- Cooke, J. & Williams, E. (2002). “Pathways and labyrinths” *Language and education in development*. *TESOL Quarterly*, 36, 297-322.
- Crystal, D. (1971). *Child language learning and linguistics: An Overview for the teaching and therapeutic professions* 2nd Edition, London: Edward Arnold.
- Elugbe Ben O. (1990). “National language and national development”. *Multilingualism, Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria*. Agbor: Central Books 102: 16-3
- Federal Government of Nigeria (2004). *National Policy on Education*. Lagos: NERDS Press.
- Freire P. (1972). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, London: Sheer and Ward Limited.
- Ige, B.S. (2000). “Language as a tool for moving education forward in the year 2000 and beyond”. *Literature and linguistics in the 21st century*. Kaduna: NCCE Publication.
- Muhammed, D. (1999), *Languages and Literature in National Development: A Hausa Perspective*. Zaria: FCE Zaria.
- Olaoye A.A. (2004). Modern approach to classroom learning: An andragogical Exploration. An unpublished Education Tax Fund workshop paper, July. Argungu, Kebbi State: College of Education.
- Pool, S. (1972). International Language Concept and Problems”. *International Journal of Social languages*. 27-49.
- Sen, A. (2005). Human Rights and Capabilities. *Journal of Human Development*. 6 (2) 151-166.
- Tambulasi, R. & H. Kayuni (2007). An analysis of the Sustainability of the Third Phase of Blantyre City Fuel Wood Project in Malawi using the Sustainability Matrix”.

International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology.14 (3). 235-242.

Ugoji, K. & Stella, C. (2010). Impact of Language Education on Natural development. Conference Paper on English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria. August 23rd – 22nd

Upah B. N. (2008). English Language & Literacy as Basic Tools for National Development in Nigeria”. *Paper Presented at the 2nd Conference of English Language Teachers Association (ELTAN)*, University of Port-Harcourt 1st-5th December 2008.