

UTILIZING NIGERIA'S LANGUAGE POLICY FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

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Abstract

The challenges in sustainable national economic development in Nigeria are traceable to a myriad of factors. Various attempts by scholars to proffer solutions have either been ineffective or impractical. This paper investigates the utilization of the Nigeria's Language Policy in achieving sustainable national economic development. Being that Nigeria is a multilingual nation with cultural diversity, the paper seeks the adoption of a language approach, using the language policy on education which reflects the nation's political ideology to proffer workable solutions to sustainable economic development in Nigeria. It examines the language situation in Nigeria; language policy and technological development; language policy and the unity of Nigeria; language policy and social attitudes in Nigeria; language policy and sustainable economic development in Nigeria. Finally, the paper gave the implications of the language policy on sustainable national economic development in Nigeria, and equally proposed a framework for a sustainable language policy that can midwife sustainable national economic development.

Keywords: Language policy, sustainable development, national economy, political ideology

Introduction

Language, politics and society are greatly interdependent. The mutual dependence fosters the progress of each. None of these concepts can successfully thrive without the other. Language as a term, refers to man's ability to exercise innate vocal endowment. It could also be seen as a means of expression available to a given speech community for the purpose of communication and socialization as well as that of protecting, preserving and transmitting culture (Anyadiiegwu, 2012 p.10). This renders the role of language in society and politics indisputably very crucial mostly in respect to communication exchange.

Language is the only sustainable adhesive that can bind a multilingual nation like Nigeria. The English Language, our colonial legacy plays a very significant role in the formation of national values and integration of Nigeria as a nation. Several decades after the decolonization of Nigeria, the English Language steadily continues to enjoy its primacy in our educational system as a medium of instruction; politically, as a medium of transmission of political ideologies and economically as a vital tool for local and international economic growth. The bleakly unity that Nigeria enjoys today is traceable to the English Language, else it would have been a herculean task.

Language is powerful enough to greatly bring people together on the basis of common linguistic and cultural affiliation thereby thinking and acting as one. It also has the potential to

divide human kind generally and can particularly threaten the economic and political stability of any people and of developing postcolonial countries like Nigeria.

Language and society are so much related. Obiegbu (2015, P.2) states that language is the oil that lubricates activities within any human society. It is indispensable in man's achievement of effective communication and thus has taken the position of national language in Nigeria. This paper examines the utilization of Nigeria's language policy for achieving sustainable national economic development.

Language planning may be seen as an attempt to interfere deliberately with a language. This attempt may center on either its status with regard to some other languages or its internal condition with a view to changing that condition (Oluwole, 2003). Thus, the first focus of language planning can be regarded as status planning. This may be in form of legislation or policy bequeathing a certain language or its variety with a status. The second focus results in corpus planning. This is an effort to improve the structure of a language or its vocabulary to make it suitable for the new needs of its speakers.

Although, there has not been a comprehensive language policy for Nigeria as a deliberate and planned exercise, indeed, language planning as an organized and systematic pursuit of solutions to language problems has remained largely peripheral to the mainstream of Nigeria national planning (Oluwole, 2003). Researchers were of the opinion that what can be regarded as the language policy for Nigeria came about in the context of other more centrally defined national concerns, such as the development of a National Policy on Education and the drafting of a Constitution for the country. It is in connection with these two documents, i.e. the National Policy on Education and the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria that reference can be made to language policy and planning in Nigeria.

The Role and Importance of Language

The primacy of language in human history has never been in doubt. Socially and politically, language functions as a medium of integration and interaction as well as an instrument of communication (Salisu and dollah, 2015). This implies that learning a languages does not only facilitate communication but maintains a variety of social bond, a shared sense of value and communal awareness that harnesses the all round development of any society. It is a system which has the capacity of contributing to the working of the whole (Oluwole, 2003). Language forms a large part of the culture of people through which they express their folklore, myths, proverbs and history. Language has sub-languages that are both ethnically and geographically defined territory identified as dialects. Some of the dialects are defined by shared settings while others are linked to progression, class or educational level or a combination of these elements. Language according to Oyetade (1992) plays a crucial role in the social, political and economic life support of the people in a given geographic entity.

According to Salisu and Dollah (2015), a useful definition of communication should include the feeling that language has been widely studied and acclaimed as the most valuable human institution and is indispensable in all spheres of life. It implies that for a country to function properly, it needs the cooperation and understanding of the people that make up the different ethnic groups, for inter-ethnic discussion that can enhance sustainable economic growth.

The Language Situation in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multilingual nation with over 512 indigenous living languages (Eberhard et al 2021). The Wikipedia identifies 525 native languages spoken in Nigeria with English being the official language and most widely spoken lingua franca. The major native languages in terms of population are; Hausa (over 63 million, including second language or L1 speakers), Yoruba (over 47 million, including L2 speakers), Igbo (over 31 million, including L2 speakers), Ijaw cluster (over 5 million) Fulfude (16million) and others such as Kanuri , Tiv, Nupe, Edo, Igala, Mafa, Idoma, Efik, Ibibio with varying population of 2 to 3million each.

The use of English as the official language in Nigeria defuses ethnic conflicts though questions the authenticity and identity of the users. This has always generated arguments about the choice of indigenous language for official and national purposes because the use of English as our official languages bothers on the root of national pride since English is a colonial language.

The Nigerian constitution identifies English, the language of our colonial masters, as indeed a second language. The 1988 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, paragraph 51 and 91 confirms 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 (paragraph 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 (paragraph 91). This implies that the official transaction of government, administration, trade and commerce, law and justice, instruction in the education sector, should be done in the English language.

Undoubtedly, Nigerian would have preferred one of the 512 indigenous languages to be recognized as the official language but the multilingual nature of the country rather poses a problem of ethnic consciousness and tribalism. This renders the national language issue a controversial and sensitive issue. The selection of any one of the languages over the others will generate disagreement. It is in respect of this that Obiegbu (2015) submits that, “The truth is that, no ethnic group want to be subservient to another ethnic language because the promotion of the ethnic language connotes the promotion of the corresponding ethnic group itself”. The English language therefore has come to stay in Nigeria and established as the language of upward mobility.

The Concept of Sustainable Development

Development according to Obiegbu (2015) is a positive change for the better, from conditions (social, economic, political, cultural and human) that are no longer considered good enough for the goals and aspiration of the society, to those that are most likely to meet such goals and aspirations. Thus, sustainable development according to Wikipedia is a pattern of resource use that aims at meeting human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come.

The United Nations in her Brondtland report sees sustainable development as a development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainable development therefore is an eclectic concept

conveying a wide range of meaning. It entails a society taking a practical, realistic and positive approach to growth and development and the ability to manage their natural produce and social capital for the welfare of present and future members of the society.

The Federal Government of Nigeria is interested in sustainable economic development. This implies that necessary actions are being taken to realize the vision of stimulating economic growth, and tackling the deficits, maximizing well-being and protecting our environments without affecting the ability of future generations to do the same.

Language therefore, serves as a veritable tool for education and as an instrument for sustainable economic development. The political parties and government take account of sustainable development as a part of how it manages its policies, how it manages 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 economic development. The English language thus, forms a key factor to the realization of sustainable economic development.

This will be examined in terms of its contribution in the areas of education, a driving force for national unity in Nigeria and economic growth.

The Role of English Language in Nigeria's Education

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) and the National Policy on Education (2004) have made some stipulations that are termed Nigeria's Language Policy. In this document, the government recognizes the role of language as a vehicle for social interaction and national cohesion and preservation of cultures. Specifically, it stipulates that;

- a. In primary school, each child must study two languages, namely;
 - i. His mother tongue (if available for study) or an indigenous language of wider communication in his area of domicile.
 - ii. English language
- b. In Junior Secondary school (JSS), which study three languages, Viz:
 - i. His mother tongue (if available for study) or an indigenous language of wider communication in his area of domicile
 - ii. English language
 - iii. Just any one of the three major indigenous languages in the country, namely, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, provided the language chosen is distinct from the child's mother tongue.
- c. In Senior Secondary School (SSS), which also last three years, the child must study two languages; Viz:
 - i. An indigenous language
 - ii. English language.

The purpose of education globally and Nigeria in particular, is for national unity and development. This has determined many of the reform programmes 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 this basic education at different levels can be achieved. Even the nomadic education that was so much invested on by the Goodluck Jonathan's administration was taught 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.

English language is the language of Education in Nigeria Ndimele (2006) . An observation of the language policy aforementioned shows that, apart from the first three years of a child's life in the primary school, the rest of the child's life in the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions, all academic activities must be conducted in the 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 opportunity.

Before development can come to a people, there must be a means of communication and language quickly comes to play Brownly (1987). Considering the many indigenous languages present in Nigeria today, it is quite difficult to impose an indigenous and unifying language because they number over five 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.

The Role of Language Policy for National Unity

English language also 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 with their ideologies all written in English language. However, the parties might have regional bases but the fact that they were named in English portrayed their national identity and consciousness. The Northern People's Congress (NPC), The Action Group (AG), The National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) after the excision of Southern Cameroun, National Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) up to the present day People's Democratic Party (PDP), All People's Congress (APC), Labour Party (LP), etc, were formed to integrate all Nigerians and give them a sense of inclusiveness with all the national political parties formed and sloganeered in English.

According to Hanna (2008), English is equally the language of nationalism. 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, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, Nnamdi Azikiwe etc. had to use English language as a weapon of nationalist struggle. 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.

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 safeguard the territorial integrity of Nigeria and its peaceful existence is propelled with English language (Standard British English and Pidgin English). 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. 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.

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 (Adebayo, 1985: p. 2) 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 favour of sustainable development in Nigeria.

The Role of the Language Policy on National 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.

An individual's economic empowerment in Nigeria is closely linked with good command of English. A wide range of business categories in Nigeria including the banking industry, technology, the pharmaceutical industry, and even vocational workers such as carpenters and electricians see increased need for English language skills. A salaried professional with good English language skills can earn an average of thirty percent (30%) more than someone with no English language skills in Nigeria. The government of Nigeria firmly recognized that English is a key element of business communication and it is essential for attracting new investments. With government and companies pushing for far more English speaking workers, it can be expected that more individuals will view English, among other skills, as a step towards career advancement and higher pay. This is a motivating factor for individuals to learn English in order to obtain well-paid jobs within the most dynamic organizations and industries in Nigeria. Clearly, we all can see that prospective employees who can speak and write English well have better opportunities economically. This way, English language is a tool for sustained national economic development.

Proposed Framework of Language Policy for Sustainable National Economic Development

Before considering the proposal for the framework of language policy, let us consider the guidelines for the formulation of a policy according to Akindele and Adegbite (1999, p. 78).

- i. Development: an examination of whether the policy contributes to the development of the society in question.
- ii. Democratization: an examination of whether the policy is favourable to the creation of equal opportunity for members of the society.
- iii. Unity: an examination of whether the policy is going to reinforce the unity of the society in question.
- iv. Foreign relations: an examination of whether the policy could be an obstacle to communication with the international community.

The political ideology of Nigeria can be seen in the light of the principles above. The ideology is provided by the underlying assumption of its constitution and the allied derivative documents such as national development plans.

Based on the national ideology above, the following framework for the formulation of language policy is proposed:

- i. Before admission into any kindergarten or primary school, parents should ensure that the child has an exposure to the mother tongue (MT).
- ii. English language and mother tongue and/or any major Nigerian language should be introduced even on the first day at school.
- iii. Orthography of Nigeria's major languages and some minority languages should be developed.
- iv. Mother tongue (MT) and any other major Nigerian language chosen should be studied to the WAEC/SSCE level.
- v. More teachers should be sponsored in the study of Nigerian indigenous languages.
- vi. Translation of science and technology terms - science and technology terms should be translated and taught in Nigerian indigenous languages.

News broadcasts and programmes should equally be done in indigenous languages to reinforce what was learnt in school and cultivate a sense of pride in the indigenous language.

Conclusion

Language is pivotal to the sustainable economic development of any society. Consequently, it must not be wrongly located in Nigeria's national reforms in her march for sustainable national economic development. A monolingual policy of language in Nigeria is counter-productive. The consequences of such policy are dire. A monolingual policy in favour of any native language, or even the English language for that matter will operate 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 national economic development. 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 national economic development.

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