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## MINORITY LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL MOBILIZATION FOR THE UBE

DR. (MRS.) M. M. OKON AND MR. E. E. AKPAN  
*DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS*  
*UNIVERSITY OF CALABAR*

### ABSTRACT

The role of the community in education cannot be over emphasized. This is why the UBE proposes grassroots community participation in public enlightenment and social mobilization towards its successful implementation (*Implementation Guidelines of the UBE Programme 2000:4*).

Grassroots community participation suggests the use of grassroots languages. Unfortunately, the use of such languages in Nigeria is restricted to the oral medium and to certain domains like religion and culture largely because the implementation of the national language policy as regards indigenous languages is still fairly fluid.

This paper takes a look at the level of intellectualization of one of the "main" languages (Bamgbose, 1992) and how prepared it is to enable the UBE realize its set objectives in the communities where it is spoken. It therefore advocates the development and use of grassroots languages given the crucial role they have to play not only in the UBE programme but also in national development in general.

### INTRODUCTION

This work seeks to explain the importance of (and the enviable position we will find ourselves) using our minor languages as a medium of instruction for mass mobilization for the UBE. One likes to lean on someone one can interact freely with and in addition understand what one's interactant says. This applies to language also; a speaker of any language understands fast what he hears spoken in his own mother tongue.

The case of mass literacy programme is not new to linguists and language teachers especially when it concerns language teaching. Mass education and permanent literacy initiated by the government, using the name UBE, is a commendable one and a step in the right direction because education is a prerequisite for social, economic and political reconstruction in any given society.

Our indigenous languages, whether major or minor play significant and strategic roles in our daily communication needs. There is need for the government to participate fully in the mass literacy programmes which have been advocated. The programme will bring gain to the government in the long run. Fyle supports the above proposition when he said that:

Universal literacy would yield much more than specific economic advantages; it would also produce the unquantifiable but invaluable benefit of the education of the mind and spirit particularly if it is literacy in the mother tongue; it would yield richer awareness of culture and, perhaps, the development of a new civilization. (1926:16).

Fyle is saying, in effect, that universal literacy (now Universal Basic Education) is nothing but literacy for a stronger labour force, a bigger and better yield ... This is true when we remind ourselves of big industrial nations like Japan and China which developed dynamic and successful mass literacy programmes in their mother tongue and now have one of the best organized labour in the world. Bamgbose (1984) in support of the above said that "children cope better academically when they are taught by a teacher who can instruct them in their own mother tongue." (1984:3).

According to a study undertaken by the Federal Ministry of Education and ratified by the National Council on Education, it is observed that eighty percent (80%) of the Nigerian population live in the rural areas and mass literacy programmes or campaign must be made to their benefit. The question now is who will do this?



In answer to this question, on mass education, the Director General of the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) said that:

“... it is not the children of today who hold the present destiny of Africa in their hand; it is the adults. So it is only by establishing them to adjust to rapidly changing world, that an immediate impact can be made on the urgent problems of society and essential programme be brought about.” (1972:11).

This calls for effective community participation in public enlightenment, and social mobilization towards the successful implementation of the scheme (Implementation Guidelines of the UBE Programme, 2000:4). To meet the fast moving world of today, mass education has an important role of facilitating mass mobilization and ultimately, general development. As we can see, illiteracy impedes our social, political and economic well being and for this country to achieve effective and efficient development for its citizenry, a dynamic and result-oriented mass literacy programme must be established. It is literacy which is the only vehicle that can get rid of plights like the blithe of disease, ignorance, superstition and poverty.

Iwuoha (1998) drew our attention to the fact that great men such as Mahatma Gandhi of India, Azikiwe of Africa and Kwame Nkruma of Ghana are products of education whose eyes were opened to the evils of colonialism and so became available weapons to fight against such colonial maladies and finally attained political independence in their respective countries. Government is interested in Mass Education because of the goals inherent in it which, if achieved, will go a long way to bringing about the much needed all round developments, which is essential to the political, social and economic progress of a country.

## POLITICAL GOALS OF MASS LITERACY

There are some political objectives that the government will achieve if the mass education is given to the country's citizens who are the recipients of the programme. Politics is important in our daily communication with people within and outside the country. The masses must be properly informed in order to participate effectively in the political programmes of the government. With mass education, people are made to be aware of their environment and their roles in the present political transition programmes of the government. Political education is an avenue for social mobilization. With mass literacy, which is the main objective of the UBE, it will be easier for the government to reach out to the rural areas with the greatest number of illiterates with its programmes and administration. With mass literacy, people will come to know their voting rights because what they could not do politically as illiterates, they could do when they become literate. They would be able to identify party symbols when voting during elections, select the candidate of their choice without being coerced by greedy politicians who are always out to milk the masses to achieve their goals.

Government had political goals in mind when it set-up the Mass Mobilization for Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) and fused it with mass literacy. This did not succeed because it did not work closely with mass literacy at least in the mother tongue during the implementation of the programme.

## SOCIAL GOALS OF THE UBE PROGRAMME

Socially, the goals to be derived from implementing the UBE scheme (to make the masses literate at least in their Mother Tongue (MT) will be advantageous to the recipients and their communities. Adults will be equipped to inculcate in themselves the spirit of oneness and togetherness. The UBE scheme will go a long way in “maintaining an adult population up to the standard of competence in knowledge, wisdom and skill which society requires. The UBE scheme, if successfully implemented will, in the words of Oyinola (1989), make people in a community aware of their individual and collective needs and provide the means to grapple with current



individual and community problems; facilitate greater and more meaningful communication and raise the overall level of rationality of the community which in turn contributes to rapid development, bring about improved social interaction and puts an end to ignorance and apathy". This social transformation will eventually lead to a dynamic development of the rural dwellers.

## ECONOMIC GOALS OF UBE

On functional literacy, Anyanwu (1988) said: "one of the greatest aims of functional literacy is to make its acquisition help any body engaged in any developmental work to become more competent and better equipped for his work." Thus the farmer, artisan, industrial worker, and in fact, anybody engaged in one form of development or another all require functional literacy, which the UBE will provide, to perform their tasks.

With mass literacy, the economic goal of self-sufficiency in food production will be achieved. Farmers will form themselves into co-operative societies and this will improve their economic lot. They will be able to send representatives to the Ministry of Agriculture to hire machines for cultivation instead of using the traditional hoes and apply fertilizer to their crops for improved yield as against their illiterate impression that fertilizer kills crops. Those on skilled jobs will now be able to improve upon their output because they will be able to read instructions on manuals about their machineries and their operations and also write letters by themselves instead of sharing their secrets with others.

These goals cannot be achieved without the use of grassroots languages. Unfortunately, Nigeria has so many languages, some of which cannot be identified. Linguists have used the tripartite nomenclature to classify the identified ones as major, main and small groups languages. The earlier division into majority/minority was kicked against by Essien (2002:16) who rather suggested a dichotomy between major and non major to get away with the pejorative terms: minor/minority.

Some of these grassroots languages have no orthographies, let alone literacy materials. They are either underdeveloped or undeveloped. These must be developed and made use of in the UBE programme mounted by the Federal Government of Nigeria, so that these languages are not limited in use to oral medium alone or use in churches and in culture.

## IBIBIO LANGUAGE AND ITS PREPAREDNESS FOR UBE

We are all aware that education has a central and crucial role to play in the mobilization of the rural population for specific national development programmes. The Ibibio linguists, language teachers and even non-linguists have been able to build up Ibibio language with literacy materials which are being used in schools today and will continue to be used in the future.

Mobilization has already been started by the local communities (the traditional rulers, opinion moulders, religious leaders, respected citizens, parent-teacher associations and even the ordinary people in very ordinary settings) to make the UBE a success in Akwa Ibom State.

Akwa Ibom Broadcasting Corporation, the media organ of the state, has been fully used to spread the gospel of the UBE to the grassroots people, showing the long-term benefits it confers both to the individual and the local communities and the Nigerian society in general. This, Ibibio people have done to counter the lukewarm attitude some Ibibios have towards education.

To them, schooling no longer leads directly to paid employment. Ibibio linguists and language teachers have already developed curricula for teaching Ibibio language both in primary and secondary schools. The language has been up-graded and has become a WAEC and NECO examining subject. We commend the noble efforts of the producers of this curriculum.

Already, adult education programme had been in existence and teachers have been trained to handle this. Though the output is small, this serves as a foundation for the success of the UBE in Akwa Ibom State. Since the UBE programme is intended to be for all, free and compulsory, it is presumed that the output then will be more encouraging than what it is now as sanctions will be imposed on persons, and societies who will prevent children, adults and even youths from benefiting



from the UBE programme. (Implementation Guidelines for UBE Programme 2000:2).

The physically handicapped in Akwa Ibom State have been given a vocational training centre, where they learn certain crafts, all in a bid to prepare them for a life long learning and the Akwa Ibom State Government caters for their welfare.

The adult education and vocational training mentioned above contribute a lot in providing skills needed for rural development projects and other aspects of life in a modern society in the area of health education, family planning, child welfare, home craft etc. Everything considered, it is clear that this kind of Education (aimed at the total mobilization of the rural communities) is best achieved by the use of the indigenous or local languages e.g. Ibibio understood by the majority of the rural population. The Ibibio language is used in disseminating information on the UBE programme in the electronic as well as in the local media, in schools, churches, village meetings all geared towards the success of the UBE programme.

UBE is an excellent opportunity for Akwa Ibom State to confront head-on the challenges and to take full advantages of the possibilities offered by the new information and communication technologies for improving the quality of education being fully aware that now is the age of knowledge. Akwa Ibom State cannot stay outside this knowledge age and operate in a world that is now run by knowledge. She has joined the rest of the world in the integration of computer awareness, computer literacy and applications in UBE. Recently primary school teachers sent representatives from each school for a five-day computer education as the Government intends to equip each school with a computer for the training of the other teachers and the school children. This is a right step in the right direction for the success of the programme in Akwa Ibom.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

For the UBE programme to succeed, we recommend that the government should form an independent ministerial monitoring committee which will be directly under the Federal Ministry of Education with branches in the states for effective co-ordination and implementation at the grassroots level.

The discrimination against the minority languages in both the Nigerian constitution and the National Language Policy should be dismantled and revised in such a way to accommodate the minority languages (Essien 1986) and all languages should be given equal rights as it is done in Russia.

To avoid the mistake of the past whereby the mass literacy work of mamser and that of Adult and non-formal education was duplicated, we strongly suggest that all matters relating to mass literacy programme (UBE) implementation should be given to Adult and non-formal education unit of State Ministry of Education because it has professional and capable staff to handle it.

May we suggest again that before the UBE co-ordinators embark on the programme at the grassroots level, a careful analysis of the socio-economic environment of the recipients should be carried out. The recipients must be taught with examples from their environment to avoid absenteeism and total dropout from classes. The curriculum should be tailored to the environment.

There is great need for the mass media to publicize the importance of our indigenous languages and mass literacy programme for the masses to know and appreciate it; for the writer to write and be proud in writing in our mother tongues. In short, every one should strive to see that we write, speak and promote our mother tongues.

## CONCLUSION

In today's world, education has (or should have) ceased to be a privilege. It is a fundamental human right and government action in most parts of the world is directed at providing access to and equal opportunities for education. The world Conference on Education for all held at Jometien, Thailand in March, 1990 reaffirmed the pivotal role of Education as follows in Articles III and V of the World Declaration on Education For All:



- (1) Basic Education should be provided to all children, youths and adults. To this end, basic education services of equality should be expanded and consistent measures should be taken to reduce disparities.
- (2) For basic education to be equitable, all children, youths and adults must be given the opportunity to achieve an acceptable level of learning.

Article V The main delivery system for basic education is primary schooling. Primary education must be universal and ensure that the basic learning needs of children are satisfied ...” (wcefa 1990a:4-5)

We Nigerians have witnessed the greater dominance given to English by Nigeria's language policy to the detriment of our mother tongues. It is good to associate with a language that opens up limitless possibilities for international communication but we should bear in mind that using the language involves imbibing the values and cultures associated with that language. We pray, Nigerians should remember the need for authenticity and cultural awareness created by our local languages and develop a policy that stresses the use of Nigerian languages along side English.

UBE is a laudable programme and all efforts must be geared towards making it a success. No sacrifice will be considered too great in ensuring the sustainability and success of UBE. All the nation's creative energy must therefore be mobilized for this purpose, as Education For All is the responsibility of us all. (13)

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