



Education
for
Sustainable Democracy
The Nigerian Experience

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**EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEMOCRACY:
THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

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CHAPTER 19

THE PLACE OF LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES FOR SUSTAINED NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Of all the resources an organisation or a nation needs for its growth and development, human resources stand out to be the most important. They are the ones to manage and harness all the other resources for the sustenance of an organisation or nation. Unfortunately, human resources are not bought over the counter. They have to be trained and developed to meet general specific production needs and such training or education is inconceivable without language which, according to Hakuta and Cancino (1977), "provides one of the most readily accessible windows into the nature of the human mind".

In this paper, we will examine the role of language in the education or training of manpower needed for national development and make suggestions as to the kind (s) of language to be used to ensure sustained development.

Definitions

It is expedient to define the key terms of the topic of this paper.

1) Language

Language as we know is a system by which human beings communicate by means of arbitrary vocal symbols (which could be represented in writing). O'Grady et al. (1989:1) see language as "a system of communication, a medium for thought, a vehicle for literary controversy, a factor in nation building". Essien (1990:) describes language as "the quintessence of humanity" and later affirms that it is needed for communication "in all its ramifications-positively to teach, explain, inform, argue, direct, praise, pray, preserve, plan, please, etc. and even negatively to antagonize, cheat, lie, deceive, deride, mislead, misinform, misdirect, displease, etc" (Essien 1989:4).

Language is thus a social phenomenon through which people talk, listen, read, write, relate with and understand one another. It is the life-wire of interaction in the society. As society makes use of language it dictates the norms for its use, thereby creating the gamut of style and register as well as 'special languages' such as pidgins, slangs, jargons, etc.

From the foregoing, it is (almost) impossible for any social, intellectual, political, economic or cultural activity to take place without language. There can therefore be no education without the use of language in any form. Language can build as well as destroy.

2) Education

According to Nwagu (1976), education is "...the process by which every society attempts to preserve and upgrade the accumulated knowledge, skills and attitudes in its cultural setting and heritage in order to foster continuously the well-being of mankind and guarantee its survival against the unpredictable, at times hostile and destructive elements and forces of man and nature". This philosophical view of education takes into consideration the sustainability and consolidation

- c) Specialized institutions were created for the training of high-level manpower. These include the Administrative Staff College of Nigeria (ASCON), the Centre for Management Development (CMD), the Industrial Training Fund (ITF) and the National Institute of Public Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPPSS).

Non-profit management development organisations and professional bodies like the Nigerian Institute of Management (NIM) and the Nigerian Institute of Personnel Management also came to being to complement government efforts. In addition, manufacturing and commercial industries have established their training schools to train their employees on the job and address issues of technological changes on the spot.

In all these, language remains an important component, a medium of transmission and acquisition of knowledge.

The Relevance of Language in Human Resources Development

As we have already said, language is the life-wire of human interaction. We cannot but agree with Essien (1998:5) that "however development may be defined or viewed, ...language is a constant, since no human activity can be envisaged without language".

Analysing the role of language in various types of learning situations, Unoh (1982) shows that no type of learning (be it rational, psychomotor, associational or appreciational) can take place without the use of the language in which the learning task is performed. Rational learning, for instance, relies very heavily on effective use of language for the learner to think, reason, imagine, perceive, analyze, synthesize, etc. These are all psycholinguistic processes. Even in psychomotor learning situations where the need for effective use of language appears to be less crucial, Unoh (1982:14) points out that:the learner can hardly acquire the skills without making perceptual input and exercising some judgment as to the principles

and operational strategies that will best ensure the acquisition of the skill. This suggests that certain amount of rational learning is involved in psychomotor learning.

Thus, even the "simplest" of learning situations, the acquisition of skills, requires at least a basic mastery of some language skills.

In developing human resources, there has to be a flow of information between the trainer and the trained. Without language no information can be transmitted. Without language the trainer/trained cannot compare, think, identify, discriminate, discern, persuade, integrate ideas and facts, pass value judgments and record observations. For effective national development to take place human knowledge has to be brought to bear on natural (and other) resources and such knowledge cannot be acquired without language. As Essien (1998) puts it, the role of language in development is that of a "facilitator" not only at the individual level, but also at the societal level so that "...the very great, the great, the 'medium-range', and even the 'small-range' minds and talents, according to endowment, emerge for the overall growth and development of the society". (pp 6-7).

Considering this all-important role of language in development, and the multilingual nature of our society/nation, the question may arise as to what language to use to achieve maximum results in human resource development.

What Language for Human Resource Development?

The above question is pertinent in a country like ours that is plurilingual. Linguists are of the view that learning is more meaningful, more effective and more creative when it is done in the mother tongue (cf. Emenanjo, 1988; Essien 1995; Bamgbose, 1991; Kamwangamalu, 2001) and some language projects in Nigeria seem to have lent credence to this view (e.g. the Ife six-year-Yoruba Project, the Rivers State Readers Project). Emenanjo (1988) has this to say:

of gains of the society and are in line with the goals of education as enunciated by Hencley & Parsons (1973) who see education as the process of acquisition of knowledge and skills through planned activities for:

- a) The personal development and individual self-reliance
- b) Ensuring a working population with knowledge, skills and understanding necessary for the growth and development of an economy with constant technological change.
- c) Social stability through promotion of man-to-man cooperation, man-to-state relationship, civic duties, patriotism, etc.
- d) Intellectual development to enhance possession, creation and transmission of knowledge and skills.

3) **Human Resources**

For the purpose of this paper, our human resources are men and women working to produce positive results for the attainment of individual, organisational or national goals and objectives. They range from highly skilled professional/technocrats in high-tech industries to semi-skilled or unskilled operatives in our offices, industries, farm plantations, etc. For them to be efficient and effective they need to be educated- trained, retrained and developed to a point where their capabilities are built up. This view is supported by Giwa (1990:9) who holds that it is an obligation for employees to be given the right type of training and development to equip them to successfully perform their current jobs and prepare them for possible higher responsibilities in the future.

We would like to emphasise the point that putting the right person on the right job would yield maximum results.

4) **Manpower Development in Nigeria**

Development is generally described as a process of positive socio-economic change in the quality and level of human existence aimed at raising the standard of living and quality of life of people. Development is thus expected to bring about changes in attitude, new skills of production and management of our resources for the

sustenance of our national growth. Before examining the relevance of language in the process of bringing about these changes in our workforce, it is imperative to look at our efforts in training and development of our human resources and the historical /economic environments that brought about these efforts.

Nigeria as a nation has not been lacking in the training and development of her human resources. Her efforts in the training and development of her human resources date back to her full political independence in 1960. Nwana (1981:9) notes that more public funds have been allocated to education than in the pre-independence period because successive governments have realised that it is a very important tool for national development.

Political independence by implication set in motion the indigenisation of management positions in the political domain and subsequent extension to the private sector. After the civil war came the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree of 1973 whose main aim was to progressively transfer the ownership and managerial control of certain classes of business operating in Nigeria to Nigerians. Though the new Nigerian owners of the indigenised businesses in most cases failed to replace the expatriate managers with Nigerians for reasons of inadequate educational background, inadequate experience and lack of adequate training, this development created the need for trained Nigerians to actualize the objectives of the indigenisation programme. With industries and commercial organisations springing up all over the country following the oil boom, the problem of trained and adequate manpower became more and more complex.

To address this problem, Government took various steps including the following to train and develop her human resources:

- a) Both Federal and State governments established universities of technology and introduced professional courses in conventional universities;
- b) Colleges of Technology (now Polytechnics) were established to provide middle level manpower;

When a language functions purely as a foreign or second language, like English in Nigeria, or any Nigerian language for non-natives, it is just a medium of communication and no more. But where a language is a mother tongue or a first language, it is both a medium of communication as well as a carrier of culture, expressing what Emil Durheim has called the "collective consciousness" of the group. In this regard, language and culture are not only symbiotic but rub off on each other in a mutual cause-and-effect-manner (13)

It is true that one learns better in a language that one is most at ease with, and for some Nigerians that language is their mother tongues while for others it is English. Most Nigerians are not at ease with the use of their mother tongue in formal situations because they have not been opportuned to do so and so think that their languages are inferior. But, every language is a complete system in its own right with its own grammar, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics. For this reason Okon (2002) maintains that our indigenous languages can be developed and used to serve all the functions that the societies in which they are rooted, would want them to serve.

Recent developments in some parts of the world, especially in Asia, have proved that people can use their indigenous national and minor languages to develop their technology. Japan, China, India, South Korea are clear testimonies.

Our position in this paper is that the right language be used for the right audience. For the high level manpower, English may best suit the purpose while for the semi-skilled and unskilled, it may be expedient to use the mother tongue or pidgin English. What is important here is the "functionality" of the speech variety used. In a rapidly changing world such as ours, bilingualism (at least) is a necessity. One should be proficient in at least two languages-the mother tongue and the official language.

Since language plays a crucial role in the dissemination of knowledge, a strong language component should form part of the training programmes of our human resources to enable them to use language appropriately. If particular attention is paid to the study of language, this will enhance the oral communication skills, speech composition, situational public speaking of our human resources so that highly placed public officers for instance would know that they should not make inflammatory statements particularly in times of crisis.

Conclusion

To conclude, language is an essential tool in the education and development of human resources for sustained national development. Education and development of human resources pre-suppose the presence of abundant human resources in Nigeria that need to be trained, retrained and developed to render them more effective and efficient for sustained national development. If Nigeria must grow and launch herself into the community of developed nations, we (our political leaders) must have the will power and total commitment to the training and development of our workforce for efficiency. In this enterprise, effective use of language cannot be ignored. It should therefore be given a prominent place in training programmes.

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