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NIGERIAN LANGUAGES, CULTURES AND SCIENCE STUDY AS NECESSARY INGREDIENTS FOR TRANSFORMATIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN

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Abstract

This paper examines the place of Nigerian languages, cultures and the study of science as necessary ingredients for transformative education in the 21st century. The paper considered the various education reforms of post-independent Nigeria, looked into the interrelatedness of language, culture and science study as basic needs of any meaningful education. It was discovered that these needs have partly been taken care of in the various education programmes but the implementation strategies have been haphazard, uncoordinated and characterized by deceit and corruption. It therefore suggests that for Nigeria to have any meaningful transformation in its education, it must develop its indigenous languages to the level they can be used to teach in all strata of education, incorporate the culture of the people in the system and emphasize the study of the sciences. When Nigerians learn in the languages they understand very well and in their milieu, concept formation becomes easier. The formulation, explanation and interpretation of scientific facts become less problematic. The end result is scientific and technological advancement that creates wealth and a buoyant economy. This is the desire of all good education systems.

Keywords: Nigerian, Education, Indigenous Language, Culture, Development

Introduction

Throughout the whole world, educational processes are designed to change the lives of a people positively. It is an enterprise in which good planning and implementation of policies determine the end result. The long period of colonial administration in Nigeria determined the direction its educational policies took. It was a type of education that emphasized rote learning and the production of people who can

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read, understand and write the English language. That system of education was lacking in vitality and relevance. It alienated the citizens from their culture and in so doing distanced them from practical education rooted in science and vocational studies.

It is no wonder then that the spate of educational reforms in the last fifty years has increased with each successive government with little or nothing to show for it. The educational legacies of the pre-independent Nigeria still surface in the latter reforms. Not only did these reforms lack the training of the citizenry in practical vocation skills, they also alienated them from their cultures. Pupils in schools were asked not to speak their indigenous languages in schools. The content of lessons and examples given in the class were taken from outside the environment and they remained mere abstractions to the learners.

When we talk of transformation in education, we are really concerned with a break in the continuity of a line of argumentation. It suggests that something is fundamentally wrong with the existing education system which needs corrections. To transform means to change for good. The numerous education reforms testify that all is not well with the system. People, for instance, ask whether the system of education currently practiced in Nigeria which continually turns out thousands of graduates, many of them unemployable, this is actually what Nigeria needs now. Is it not better, they reason, to look inwards and transform the system in such a way that some of the products can be self-employed instead of waiting endlessly for elusive government jobs?

From 1954 when the country practiced the 8-6-2-3yr system of education, it has moved from there to 6-5-2-3, to 6-3-3-4 and now to the 9-3-4 system (Adetunji, 2021). All these constant changes have not given us the transformation we are looking for. Having established the inadequacies of all these systems, one may ask what went wrong. Could it be a matter of bad planning and implementation or both? If this effort is not made, the result of any future transformation may even be worse than the system it seeks to change (Gusau 2018).

There are three basic things that will positively transform Nigeria's education. They are as follows:

- The development of Nigeria's indigenous languages up to the point that they can be used for teaching and learning all subjects except foreign languages in all strata of the education system.
- Extensive incorporation of the various ethnic cultures of the Nigerian society in its education, and
- The study of science and technology should be given high priority.

The success of these criteria and the impact they will make in transforming our education rest on good planning and implementation. By good planning, according to Adesina (1981) is the process of applying scientific or rational procedures to the process of

educational growth and development so as to ensure the efficiency and effectiveness of the educational system.

Making Nigerian Languages Relevant to National Development in the 21st Century

Let us now see how the development of indigenous languages can help to transform our system of education. The Nigerian languages, like all other human languages are both expressions of cultures as well as vehicles of cultural transmission (Adetunji, 2021). They are both the cause and index of social and cultural change. The interdependence of language with social and cultural structures cannot be overemphasized. Language plays a key role in defining the nature of culture. The constant restructuring of the society which takes place as a result of addition of new knowledge, if not properly comprehended, interpreted, and transmitted, may create and reinforce an elitist culture which is characterized by a limited class beneficiary of the resultant socio-economic and cultural development (Meyer,2017). The assertion by Meyer is a classical example of elitist culture in Nigeria whereby a fragment of the society who happened to benefit from western education enjoys whatever that education brought to Nigeria.

Concept formation is intimately connected with language competence. Since languages aids concept formation as well as concepts, it plays a crucial role in hypothesis formation, explanation and dissemination of scientific concepts (Okechukwu, 2022; Ukpokalu, 2020). It is important that both scientists and laymen develop a flexibility to readjust themselves to the scientific situation. The development of such a mind capable of constant readjustment is as much dependent on language and culture. Since education, according to Kramsch (2019), provides access to science and technology, its products must be relevant to the needs of a people in a country as a whole, not to a fragment of the population. In today's Nigeria, the type of the system of education confides in the elites, the dividends of scientific and technological education. The system thus creates and oils an elitist social class, a class of privileged elites who enjoy the rank, status, wealth and other benefits conferred by education. Unfortunately, this class of people who are in the minority, appropriate to themselves the power of decision making in matters relating to the state. Thus, science and technology and its products, identified with the interest of the minority, are considered largely irrelevant by the community at large.

The state of the study of Nigeria's indigenous languages presently in our school system is worrisome. In spite of the place given to it in the National Policy on Education (NPE 1981, 1984, 1998, 2013) the implementation has been politicized. Some tertiary institution who brazed the new zeal to establish units for developing the languages and producing manpower in them are now at the crossroads. It is either there are no students to study the languages or funds are grossly inadequate to cater for them. The results of University of Ife six-year research project on Nigerian languages, pioneered by Professor Babs

Fafunwa has been jettisoned. The majority of the citizenry are discouraged from studying Nigerian languages because of the numerous advantages of the English language as an international language, language of education in Nigeria, language of administration, of politics, of commerce, religion, and of employment. The intimidating posture of English in Nigeria has made the development of indigenous languages to the level it could be used to study the sciences and technology almost impossible (Okechukwu, 2022). The medium of instruction in the teaching and learning of the basic sciences in our school system has remained the exclusive preserve of English. Primary Health Workers, Agric Extension Officers and other government agencies manage to explain their products in code switching and code-mixing. Unless concerted efforts are made to develop the indigenous languages to a point that they can be used to teach and explain the basic sciences and their products, the education system will remain lopsided.

Culture as a Transformative Education

Culture is defined by Brooks (2021) as the historical patterns and the socially valued characteristics that shape the lives of the people and hold them together. These patterns and traditions are cumulative in nature, and they intrude, stimulate, interrupt and impede the socialization process of human beings. It does not matter whether it is creativity in literature, arts and architecture or in speculative philosophy, whether it is the conceptualization, formulation and solution of various scientific and technological issues and problems, culture provides the general framework for their development (Phillipson, 2020). To teach the culture a particular language represents a motivating and engaging component of language teaching and learning. It is, therefore, proposed that Nigeria's education planners and teachers would pay closer attention to integrating culture as an integral part of the education system. To develop cultural awareness, alongside language awareness, materials need to provide more than a superficial acknowledgement of cultural identity and address more thoroughly the kind of cultural adjustment that underlies the experience of learning (Seelye, 2019).

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the present education system does not take its root from the people's culture and the knowledge acquired cannot solve the people's problems. The lapse, which needs positive transformation; is traced to the type of language that is used in the education process. When pupils and students can neither think nor learn in a foreign language, concept formation becomes rather difficult. The result of the six-year- University of Ife research project should have served as the beginning of a conscientious effort towards transforming our education to really address our development efforts. The peoples' Republic of China, India and some Eastern European countries are countries whose scientific and technological advancements have continued to marvel the world. Their system of education is rooted in their culture. Nigeria

is interested in importing finished technology from Europe instead of developing her own. Why is Nigeria reluctant to develop its indigenous languages? Science is dynamic and its development is intimately connected with the development of society. Unless Nigerian scientists constantly renovate their consciousness in terms of the life styles of its people, its development is bound to be irrelevant to the majority of the citizens. For as long as science and technology determine the nature of an economy, and hold the key to the production of wealth, the type of transformation being canvassed must train the people in the sciences inherent in their culture, not outside of it (Byram, 2018).

The structure of education in present day Nigeria should not inhibit any balancing of primary, secondary, and tertiary education. If it does, the scientific personnel produced will be ignorant and indifferent to the life styles rooted in their own culture and therefore become largely irrelevant to their own milieu. They will act as cheap labour for developed countries. This the genesis of the brain drain dilemma in Nigeria. In collaborating with the above statement Hinkel (2019) cited a study by the United Nations Conference Trade and Development in India. The report revealed that every Indian engineer who emigrated abroad means a loss of about Rs. 2.56lakhs (US32,000 dollars), every emigrating Arts, Science or Commerce graduate costs Rs. 1.36 lakhs(US $17000 dollars), and each medical doctor Rs. 3.52 lakhs (US 44,000 dollars). Based on these calculations, the report estimated that the contributions made by India alone to the US economy in 1970 through the supply of skilled man-power was about US $874.5 million dollars. The report further stated that the contribution of developing countries (Nigeria inclusive) that year was 2929.6 croes (US 3,660 million dollars).

The above account reveals the irrelevance of present higher education to a developing country like Nigeria and the subtle exploitation of the developing countries by the developed ones. If the application of science and technology by-passes the large majority of the people as it does in a developing country like Nigeria, then, it is bound to destroy itself along with the society it is designed to serve. The application of the products science and technology in a specific context is dependent largely on two factors: (i) the cultural milieu in which it is placed and which it is called to score and (ii) the milieu it creates as a result of its application. If the language used in the community does not keep the audience in view as a result that the communication becomes restricted to a small group, then it is conceptually in accessible. The larger society is thus excluded and science and technology remain non-culture. Expanding the scale of communication, which indigenous languages can do in a multilingual society like Nigeria, is a precondition for the removal of constraints on the path of wider application of science and technology.

Suggestions

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One important suggestion in transforming Nigeria's education in the 21st century is to efficiently address the question of developing Nigeria's indigenous languages to the level they can be used in the teaching and learning process at all levels of education. The development of these languages will aid in concept formation. It is neither important any longer to talk of 'major' and 'minor' Nigerian language to avoid the problem of fear of domination by some ethnic loyalties nor feasible to argue about the colossal amount it will involve. Nigeria has the financial capacity to develop all its languages. The political leaders need the will to get their priorities right. This is time to avoid waste and channel our financial and human resources to the needed areas.

It is important also to ensure that any transformation in our education must incorporate studies in the various cultures. Our value system does not encourage stealing, embezzlement, corruption of any type, kidnapping and any other social vices characteristic of present day Nigeria. Education is the most appropriate socializing agent that can eradicate those vices. The transformative education we envisage should not train Nigerians outside of their culture. The over use of English language in our education system has resulted to indigenous languages' displacement and replacement and if urgent measures are not taken to check it, it may lead to their eventual death. No Nigerian however chauvinistic ever doubts the importance or relevance of English in the development of a good education system but the danger is that it has become a source of external blackmail especially with regards to the development of Nigerian languages (Omolewa, 2007).

Transformative education in Nigeria in the 21st century, must of necessity, emphasize the study of the pure sciences which are to be taught in the indigenous languages since it is from them that applied service technological advancement derives. Nigerians have basic science knowledge. All that is needed is to use knowledge that modern science provides to embellish it and adjust it to suit our needs. Nigeria should not be in a hurry to do what Britain, the USA, and the other developed countries are doing presently. In transforming our education, we should emulate the self-efforts of countries like China, India, and Taiwan, etc. Today, China has perfected their **Acupuncture** treatment for malaria. Among other scientific developments, they are using silk fabric abundant in their environment to produce artificial arteries for the human body. Their technological advancements cover areas such as electronics, medicine, agriculture, engineering and all other areas of human endeavor. Scientific and technological advancement is never imported. It has to grow out of the effort of people in dealing with their problems. Until Nigeria wakes up to transform its system of education in the right direction, the attainment of scientific and technological advancement that will lead to creation of wealth and employment will continue to elude us.

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We also suggest that transformative education in Nigeria in the 21st century must address the issue of strikes by teachers and the constant disruptions of the school calendar. Most governments of the world allocate a greater percentage of their budget to education. This is not the case in Nigeria. The welfare of the teachers and their students should be given adequate attention. No meaningful education will take place when teachers are not well paid, no infrastructure in schools and where students go to school empty stomachs.

Conclusions

This paper has looked into Nigerian languages, cultures and science study as necessary ingredients for transformative education in Nigeria in the 21st century. The authors are of the opinion that the development of Nigerian languages to the stage that they can be used to teach basic sciences in our schools is a right step in the right direction. They also advocate an extensive incorporation of the various ethnic cultures in the system of education and high priority to be given to the teaching of the basic sciences. Transformative education in Nigeria in the 21st century must address the issue of adequate planning and implementation strategies. The welfare of teachers and their students should be taken into consideration to avoid the constant strikes and disruption of academics that characterize the system presently.

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