

THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL IDEOLOGY ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND EDUCATION POLICIES IN NIGERIA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

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Abstract

Language policy is a delicate issue especially one set in a multi-lingual context as found in Nigeria. The role of language in education as a means of achieving sustainable development in any given society is a truism. Language education in Nigeria is a complex and dynamic field that reflects the intersection of political ideology and national economy in shaping sustainable national development. The dominance of English as the official language underscores the historical legacy of colonialism and the desire for linguistic unity in a multiethnic society. However, the emphasis on English has often marginalized indigenous languages and dialects, leading to concerns about linguistic diversity and cultural preservation. As a result, there is a strong emphasis on teaching English in schools to equip students with the language skills needed for success in a competitive globalized world. Conversely, indigenous languages are often neglected in the education system, potentially eroding cultural heritage and hindering inclusive development. To promote sustainable national development through language education in Nigeria, policymakers must navigate the complexities of political ideologies and economic imperatives. Balancing the promotion of linguistic diversity, cultural heritage preservation, and economic competitiveness is essential for fostering a harmonious and prosperous society. By adopting inclusive language education strategies that value both indigenous languages and internationally recognized languages, Nigeria can create a more equitable and culturally rich educational environment conducive to sustainable national development.

Keywords: *Language education, Language policy, Political ideology, Sustainable national development and English language.*

Introduction

The term ‘language’ could be applied to man’s ability at exercising his innate vocal endowment (Zygmunt, 2016). It could also be seen as a means of expression available to a given speech community for the purposes of communication and socialization as well as that of showcasing, preserving and transmitting culture. Nigeria is a country so richly endowed with language that she has about 400 languages (Igiri, Awa, & Rose, 2022). Ethnic divisions in Nigeria are linguistically determined. Consequently, the existence of many languages implies the existence of many antagonistic ethnic nationalities. Three languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba were elevated to major languages while the rest are seen as minor languages. This is predicated on the fact that the Hausas, Ibos and Yorubas are the three major tribes in Nigeria (Ogundiya, 2010). The national language question saw the English language emerging as the lingua franca and the official/national language due to its neutrality in a multi ethno-linguistic and multicultural setting as Nigeria (UNESCO, 2023).The language has also been adopted as a

medium of instruction in our school system. The English language, a foreign language plays multifarious roles in Nigeria being the second language, the lingua franca, official language and the language of instruction. The elevation and status of the English language has been saddled with numerous criticisms and condemnations. Opponents see the language as elitist in nature, having the tendency of excluding the majority of Nigerians from involvement in, and participation in national issues that concern them. In our education setting, they argue that academic underachievement in Nigeria is traceable to failure to comprehend teaching concepts owing to linguistic deficiencies. Haddy, (2011), in this regard establishes the relationship between thinking and linguistic abilities. He notes that “there is a medium in which we think, and of course it is a language”. This implies that the English think in English, the Hausas think in Hausa, the Yorubas in Yoruba and the Igbos in Igbo. Supporters of the use of the English language as our official language, the lingua franca and the medium of instruction in schools base their arguments on the fact that the use of the English language engenders mutual understanding, co-operation and peace in a country bedeviled with too many ethno-political problems. They see it as neutral and have the capacity to be accepted by all as a national language more than any other indigenous language. They also remind their critics that the majority of Nigerian indigenous languages are still in the process of language engineering while some are yet to be codified. Language and society are so much related. Their relationship cannot be underestimated. Language is the oil that lubricates activities within any human society (Ugboja and Ijoko, 2022). It is an indispensable medium that helps man to achieve effective communication as it mirrors the mind in deep and significant ways.

The English language has taken the position of a national language in Nigeria. There is no gain saying the fact that English has become a Nigerian language (Adegbite, 2004). The language has become an invaluable legacy of the British colonial masters. Several years after independence, English still survives and has assumed a more important status in Nigeria. This paper examines English as the language education, the language of economics and the language of unity in Nigeria. These are very important avenues for meeting the much needed sustainable development that we all need in Nigeria. The importance of English language as a veritable tool for sustainable development in Nigeria forms the core of this paper.

Thus, language education serves as a crucial force in shaping the cultural fabric, national identity, and socio-economic progress of a country. The interplay between political ideology and national economy significantly influences language education policies and practices, impacting the sustainable development trajectory of a nation. This introduction provides a comprehensive overview of the intricate relationship between political ideologies, economic factors, and language education for sustainable national development, with a specific focus on the case study of Nigeria. However, the emphasis on English has raised concerns regarding the marginalization of indigenous languages and dialects, potentially eroding linguistic diversity and threatening cultural sustainability within the country.

The confluence of political ideologies and economic forces in shaping language education policies in Nigeria underscores the complexities and nuances that underpin sustainable national development. A balanced approach that appreciates linguistic diversity, preserves cultural heritage, and fosters economic competitiveness is imperative for creating an inclusive and equitable educational landscape conducive to sustainable growth. By critically examining the case study of Nigeria, policymakers, educators, and stakeholders can glean

invaluable insights into the intricate dynamics at play and chart a course towards a more holistic and culturally enriched educational system that propels sustainable national development.

In light of these considerations, this paper delves into the multifaceted interplay between political ideology, national economy, and language education within the context of Nigeria, offering a nuanced analysis of the challenges and opportunities that lie at the nexus of linguistic diversity, cultural resilience, and economic vitality. Through this exploration, the complex mosaic of language education emerges as a catalyst for a change, underscoring its critical role in shaping the sustainable development course of nations worldwide.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to examine the nuanced relationship between political ideology, national economy, and English language education in Nigeria, with a focus on their collective impact on sustainable national development.

Language Diversity in Nigeria

The number of languages spoken in Nigeria has been variously estimated from one hundred and fifty (150) to about four hundred (400) (FRN, 2013). Everywhere in the world, there appears to be one language problem or another. All the former British colonies were left with the English language on the departure of the colonial government. Nigeria has English as her official language. The use of English as the official language in Nigeria defuses ethnic conflicts and yet questions the authenticity and identifies of the users. This has always resulted in arguments about the choice of indigenous languages for official and national purposes because the use of English as our official language strikes at the root of national pride since English is a colonial language. The Nigerian constitution stipulates that English, the language of our colonial masters and indeed a second language to Nigeria is our official language. Paragraphs 51 and 91 of the 1988 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria further confirm the status of English as follows:

The business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English language, and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made in paragraphs 51. The business of the State House of Assembly shall be conducted in English but the house may in addition to English conduct the business of the house in one or more other languages spoken in the state.(Federal Republic of Nigeria, paragraph 91).

This implies that official transactions of government, administration, trade and commerce, law and justice, instruction in the education sector, should be done in the English language. Nigerians, as a matter of fact, would have wanted to have one of the four hundred ethnic languages to be recognized as the official language. But the multiplicity of the languages poses a problem to the ethnic conscious Nigerians. The situation is a very difficult one and that is why it has been concluded that “the national language issue in Nigeria is a sensitive ad controversial one” (Obiegbu, 2015:19). The reason is that each language has a geographical boundary which sees her language as a mark of social identity. The selection of one as a national language over others would bring in disagreement.

Language in Education

The goal of education is to help the learner develop his natural ability by creating the necessary environment that will facilitate, challenge and involve him socially, physically, intellectually and emotionally in the art of learning and doing. The relationship that exists between language and the mind is such that language is a reflection of the mind and a means of conveying knowledge and information stored in the mind (Akindutire and Ekundayo, 2012). Language plays an important role in learning at any level of education. The normal teaching-learning process thrives on effective communication by which the teacher and his/her learners are required to command the language of instruction. This means that no matter how expertly learning experiences are selected and organized, the ultimate objective of the teaching-learning exercise; which is a change in behavior, would not occur if the teachers cannot relate these experiences in the appropriate language. Consequently, language becomes a veritable tool for any form of education (Aminigo, 2003).

The Concept of sustainable Development

Sustainable Development is development that meets the need of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is interested in sustainable development. This means making the necessary decisions now to realize our vision of stimulating economic growth and tackling the deficits, maximizing wellbeing and protecting our environment, without affecting the ability of future generations to do the same (Efemini, 2002). The government takes account of sustainable development as a part of how it develops its policies, how it runs its buildings and how it buys its goods and services. All departments are responsible for making sure that their own policies and activities contribute to sustainable development. The English language forms a key factor to sustainable development in Nigeria.

English as a Tool for Sustainable Development in Nigeria

This paper looks at English language as a tool for sustainable development in Nigeria in the areas of education, economic growth and as a driving force for national unity in Nigeria.

The Role in Education

The purpose of education in Nigeria is for national unity and development. This has informed many of the reform programs of successive Nigerian governments. There have been initiatives by government on nomadic education, technical skills development, professional enhancement and continuous education among others. It is only through the English language that these basic educations at different levels can be achieved. Even the nomadic education has to be done in English language because the concept to be used in teaching at a higher level (right after primary three) has to be provided in the English language.

The English language is the language of Education in Nigeria Ndimele (2006). Apart from the first three years of a child's life in the primary school that was mentioned in the National Policy on Education, the rest of the child's life in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, all academic activities must be done in English language. English is the language of prestige per excellence and a firm knowledge of it is an assurance of climbing the educational ladder of success in Nigeria. Credit in five subjects including English and mathematics in the

West African School Certificate is a passport to any Nigerian university and subsequently offers a speedy access to employment in the job market.

Before development can come to a people, there must be a means of communication and language quickly comes to play. Considering the many indigenous languages present in Nigeria today, it is quite difficult to impose an indigenous and unifying language because they number over four hundred. The language scenario in Nigeria would have been close to what happened at the Tower of Babel had not a foreign language, English, been introduced and used in the country.

English Language and Economic Growth

Economically, English language is the avenue to sustainable development in Nigeria. Economists in Nigeria believe that English is crucial for economic growth, as it helps them trade more widely on an international scale. Nigeria can do international businesses because we have English as our official language. The international community can easily and comfortably be reached because of the prestigious language. English is very important when hiring a new employee. This underlines the fact that English language skills enhance business and trade, while also improving an individual's economic conditions.

English Language and National Unity

English language serves as a tool for sustainable development in the area of national unity in Nigeria. Amidst the compounding complexities and wars in the northern part of Nigeria, the only language that still emits the spirit of oneness in Nigeria is the English language. More often than not, activities conducted in indigenous languages are seen as being ethnic or tribal, except in cultural celebrations or ethnic displays. This explains why, even during the first republic and during the colonial era, when English had not attained its present level of ascending in national and international affairs, political parties were formed in English language. However, the parties might have regional bases but the fact that they were named in English entailed their national identity. The Northern People's Congress (NPC), The Action Group (AG), The National Council of Nigeria Citizen (NCNC) after the excision of Southern Cameroun, National Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), were formed to integrate all Nigerians and give them a sense of belonging. This trend has necessarily survived until today with all the national political parties formed and sloganeered in English. English is equally the language of nationalism (Obiegbu, 2008). The love of a country has to be manifested through the language that everybody can understand lest the ethnic agenda be implied. This was why, even in the old political days, nationalists like Herbert Macaulay, Obefemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, Nnamdi Azikiwe etc. had to use English language as a weapon of nationalist struggle (Odo, 2015). A nationalist bases his patriotic views in English. If English language is not used to express the same ideas for which he is known as a nationalist, he is seen instantly as a tribalist and not a nationalist. English is the language of authenticity in Nigeria (Mekiluwa, 2001).

Collective identity of Nigeria is stamped on national institutions through the medium of English language. The Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Police, that all safeguard the territorial

integrity of Nigeria and its peaceful existence is propelled with English language (Standard British English and Pidgin English) (Bowen, 2005). The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) which is aimed at bringing together all the educated Nigerian youths from the universities is a great ideal of the Nigeria government. This ideal would not have been possible without the English language which binds all together at the camps and at their primary places of assignment. The idea of the National Youth Service Corps is geared towards reinforcing the spirit of oneness among Nigerian youths (Egbezor and Okanezi, 2008). However, on-going challenges of security and national unity which the vicious Boko Harams have caused in the northern part of Nigeria are causing a lot of threat to this good scheme of the Nigerian government because the youths are now afraid to go to the northern part of the country for the service scheme. We believe that with providence on our side, the English language will continue to bind us together (Dorcas, 2019).

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is written in English to create a level playing ground for all Nigerians. The National flag, the National Anthem, the National Independence Day, the National Associations as well as several national monuments are designed in English and all of these “assert” that English is the foundation of the giant structure called Nigeria. All these have the effects of reducing what (Cote, 2021), refers to as “deep rooted mutual suspicion that result in prejudice, stereotypes and subtle linguistic hostility among various linguistics groups”. English language remains a very big tool in favor of sustainable development in Nigeria. Having seen the role of language both as a veritable tool for education and as an instrument for sustainable development, there is need at this juncture, to examine Nigeria’s language policy and its implications for sustainable development.

Nigeria’s Language Policy

Both the documents of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (2013) and the National Policy on Education (2004) have made some stipulations that could be termed Nigeria’s language policy. Section 55 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulates that “the affairs of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa and Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof”. Similarly, in the National Policy on Education, government recognizes the role of language as a means of social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. For this reason, it stipulates that:

- a. every child shall learn the language of his immediate environment and in the interest of national unity is required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages.
- b. for smooth interaction with our neighbours it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools. Specifically for early childhood/pre-primary education, the policy stipulates that government shall “ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community”. Therefore, a summary of Nigeria’s language policy reveals the following:

- a. Use of English in the affairs of governance at the national and state levels and any of

- the three major indigenous languages.
- b. Use of the mother tongue at the pre-primary level
 - c. Use of the mother tongue, the English language and the French language at the primary level.
 - d. Use of English, French and any one of the three major languages (provided it is not the child's mother tongue) at the junior secondary level.
 - e. Use of English and any indigenous language at the senior secondary level. (French and Arabic are language options).
 - f. No specific prescriptions are made in the policy document for language education at the tertiary level (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2013).

Implications of this Policy for Sustainable Development

In essence, Nigeria has a multilingual/multicultural policy on language in the training of manpower needed for the development of Nigeria. It recognizes the strategic roles of both the native languages and English in education and overall manpower development (Curry, Nembhard, and Bradley, 2009). However good the intentions of government are in the stipulations of these policies, the implementation is far from realization especially in the use of the mother tongue, and hence, the objectives of the policy are far from being achieved (Aina, Nathaniel and Ibitomi, 2017). There is therefore, the need to overhaul the policy as it regards the use of the mother tongue with respect to the provisions and implementations.

In line with Ndimele, (2015), a framework that relates linguistic communication to educational, socio-economic and political needs in Nigeria are hereby proposed: - that English be used at international and interpersonal levels, for broadcasting, business and economic transaction; and as a medium of (and subject in) higher education. That the three major languages as well as other native languages which have had their orthography developed be used at the inter-zonal levels, and as a medium of primary and lower secondary education and a subject at all levels of education. It stipulates that other minority languages be used for informal purposes, semiformal use at inter-zonal level, for instance, in customary courts, at lower levels of administration, and so on. These reforms become necessary against the backdrop of the fact that researches have shown that the child learns best in his mother tongue. With this, Haddy, (2011) submits that:

If the Nigeria child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, initiative, industry, manipulative ability, mechanical comprehension and co-ordination of hand and eye, he should acquire these skills and attitudes through his mother tongue; after all, this is the most natural learning medium.

The developments attained by Asian countries according to Sherine, (2013), were partly because they held on to their local languages. For this reason, the Nigerian government has serious tasks to carry out in both ensuring that the process of language engineering for native languages is set off. This does not call for mere provisions of a blue print, but rather, an urgent and pragmatic approach to the implementation of the any of such proposals (Vuzo, 2019). Against the background of the multilingual composition of Nigeria and that language planning and engineering is not easy; against the stark realities of globalization, the status, roles and functions of the English language in Nigeria in relation to education, to empower, secure and

achieve advancement is undoubtedly a foregone conclusion.

Conclusion

Language is central to the sustainable development of any society. Consequently, it must not be wrongly located in Nigeria's national reforms in her march for sustainable development. A monolingual policy of language in Nigeria is counter-productive. The consequences of such policy are dire! A monolingual policy in favor of any native language, or even the English language for that matter against the socio-political and linguistic composition of Nigeria; non-existent language planning and engineering, functions and roles of the English language as a world language and the language of globalization, is an impediment to sustainable development in Nigeria. It only stands to reason therefore, that the multicultural policy to language in Nigeria remains the best option in view of the role of language in sustainable development (Khatib, 2008). However, there is obvious need to overhaul and reform the policy as suggested in this paper to situate language properly in its role in Nigeria as a tool for sustainable development. Thus, the promotion of English as the primary medium of instruction serves as a way to foster national unity and integration in a country with diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

However, with the transition to democracy, there has been a growing recognition of the importance of promoting indigenous languages and cultures in the education system (Karaca-Atik, Meeuwisse, Gorgieusk and Smeets 2023). This shift in political ideology has led to policies that aim to incorporate local languages into the curriculum alongside English, with the goal of preserving cultural heritage and fostering a sense of identity and belonging among students (Kansanen, 2004). In conclusion, the impact of political ideology on English language education policies in Nigeria is a balancing act between promoting a global language for economic and social mobility, and recognizing the importance of local languages for cultural preservation and identity formation. A sustainable approach to English language education policies in Nigeria would involve finding a harmonious balance between these competing priorities, taking into account the diverse needs and aspirations of the population, in order to ensure inclusive and equitable development for all.

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