

NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM ENDANGERED THROUGH GLOBAL CRISES; PROPER USE OF LANGUAGE AS A REFORM

By

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Abstract

This paper discussed the Nigerian education system endangered through global crises; proper use of language as a reform. The concept of language-crises in Nigeria and its effect on education, language for managing crises was discussed to ascertain the way forward. It is seen that the most important fact about language is that it is a way of communicating meaning or idea and when it is not so the purpose of using language is defeated. We equally see the sit at home order in South East as a big challenge to our educational system. Governments at all levels have an indifferent attitude towards the educational crisis in the country. language use in crisis situations is highly ideological and exhibit features of affect involving the use of flaming, labelling, and some forms of rhetoric that reflect negative evaluation of some perceived social enemies. Negative representations of the attackers are understandably influenced by the emotions of people who are directly or indirectly affected by the crises. The expressions of anger, fear, shock and frustrations in language use occur frequently. However, some forms of labelling and negative constructions of the situation are actually misleading and tend to divert attention to some serious aspects of the crisis in question thereby putting the education system at hold.

Introduction

Nigeria is at a tipping point regarding security, human capacity development and economic growth. However, the biggest challenge we face as a country is not about the challenges of today but a bleak future stirring Africa's biggest economy and the most populous black nation in the face. Looking beyond the 2023 general elections, one sees our leaders' deliberate insensitivity and indifference at various levels to the destruction of one sector that offers us hope to safeguard and recover the future. That is the educational sector.

In the last month, Nigeria's education sector crisis has become more evident. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), which has been on strike since February 14, has extended this by three months. ASUP, the Union of Polytechnic lecturers, has commenced a strike action. There is zero public school registration for the WAEC examination in Sokoto and Zamfara States, and some candidates in some South-East States cannot participate in the UMTE examinations due to the sit-at-home orders of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). There are other horrendous developments in the education sector. What is freightening is the inability of our policymakers to connect the monumental rot and negligence of the education sector today to our bleak future.

Neglecting the education of the present generation of Nigerians would in many ways, endanger the prosperity of the future. But does anybody actually care? Educating young people today

will determine how much progress we make as a country, going into the future. It is evident that with the neglect or near-total collapse of education in Nigeria, the future of our society is uncertain or may be gloomy. (Umeh, 2001).

Concept of Language

A language is a structured system of communication. The structure of a language is its grammar and the free components are its vocabulary. Languages are the primary means of communication of humans, and can be conveyed through speech, sign, or writing.

The most important fact about language is that it is a way of communicating meaning or idea. If it does not do that, it would be irrelevant to most of what human beings do as bird song or the sound of the waves. In Nigeria, there have been crises endangering education. We therefore ought to make use of language properly in order to address the crises as the effect on education are quite unfavorable.

Crises in Nigeria and Its Effects on Education

Nigeria seems to be retrogressing in all aspects of education and skills acquisition. The net quantity and quality of education in Nigeria, in comparison to past decades, given our population and economy, is negative. The products of our education system cannot measure against their opposite numbers in India, China or the European Union (EU).

The education sector crisis has been made worse by the intractable insecurity in various parts of Nigeria, the girl child educational inequity, and poverty that has made quality education unaffordable to many Nigerians. There is a total loss of confidence by stakeholders in our education system.

The loss of confidence in Nigeria's education is led by the political and other elite classes. Over 95 per cent of the elite leaders in government, business and technocratic professions are educating their children in tertiary institutions in Europe and the United States. Consequently, there is hardly any serious policy discussion about education in Nigeria.

Despite notable interventions of the UNICEF and the Nigerian government, we still have 18.5 million out-of-school children in the country; the second-largest number in the world.

Our education sector needs a quantum overhaul that targets its outcomes. We need improvement starting from primary education, where we see many out-of-school children. Secondary education needs a total overhaul, where we are witnessing declining standards and low attainment in national examinations like NECO and WAEC. The complete collapse of the higher education sector, where workers engage in incessant strike actions, leading to half-baked graduates who are grossly untrainable and unemployable, needs immediate attention.

Education has suffered from insecurity at the basic primary and secondary levels in most parts of the country. The "unknown gunmen" and IPOB agitators have terrorized the South-East and forced a sit-at-home observation on every Monday. This problem has affected schools in the five South-East states, where 20% of the time allotted to education is lost each week. Students in the South-East states missed examinations scheduled for Mondays nationally during necessary national examinations like WAEC, NECO and UMTE. (Odeh, 2003).

As if this is not shocking enough, in Sokoto and Zamfara States, students in public schools did not register for the WAEC examination this year, either because the government did not pay for them, or because of various other militating factors. This anomaly indicates retrogression in teaching, learning and examination for certification.

In other parts of the North, the uptake of the WAEC examination is minimal, even with some state governments paying for the students. Students in Internally Displaced Persons (IDP)'s camps are worrying more about survival than getting an education. Government poorly funds most government schools, and they owe teachers' salaries.

Most government schools in the South of Nigeria are overcrowded and always attended by children from poor backgrounds whose parents cannot afford the prohibitive costs of private primary and secondary education.

As the crisis in the education sector deepens, the attention of our political leaders is fastened upon elections and politics. While elections and politics are essential and must receive due attention, they however should not detract attention from the education sector, which is undergoing decay and needs urgent and immediate attention.

It is disturbing to note that the generation that had good government-funded basic education in the '80s and '90s is struggling to function productively nowadays; how much more will the children of this generation with poor education or no education, in some cases, become productive at all. The irony is on all of us.

The rich and middle class have insulated themselves from this problem. Children of people in these classes go to private schools abroad or at home, which continues to widen the gap between the poor and the rich, and invariably creates inequality.

The children of the poor are hard done. In the past, education was the greatest leveller. Children of the poor often meet and outcompete children from affluent backgrounds in schools. They learn the confidence that comes with knowing that they are as good as anybody with hard work and intelligence, no matter their family backgrounds.

Our tertiary education sector is comatose with ASUU and ASUP strikes. The students are unproductive at home or sometimes nuisances to their communities. Imagine the impact on the quality of education of these students.

Governments at all levels have an indifferent attitude towards the educational crisis in the country. They have not articulated better ways of managing education to provide the needed quality for our children. Education policies are either not fit-for-purpose or not yielding the desired results, and education monitoring institutions are moribund, at best, where they exist.

It is disheartening that private education providers buy and sell quality education in many states. In some middle class and working-class families, tuition fees and other school-related charges take a chunk of their incomes.

The recommended average percentage of GDP on total government and private expenditure on education is 5%. Most countries in the developed world spend even more than this average on education. For example, "among the 34 OECD countries' reporting data in 2015, 17 countries spent more than the average percentage (5%) of GDP on total government and private expenditures on education institutions for OECD countries. Norway spent the most on education as a percentage of GDP at 6.4%, followed by New Zealand at 6.3 per cent, the United Kingdom at 6.2 per cent, and the United States at 6.1 per cent," according to UNESCO. However, data from UNESCO also shows that the expenditure on education (as a per cent of GDP) in Nigeria was 0.85% as of 2017. This statistics shows the crass negligence that our education sector is facing from all sections of the government.

Two futures are possible with our political leaders' indifference to educational issues. The first is one in which we will continue to relegate education to the rear of our development agenda; and our youthful population, which ought to be a demographic advantage, becomes a burden. We will entrench and reinforce generational inequality and possibly poverty, insecurity, and, most importantly, dismantle the building blocks of the future. Conversely, we are setting our country up for endless, perennial crises because of the collapse of the essential building blocks of a functional society. Either way, we cannot win.

We know that the growth of the human mind and the broadening of the human intellect reflect man's immediate environment's physical development. Therefore, the development's physicality is just a reflection and reification of the extent of our mental and intellectual

development. This idea underscores the importance of training and education as a key to societal growth.

We see this in what happens to a developed environment when undeveloped minds are allowed to inhabit them, and they trash them and reduce the place to the extent of the level of development of their minds, and converse is the case too. This fact underscores the importance of education to the development of Nigeria.

The children we do not educate today will pose a danger in the future, and they may fuel insecurity, criminality, and total dependency on the state for survival, not to mention the lost opportunity cost in productivity they would have given, were they educated. Now is the time to pay attention and call for a “state of emergency” in our education sector.

We must bring all ideas, talents, skills, and resources to the table to resolve some of the crises threatening to mar the future of the next generation of Nigerians. It is not just a policy and monetary issue. We need to focus on teacher education to improve the quality of teachers and engage in their periodic testing and retraining. The promotion of teachers should be tied to the quality of their teaching, personal development, and the impact of teaching on students. We need to provide them with the teaching resources and incentives they need to do a good job. Individual states should set independent standards for teachers’ accreditation in their jurisdictions.

We must provide all forms of financial and psychological incentives to teachers. We must ringfence their benefits and emoluments in both federal and state budgets and never allow a situation where governments owe them salaries. The reward of teachers must be here “on earth and not in heaven.” We should pay them wages when due and pay them a living wage. We must review the pay of teachers on the basis of current economic realities and attract the best to the teaching profession.

The future we want to build for our children will be worse than what we have now if we do not prioritise education. A stitch in time, they say, saves nine. We must focus and refocus all our physical and intellectual energies to rescue our education from total shambles and, that way, safeguard the future we desire.

Language for Managing Crises

- **Make more use of short words:** In times of crisis, the language we use is essential to capturing the attention, trust, and confidence of our audience. In managing crises, replace long words with short ones; the clearer and more concise you are, the higher chance you have in curbing the crises. When your words are so long, you delay the patience of people thereby incurring more damages, inflicting anger, fear and frustration on the masses causing them not to go their daily businesses. For instance in a case of attack by herdsmen, the nature and extent to which this had been deployed in online audience on national security especially the herders-farmers bloody clashes in Nigeria and its possible implication for national security which can lead to the nation being highly polarized. Meanwhile, research has shown that language use by people affected by security threat like the case of herdsmen attack or terrorist attacks, who though not directly affected by the threat, but respond to the news about the situation by posting comments and responding to posted comments on the Internet (Chiluwa, 2016), could further or mar the state of security in human society thereby endangering education and its processes.
- **Avoid hate speech:** In managing crises, one has to avoid completely abusive or threatening speech that expresses prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or similar grounds. When hate speech is used in an environment where crises is disrupting, it will set going the problem thereby affecting every process of the communities including education. Take for instance in Nigeria, there is crises everywhere, no peace in the land,

people are afraid to go about their daily businesses. Now that we are into election, many questions that were thrown to the presidential candidate of labour Party (LP) Mr. Peter Obi, he responds to them all avoiding hate speech because he is on the bid to bring peace into the nation for every aspect of the country to have fresh air again.

- **Avoid exaggerations and inconsistency:** The connotative effects of exaggeration, inconsistency naming and labeling, among other discourses structures are key agents in the linguistics construction of violence and war. Thus, language carefully chosen can mask violence, and when it does not, it's an active part of violence (Chiluwa and Ajiboye, 2016). Linguists are increasingly turning their attention to the working of the expression of emotion in discourse (Mackenzie and Albajuez, 2019) In times of crises, with mass media as extraordinary powerful creator of positive and negative frames of events (Gower, 2009) studies have revealed how these frames can easily influences people's appraisal of such events and incline them towards certain lexical choices revealing positive or negative attitudes (Chiluwa and Ajiboye, 2019). When their attitudes are negative, it will be disastrous and detrimental on the masses, thus the need for a choice of word that should clearly not reflect anger, fear and frustration on the people, and their educational system.

Tips for crises management through effective use of language

- **Discover what you really convey with your face and body gestures when speaking:** Tape yourself talking or watch in a mirror when fielding "media" questions. (Or get some media training!) Whatever the case, you need to be looking for tells, tics and anything that can be misconstrued. Act confident and self-assured, and be mindful of your natural reactions. Your body language can tell a different story than your talking points.
- **Write down your talking points, and don't be afraid to shut up:** Many times, CEOs and spokesmen get in hot water because they simply say too much – there's a human tendency to fill dead space in a conversation. But with reporters, you're not obligated to talk until they say stop. Just give a comprehensive, efficient answer to their question and await the next. It's OK to repeat talking points – those are the things you want to convey most – and it ensures that the clip that makes it to the 6 o'clock news isn't an off-hand quote.
- **Ask yourself who is affected by the crisis. Then speak directly to them:** Tailor your language to reflect a direct interaction with people impacted by whatever scenario is taking place. This is your chance to set the story straight, or to extend a message of unity or care to anyone hurt or reeling from bad news. Be human – there's nothing wrong with showing a little emotion. Just be sure to avoid straying from your original message.

Recommendations

1. Government should look into the Nigeria educational system and make amend by addressing the people from time to time on the need for a peaceful environment for the growth of educational system in Nigeria.
2. Agencies in-charge of curriculum planning and development need to include crises management as an area of study.
3. The masses should avoid escalating information on crises by using improper language but rather be educated on the use of language especially during crises. .

Conclusion

Nigeria's educational system is pretty far, far away from perfect. In fact, it's undergoing a crisis that can shape the future of the country. After all, the foundations on which we build something

become either the strongest or the weakest link in the chain. So, we need to make sure that we are building strong foundations. This can be done via education and a quality one, moreover. We need to put kids in school and actually teach them something. We need to make sure the environment is safe for them.

Sure, there isn't a single course of action that can lead us to the appropriate part of our journey. We just know what is the end goal that we need to strive to reach – quality education for every child. This is something that we, as a society, should put into our priorities. The future lies in the hands of those who are still kids.

We should make sure that we set them up on the right path to a successful future. That is done through quality education – a right for every child.

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