

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN POLITICS, SECURITY AND THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

In a multi-lingual and divergent ethnic country like Nigeria, social interaction, mutual trust and patriotism are usually very difficult to achieve. In such a pluralistic linguistic and cultural setting, there is always inevitable necessity for people of diverse tongues to interact and operate smoothly in social, political, economic, educational and cultural settings or institutions. If these social interactions are to yield positive and visible results, culminating in growth and development of the individuals and the nation in general, they must be done via a language devoid of mutual suspicion, distrust, hatred and insecurity. To this extent, the English language, which is the only language in Nigeria that possesses the capacity to unify the babel tongues of the various ethnic and linguistic groups, provides intelligibility in inter-personal and group communication in the operation of social structures. This paper therefore, traces and provides sufficient evidence to prove that the English language alone holds the key to politics, security and educational system through the provision of level playing group and platform for various divergent linguistic groups to contribute their quota to the growth and development of the geographical entity called Nigeria. Therefore, there is need to review the curriculum of Nigerian education at all levels in line with the prevailing situations. Education system should be reviewed in such a way that it will make beneficiaries job creators rather than job seekers. In other words, there is need for proper synergy between education, vocational studies and entrepreneurship skills.

Key words: English language, politics, security, Educational system

Introduction

The language question has been a thorny and much discussed one in Nigeria. The fact that the language question has become a genuine political and linguistic problem can be seen from the attention it has received and the discussion it has generated in educational and linguistic circles. Language is used among humans to establish, adjust and maintain interpersonal relationships and convey ideas and notions that are believed to be in the overall interest of a group, institution or community (Austin 1962; Searle 1969; Stubbs, 1995). This, in effect, demonstrates that language is a form of action, which can generate counter actions and reactions in forms other than language. Fairclough (1989) also argues that ideologies are closely linked to power and language because language use is a demonstration of power. Language has often been used as a medium of domination and social force; it has often been used as a political tool hence it plays a significant role in human actions and reactions (Ayoola, 2007:71).

At the close of the twentieth century and in spite of its legislated position as the ‘official language’ in Nigeria, English metamorphosed from the official language of education, government and business to the unproclaimed lingua franca as well as the convenient language of both official and intimate ‘record keeping’ and communication (Udofot, 2003).

Nigeria as a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic and pluralistic cultural nation faces a number of social, political, security, linguistic and religions problems. For example, the people in the Nigerian federation speak several languages, ranging from the major ethnic languages of the Hausa, , Igbo and Yoruba to the diverse languages of the minorities of Fulfude, Kanuri, Mumuye Tiv, Ijaw, Gwari, Igala, Idoma, Efik, and Ibibio to mention but few. In this kind of divergent linguistic setting, human interaction and relationship amongst the various distinct groups would be difficult if not impossible, without an independent and neutral language which many people can speak and understand freely and effortlessly. Ordinarily, because of the monolingual propensity of different actors in various fields in Nigeria, there would be mutual distrust and suspicion among the operators of national assignments leading to hatred and gross insecurity, if there is no language which each of the divergent linguistic/cultural groups can speak and write.

For example, while the three major ethnic groups will be suspicious of one another, the vast minority ethnic groups would be suspicious of the three major languages and political groups as forming unholy alliance against them. The obvious mutual distrust among these groups would naturally have a devastating impact on the overall development of the geographical entity called Nigeria.

The above socio-cultural cum linguistic scenario would naturally impede negatively on national integration, security and development. To overcome the above envisaged problems, a language that possesses the characteristic features of national acceptability, mutual intelligibility and social neutrality needs to be put in a central position to act as a bridge through which all the different ethnic/linguistic and cultural groups can cross into the mainstream of the national culture. And the only language that can step into the big shoes painted above is the English language.

Literature review

There are varied definitions of the concept of education. It is seen as a race course, the transmission of what is worthwhile from generation to generation, and “the various ways in which a society transmits knowledge, including factual information and occupational skills, as well as cultural norms and values, to its members. Education also involves formal instruction under the direction of specially trained teachers Macionnis cited in Azikiwe (2008.

21). Education is also seen as a process by which individuals are assisted formally through proper direction and guidance to develop their capacities not only for their own benefit but for the society at large. Suffice to say that the essence of education is to develop individuals so that they can become effective and efficient in what they do and also contribute to the advancement of the society where they live. Orikpe (2013) avers that education plays a critical role in changing the behavioural patterns of citizens to the desired direction. The next concept for clarification is national security.

The issue of security is not alien as it has been the central focus of primitive society. In the same vein, Audu, Lukeman and Mohammed (2014) argued that since the end of the cold war, there appears to be shift from viewing security from state-centric perspective to a broader view that places emphasis on individuals, in which national security also encapsulates human security, human right and national development. National security according to Iredia (2011) simply mean, the capacity of a state to overcome challenges confronting her. He added that national security is not limited to military might, defence or law enforcement; it covers basic dimensions like job, water and food security. National security is also seen as a state or condition in which most cherished values of a country and the people are permanently protected and continuously enhanced.

The concept of security also denotes the condition or feeling of safety from harm or danger. It also means the defence and protection of values acquired. To Oche (cited Nwaneggo and Odigbo (2013) security has to do with freedom from danger or threat to a nation's ability to protect and develop itself, promote its cherished values, legitimate interests and enhance the well-being of its people. Internal security implies freedom from danger to life and prosperity. Audu, Lukeman and Mohammed (2014.16) explained security as any mechanism devised to alleviate the most serious threats that prevent people from pursuing their cherished values. From the various explanations of security above it can be deduced that insecurity implies a state of vulnerability to attacks, danger or threats to a people, their properties, cherished values and the inability of the nation to protect its citizenry

The English Language, Ethnic Languages and the Unity/ Development of Nigeria

The English language plays a major role in the affairs of this nation because of its premier and honoured position as a national language, official language or lingua franca. To this extent, other ethnic languages feel threatened and intimidated by the English language because of their limited influence in the unity and development of the nation. For example, the Igbo language feels so threatened by the English language to the extent that scholars and opinion leaders in Igbo land continue to express real or imaginary fears that at the rate the English language is influencing the Igbo people, it will be a matter of years when the Igbo language will go into total extinction. This fear is hinged on the fact that many Igbo men and women, children and adults cannot fluently express themselves in Igbo language –their mother tongue – because of the influence of the English language. Some who try to speak Igbo suffer obvious linguistic problems called code-mixing and code-switching. This paper does not intend to go into examples of code switching and code mixing which produce what one may refer to as “English-Igbo.”

The point being made above is that the English language is so powerful and influential that ethnic languages feel greatly jeopardized and threatened by the English language.

The Hausa, among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, are the most proud in terms of using their language. In respect of this, a dangerous sect that calls itself Boko Haram, feels so much threatened by the English language in particular and Western education in general, that it has embarked on a “twenty first century Jihad” and blind genocide through

suicide bombing of Christian churches, federal government establishments, private and public buildings and media houses, with a view to stopping the use of the English language and the influence of the West in Nigeria. This sect suffers from what we may call “West phobia” (Fear of the West) and English-phobia (fear of the English language).

The picture above shows that every ethnic and linguistic group in Nigeria is doing everything possible, (legal and extra-legal in some cases) to preserve its language or mother tongue. Ironically, these Nigerians with diverse languages often congregate as members of the nation called Nigeria (an indivisible and indissoluble one), where they are expected to communicate intelligibly in schools, colleges, universities, hospitals, the judiciary, army, navy, legislature, civil service, banks, air force among so many other areas of human activities as Nigerians.

Security and the Nigerian System of Education

Education and security can influence each other positively or negatively depending on the context. This is necessarily so because it enables individuals, groups, countries and human race to explore, appreciate, understand and develop their physical and social environments for the satisfaction of their needs. An educated person has broad view of issues as against narrow and parochial outlook. Education makes people to be tolerant of other people’s religion, belief, culture, limitations and promote social harmony and security. It is ability to listen to almost anything without losing your temper or your self-confidence. A good number of conflicts often arise from ignorance and manipulation of ethnic and religious identity. In fact, education (not just passing through the four walls of the school) system produces tolerant and civil citizens who are able to understand and live with people from different ethnic, economic, religious and cultural backgrounds and other forms of identities.

Evidence of Insecurity in Nigeria

The thesis of this paper and indeed its essence is to show that there is insecurity in Nigeria as the statistics below shows but that the rate of in security will seriously skyrocket to a point of national disintegration and overall regression in diverse sectors of the politics, education and family, if a neutral means of mass communication for mutual intelligibility amongst the various ethnic/cultural groups such as the English language is not given the prominent and indispensable place it deserves in the Nigerian Federation. Let us glance through instances of high level of insecurity within a given period. For example, “The Nation Newspapers” of 18th May, 2012, reported the Minister of Police Affairs, Navy Captain Caleb Olubolade (rtd) as saying:

In 2011 alone, the Nigeria Police reported that the fundamentalist Islamic group – Boko Haram –launched 118 terror attacks in Nigeria, killing 308 people in six states in the North central Nigeria, plus the Federal capital, Abuja (online). It is on record that the Boko Haram sect is fighting against Western Education and Western civilization, whose nucleus is the English language through which Western discoveries in arts, science and technology are distributed throughout the world. Therefore, a fight against Western civilization is a fight against the English language and a fight against all forms of unity, integration, security and development in Nigeria. Apart from the specific figures of evidence of insecurity given above by the police, the researcher went ahead to gather more statistics to show how insecure Nigeria is and how more insecure it will be in the absence of the English language.

Roles of the English Language in Achieving Nigerian system of education, Security and politics

In this part of the discourse, the researcher looks at the specific areas in which the English language plays inevitable and indispensable roles in achieving Nigerian system of education, security and politics:

a. The English Language and Education in Nigeria

The development of any nation depends highly on the quality of its educational system and the education of every nation relies on a language for the teaching of its curriculum to its citizens. From the multi-lingual nature of Nigeria, education through teaching and learning encounters takes place via the English language. To this extent, whether it is at the primary, secondary or tertiary levels of education, the English language is used as a language of instruction, examination and evaluation.

b. The English Language and Law Making In Nigeria

The purpose of making laws is to protect the rich and safeguard the weak. A lawless society is a Hobbesian society where there is the philosophy of the survival of the fittest. To eschew a lawless society, Nigerians make laws that guide the behaviour and activities of its citizens. In Nigeria, it is only the English language that is used in making laws that can be uniformly applied to all Nigerians irrespective of language, tribe, religion and culture. For example, paragraph 55 of the 1999 constitution, emphatically states that the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in the English language.

c. The English Language and the Nigerian Judicial System

In Nigeria today, civil and criminal cases are heard, judged and disposed of in a language which all lawyers, judges and justices can speak, understand and appreciate. In the Appeal and Supreme Courts, judges/ justices are The English language as a panacea for national Security appointed from various ethnic groups but are expected to speak a uniform language in the court and give judgement in a language which majority of Nigerians can speak and understand

d. The English Language and the Nigerian Commercial Sector

The life of any nation depends so much on its economic or commercial activities. The demand for and supply of goods and services determine to a great extent, the rate of economic growth and development of a nation. These socio-economic activities are done through a common language which all operators of the system can speak and understand.

e. The English Language, Politics and Governance in Nigeria

Politics, to a great extent, is the life of every nation, whether it is completely civilian, quasi civilian or military. It is through politics that governance is achieved. In Nigeria, national political parties are formed beyond ethnic or cultural boundaries. Parties that have ambition to control the federal governance must possess obvious national outlook, constitution and characteristics. This means, membership of such a political party must cut across ethnic, linguistic, social and cultural boundaries.

Educational system, National Security and politics in Nigeria

Nigeria Is a nation beset with numerous socio-economic, educational and political problems which have retarded its growth and development. Nigeria Is bedevilled with the dwindling standard of education, various Indices of Insecurity such as armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry, youth restiveness, boundary disputes, ethno-religious crises, militancy, murder, poverty, unemployment etc and bad governance manifested in corruption, non provision of basic necessities of life etc. Education Is the bedrock of societal development and no nation can rise above the quality of Its citizens 'educational level as the type of education given to the

people of a nation determines the type of governance that might exist in the country and the rate of its development. Where there is a state of insecurity and bad governance, there is absence of quality education and development is as elusive as a mirage. Quality education and good governance are remedy to Insecurity and underdevelopment or stagnation. There are about 40 million unemployed youths In Nigeria. Security Is an Illusion If a greater population of a society are poor, unemployed, miserable and aggrieved. Leadership problem is the major problem facing Nigeria. Quality education, national security and good governance bring a healthy development to a nation. They are a serious concern in every nation and this paper is poised to investigate them.

Conclusions

For Nigeria to remain one indivisible and indissoluble country and for Nigerians to interact freely in the area of Education, polity, economy, defence, legislation, judiciary, sports and games among other sectors, without any iota of distrust, suspicion and feeling of insecurity and poor integration. The English language provides a soft landing pad and a level playing ground for all Nigerians to mutually communicate and contribute their quota to the overall development of the geographical entity called Nigeria. This is because language is the symbolic life of any nation and indeed a source of power, unity, security and development. Therefore, without the English language, Nigeria would be a mere geographical expression

Recommendations

The following suggestions are hereby by made: There is need to review the curriculum of Nigerian education at all levels in line with the prevailing situations. Education system should be reviewed in such a way that it will make beneficiaries job creators rather than job seekers. In other words, there is need for proper synergy between education, vocational studies and entrepreneurship skills.

The government should embark on mass employment of the youths. The governors of states in the north should work towards sensitizing their people towards placing high premium on Western education that will liberate the mind so as to douse radical religious ideology that constitute insecurity in the country.

The government should review policy on retirement age so as to create vacancies for the unemployed youth. This can be done without creating another problem provided government put up a workable pension scheme in which retirees are paid their gratuities and pension promptly. If the pension Scheme is good, people won't be requesting for an upward review of retirement age, thereby, closing the door of employment opportunities for younger generations.

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