

LANGUAGE AND FUNCTIONALITY: THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN NATION BUILDING

By

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Abstract

This study examined Language and functionality: the strategic role of Language education in nation building, poor funding, inadequate language education teachers, and inadequate infrastructural facilities, among others has contributed immensely to strategic roles of language functionality in Nation building. Two research questions guided the study. The sample of the study was 80 head of departments (lecturers) in language education departments in federal universities in South-East Nigeria. A-20 item questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. The instrument was validated by two experts in Language education and one from measurement and Evaluation from university of Nigeria Nsukka. The instrument yielded 0.84 using Cronbach Alpha method. The results were analysed using mean scores. The findings of this study on the roles of language education in Nation-building indicates that, language functionality enhances nation cohesion and stability, reduce social unrest and conflict in the nation, reduction of terrorists attack, enhances cultural integration of the multi-ethnic groups in Nigeria. The findings of the study also showed that the problems hindering the strategic roles of language education in Nation-building in Nigeria include poor funding of language education programme, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate language education teachers, non-existing language laboratories among others. However it was recommended among others that the resource persons on language education and Nation-building should be invited to schools to talk to students on the importance of language education in Nation-building, all the stakeholders in education sector should take synergic approach to enhance the enviable roles of language functionality in Nation-building.

Introduction

Language is considered as a veritable human endowment due to its unique role in capturing the breath of human thought and endeavours. Language constitutes that quality of human peculiarity, that unique attribute of man's distinctiveness and that priceless mandate of superiority over the entire creation of God (Baba, 2010). Hopkins (2010) defines language as the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a place or race. The theory of language determination and linguistic relatively shows that there exists a relationship between language and thought (Jacobs, 2011). Harris (2013) opined that language is the key to the heart of a people. By this, language conceived as a purely human and non-instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols. This functional knowledge of language shows that human experience has achieved in the way of dealing with situation and can be communicated through language. This implies that language does not operate independently of culture. Also language helps in the performance of social roles and determination of social relationship in a given society (Jones, 2013).

Functions of language

The functions of language have received scholarly attention due to its impact in human organization. Margann (2011) asserts that language functions include the emotive function (express inner feelings of individuals), conative functions (use of vocatives and imperatives to compel one to acts), the phatic functions (opening and checking a channel or way to verify its operation for social reasons, poetic function, metalistic functions, which are developed as elements of communication. In the opinion of Hall (2010), language performs three basic functions, which are ideational, interpersonal and textual in nature. To Broun (2011) language performs two major functions, transactional and interactional; the transactional functions relating to passing information across, giving instructions and socialization purposes whereas interactional function helps in establishing and sustaining social relationships. Apart from the above definitions, linguists like Hillson (2012) outlines the roles of language as the communication of ideas, for emotional expression, for social interaction, for the sheer power of reality, for recording facts, as the instrument of thought and for the expression of identity.

The communication function of language is stressed by Austin (2011), as adaptive process by which grammar is tailored to serve communicative needs of its users. This view of language is associated with the study of language in pragmatic, cognitive and interactional framework, as well as in socio-linguistic and linguistic anthropology. Adedineji (2010) explained functions of language as language forms, language informs, language reforms, and language transforms.

Furthermore, language is used to care, heal and motivate people in a given society. The reformative function of language concerns using language to greet, to console, to condole, to sympathize with, persuade, to correct wrong, to remediate, to advise (Adedineji, 2013). The reformation function is mediated by formation and information systems. The agents of reformation are the family, the school, the mosque, the church, the media, and the government, all which are supposed to have been adequately formed and informed by language. The reformative function of language enables people to influence (positively) other people's behavior in a way that makes cooperation possible and conflict difficult (Ibrahim, 2012).

The next function of language is expressed in form of information age. Here, language is used for communication purposes; medium to transmit messages and knowledge. While the formation function of language gives life as language is used here to form ideas, develop character, and to make attitude positively or negatively, the information function of language keeps man alive. This function is performed on the view that man needs news always to survive, to function, to attain sanity and the submission that education is life and life is education, entailing that an uneducated person is dead (Jacob, 2011).

The transformational functions of language hinge on its use for change and revolution. Marris (2013) asserts that language is used to make new things happen. To assert that what differentiates world of today and that of our forefathers is attributed to the roles of language, available to us through a global family. Language has practically informed the changes in living, administration, science and technology, making the modern world possible.

The role of language in a given society cannot be over emphasized as it plays multi-dimensional functions which range from social, economic, and cultural, to communicative purposes. Awoniyi (2009) observed that language in a given society plays several roles which include:

- Interpersonal communication; for instance, after a tragedy, there is a pattern of speech with appropriate pitch and role. The same rules apply at time giving tension or conflict.
- Connection with culture; the best way to understand African culture is simply to study the language.
- Transmission of knowledge from one generation to another which is done through the help of Nigerian languages.
- Language as a means for co-operation; Nigerian languages especially Hausa, Ìgbò and Yorùbá are spoken across many communities.
- Function within economic programmes; especially in the buying and selling of all sorts of communities.
- Language and child bearing; through examples, precepts and reinforcement, children are gradually initiated into their linguistic community.
- Language and music; Nigerian languages are very melodious and they have given rise to nice songs, often accompanied by rhythmic drumming and dancing.

Thus, the integration of language and education will definitely enhance to a greater extent of Nation-building and development. The role of language in educational process is complex especially, when the individual and the community in which he lives use more than one language as the case of Nigeria as a multi-ethnic society. According to Elias (2014), education has remained an instrument of change, national building and development. It is a social process and the medium for the acquisition of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes for survival in a changing world.

In a case, knowledge and skill acquisition which education is all about cannot be over emphasized. According to World Bank (2014), “successful development entails more than investing in physical capital, or closing the gap in capital. It also entails acquiring and using knowledge”. This, to successfully confront the challenges of development and nation building, a developing country must undertake three major tasks.

- Acquired and adapt global knowledge and create knowledge locally through language education.
- Invest in human capital to increase the ability to absorb and use knowledge; and
- Invest in technologies to facilitate both acquisition and the absorption of knowledge.

Similarly, Fafunwa (1979) defines education as “the aggregate of all behavior which is of positive value to the society in which the child lives. Hence, is a process of disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or to guarantee rational direction of the society or both. It is then expedient that language education should be made more functional in order to attain the stipulated objectives of education in Nigeria in Nigeria as it is in the National Policy on Education (2004).

The functionality of education and language exists where it is used to ensure the effectiveness of individuals in the society and its general development. Language education refers to the institution of language studies in schools. The language will be studied by the students to enhance the general development of the society. Tupas (2015) asserts that the complex relationships between language,

education and national building focus on how language policies are used by states and government as instruments of control, assimilation and empowerment.

Unique properties of language

Naturally, language has many unique properties among which are the dual role it plays in most known formal educational systems. Thus its features on one hand, as a subject in the school curriculum accordingly permits one to talk of language education in much the same way that one would talk of physics education, science education, economics education and the like (Bamgbose, 2014). On the other hand and completely unlike any other subjects on the curriculum, it also serves all over the world as the means or medium of instruction in all subjects (Brann, 2014). Thus, language education and language are interwoven and it is a vital medium through which all subjects are taught in schools and greater attention should be given to its study by the government and other stakeholders.

The early effort in language education was introduced in Nigeria by the Christian missionaries just before the middle of the 19th century. For about four decades after that, both the nature and main thrust of language education in Nigeria were completely left out in the hands of the missionaries (Idris, 2014). However, not everybody liked or approved of the products of such system of education. Thus the products of the educational system were dysfunctional in the society. This singular defect made the government find other stakeholder in education to look for a viable language education that will serve Nigeria's purpose especially the functional adoption of individuals in the society.

The birth of national policy on education emerged after the attainment of political independence in Nigeria. According to Bularidi (2013), some people felt and openly canvassed twenty years back in the parliament for English to be replaced with one of our indigenous languages as official language. Bularidi further argued that others who were particularly worried by the problem most people in the country encountered in understanding English and communicating well in it, advised that more effort should be put in to the teaching of major indigenous languages to enable them to serve as an alternative to English as official means of communication in government and business (Osaji, 2014).

The overall effect of these suggestions and pressures brought about an important shift in the attitude of government, particularly at the Federal level. According to Ibrahim (2014), the shift took off as an admission by government of what had long been known to linguists and anthropologists, that a language is simultaneously a vehicle for a people's culture and a means of maintaining and indefinitely preserving culture. Hence, more attention should be given not only to the study of indigenous languages; it should also be used in all the spheres of human endeavours. Morris (2014) argued that in addition to seeing the relationship between language and culture, the government also came to see the indigenous knowledge and languages more clearly for what they had all along been viz, a veritable and practical means of communication.

Thus in an official document first published in 1977, revised in 1981, 2004 and titled Federal Republic of Nigeria National Policy on Education (NPE), the federal government for the first time laid it down as a policy that:

- In primary school, which lasts six years, 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, and
 - ii. English language.
- In junior secondary school (JSS), which is of three years duration, the child must study three languages, viz (a) his mother-tongue (available for study) or an indigenous language of wide communication in his area of domicile, and
 - Just any one of the three major indigenous languages in the country, namely Hausa, Ìgbò and Yorùbá provided the language chosen is distinct from the child's mother-tongue.
 - In senior schools (SSS), which also last three years, the child must study two languages, viz. (a) an indigenous languages and (b) English language. French and Arabic exist under the policy as language options at both the junior and senior secondary school levels, (NPE), PGE, 2004). It is pertinent that, indigenous languages in Nigeria should be given a pride of place in Nigeria's education system (Ibrahim, 2014).

Nigeria as a nation-state has multiple ethnic groups with varying ethnic languages. As each of the languages in by definition a mother-tongue in theory they all qualify to be taught as school subjects under the NPE policy on language education in primary and junior secondary schools. However, because most of them have small numbers of speakers, it would not be practical to teach them as school subjects. According to Brann (2015), the former National Language Center, now the current Language Development Center (LDC), placed under Nigeria Education Research and Development Council (NERDC) in 1976 suggested thus: in addition to three major languages, Hausa, Ìgbò and Yorùbá and nine other indigenous languages in the country should be allowed to feature in the country's formal school system. They are: Edo, Fulfulde, Ibibio, Idoma, Igala, Ijo, Kanuri, Nupe and Tiv.

Tilly (2014) argued that Nation-building is an architectural metaphor which, strictly speaking implies the existence of consciously acting agents such as architects, engineers, carpenters, and the like. However, as used by political scientists, the term covers, not only conscious strategies initiated by state leaders but also unplanned societal change. In the apt phase of Oyvind (2015), the concept of Nation-building became for political science what industrialization was to social economy: an indispensable tool for detecting, describing and analyzing the macrostructural and sociological dynamics that have produced the modern state.

From the above discussion, in many multi-ethnic (proto) societies like Nigeria, the impetus for pushing through social integration and creating a nation-state came and comes from the state apparatus itself, using methods like material incentives (financial, economic, public service, employment and like) or cultural means (languages policy, education system policy in religion) or compulsion. Hence, language has an essential role in ensuring Nation-building. But there seems to be some problems in the use of language education in Nation-building. The greatest problem of language education to Nation-building in Nigeria is that of responsibility and control. In this exercise, the various agencies of education are actively involved at times the unhealthy pattern of this rivalry or competition is often determined by the nature and problems of development itself. In this connections Castle (2015) sees underdevelopment as a constellation of circumstances, physical, social and political, which contribute to the deprivation of the minds as well as the body. It involves the poverty that debilitates health, the ignorance and superstition which depress the

human spirit, the conservation that resists college, the social privileges which inhibit the fruition and proper use of talent and skill (Castle, 2015).

Factors inhibiting the use of Language for Nation building

Apart from the above, other visible problem of the use of language education may be poor staffing of schools in Nigeria. Obododimma (2014) argued that the hub of any teaching and learning center depends on the quality of teachers employed to implement the curriculum. Other problems are poor funding of schools and divergences on the level of entrance into the teaching profession among others.

Another problem inhibiting the use of language education to enhance Nation-building is Language Conflict. Musteysha (2015), claims that this is a natural occurrence among languages and/or language speakers that compete for dominance and/or survival. According to Webb (2013), conflict linguistics deal with situations in which two or more languages or varieties of languages that are in contact with each other and (used in the same communities) are also in a state of competition that is, in a relationship of tension. This singular situation does not give room for national cohesion and building and this affects national development in all its ramifications (Abolaji, 2015).

Studies on the language education situation in Nigeria also report that there is competition among the local languages especially between the languages of the majority ethnic groups and languages of the minority ethnic groups on the other hand. Abu (2015) observed that this singular situation has greatly affected the functionality of language in relation to its role to Nation-building.

Generally, language education as it is geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual national efficiency and national-building as well as towards social, cultural, economic, political, scientific progress. In order to achieve the above, there must be an effective means of ensuring the functionality of language education in Nigeria to enhance Nation-building which ultimately ensure national development.

It is against this background the researcher embarks on this study. The study is guided by two research questions:

1. What are the roles of language education in enhancing Nation-building in South-east Nigeria?
2. What are the problems hindering the strategic roles of language education in Nation-building in South-east Nigeria?

Method

The design adopted for this study was descriptive survey, which was used to obtain information from the respondents. The design was chosen because the study seeks to collect data on the particular features of a given population in a systematic manner such that the findings are expected to be generalized to the entire population (Nwogu, 2006). The area of the study was all the federal universities in southern-east Nigeria. The population of the study was the head of departments (lecturers) in language education departments in the federal universities in South-east Nigeria. The sample of the study constituted 80 language education lecturers drawn through stratified simple random sampling technique. A-20 item questionnaire was used to collect data from the respondents. Items 1-10 were based on the roles of language education in Nation-building in

Southern-east Nigeria. Items 11-20 were based on the problems hindering the strategic roles of language education in Nation-building in South-east Nigeria. The instrument was structured on a 4-point likert scale on which the respondents acted on. The items in the questionnaire were weighted as follows: strongly Agree (SA) – 4 points, Agree (A) – 3 points, Disagree (D) – 2 points and Strong Disagree (SD) – 1 point. The criteria mean was 2.50. The instrument was face validated by two senior lecturers in language education and one in measurement and evaluation all from University of Nigeria Nsukka. The Cronback Alpha co-efficient method was used to determine the reliability of the instrument. It yielded a co-efficient of 0.83 with overall reliability of 0.84. A total of 80 copies of the instrument were administered and retrieved. The data was analyzed using mean scores. Any item with a rating of 2.50 and above was accepted value while item with a mean rating below 2.50 was rejected.

Results

The results of the data collected from the study are presented in table 1 and 2 according to the research questions.

Research Question One

What are the roles of language education in Nation-building in South-east Nigeria?

Table 1: Rules of language educations in Nation-building in South-east Nigeria

S/N	Statement	Mean	St,D	Decision
1	Language education functionality enhances national cohesion.	3.50	1.018	Accepted
2	It also helps to reduce social unrest like riots in the nation.	2.50	1.153	Accepted
3	Language education helps to reduce conflict in Nigeria.	2.60	1.666	Accepted
4	The tapping of the potentials of language education helps to reduce terrorist attacks as all understand the language spoken.	3.00	1.778	Accepted
5	The terrorist of language education enhance political cohesion and stability.	2.50	0.529	Accepted
6	The study of language education helps to train manpower that will help tap the nation's abundant resources for economic development.	3.10	0.632	Accepted
7	It also enhances cultural integration of the multi-ethnic groups in Nigeria for Nation-building.	3.00	0.129	Accepted
8	Language education will enhance or promote intermarriage through interaction among the different cultures in Nigeria.	2.50	1.211	Accepted
9	Language education will help in strengthening mother-tongue education in line with the current language policy in Nigeria.	2.65	1.016	Accepted
10	Language education gives room for parallel recognition and popularization of local languages alongside second language (L ₂) so that they can gain respectability.	2.55	0.723	Accepted
	Grand Mean	2.80		

Data presented above in table 1 shows that the respondents agreed that all these items are the major or strategic functional role of language education in nation-building in South-east Nigeria. All the items have mean scores above 2.50 which is the criterion mean of acceptance. The grand mean is 2.80.

Research Question Two

What are the problems hindering the strategic roles of language education in nation-building in South-east Nigeria?

Table 1: Problems hindering the strategic roles of language education in nation-building in South-east Nigeria

S/N	Statement	Mean	St,D	Decision
11	Poor funding of language education programme in Nigeria.	2.53	0.351	Accepted
12	Inadequate infrastructure facilities for teaching language education in schools.	2.56	0.214	Accepted
13	Inadequate language education teacher in schools.	2.56	0.532	Accepted
14	Non-existing functional language laboratories in schools that show case Nation-building	2.71	0.241	Accepted
15	Inability of language education teachers, to improvise instructional materials while teaching.	2.82	0.541	Accepted
16	Non-integration of Nation-building idea in the programme of language education.	2.56	0.572	Accepted
17	Non-integration of local languages in the school curriculum at all levels with emphasis on Nation-building.	2.79	0.524	Accepted
18	Non-provision of language education programme in schools.	2.75	0.632	Accepted
19	Poor research habit in language education programme in schools.	2.51	0.631	Accepted
20	The existence of language conflict in language education programme.	2.50	0.523	Accepted
	Grand Mean	2.83		

Table 2 revealed that the teachers agreed that all the above are the problems hindering the strategic roles of language education in nation-building, hence, the grand mean of 2.83 is greater than the criterion mean of 2.50.

Discussion

The findings of this study on the roles of language education in Nation-building shows that language functionality enhances nation-building cohesion, it helps to reduce social unrest and conflict in the nation, reduction of terrorists attack when people understand themselves not minding linguistic difference. The tenets or programmes of language education enhances national cohesion and stability; language manpower help to tap the nations resource for development, it enhances cultural, integration of the multi-ethnic groups in Nigeria, it enhances intermarriage through interaction among different centers in Nigeria, language education strengthen mother-tongue education in line with the current language policy in Nigeria. Language education helps for parallel recognition and popularization of local languages alongside the second language and the like. The role of language education to Nation-building was highlighted by Tupas (2015), thus “the complex relationships between language, education and nation-building focuses on how language policies are used by states and governments as instrument of control, assimilation, and empowerment of her citizens”.

By this, language education plays an enviable role in ensuring nation-building as it helps to articulate the political, economic, socio-cultural and religious life of the people in a given nation like Nigeria. When positively used, it will ultimately give unquantifiable room for the long search for national development, peace and stability. In line with the above, Brann (2014) observed that language is the vehicle through which all education processes are articulated. Thus, he argued that it is the tool which is used to teach all subjects in all levels of a nation's education sector. Hence, it plays an enviable role in Nation-building. Also, Oyvind (2015) argued that language education promotes nation-building through cultural means which comprise language policy and education system operational in a given society like Nigeria. All these roles accrue to Nigeria in her bid for accelerated nation-building through language education. This will be made functional or realistic if the identified hindrances are tackled as they arise.

The findings of the study also showed that if all the problems hindering the strategic roles of language education in Nation-building in Nigeria are adhere to, the pace of development in all spheres of life will be accelerated. The problems include poor funding of language education programmed in Nigeria, inadequate infrastructure, inadequate language education teachers, non-existing language laboratories, the inability of language teachers to improvise instructional materials that referent national integration traits while teaching, non-integration of National values in the programme of language education in Nigeria, non-integration of local languages that reflect Nation-building ideas in language curriculum in Nigeria, non-provision of language centers, poor research habit in language education that reflect Nation-building, the existence of language conflict in language education programme.

Based on the above responses from the teachers of language education, it can be inferred that the use of language education to enhance Nation-building in South-east, Nigeria has been stalled by these problems. In line with the above, Castle (2015) emphasized that unhealthy rivalry among languages in language education programme hinders the aim of attaining Nation-building through language. Obododimma (2014) further argued that quality teachers and non-existence of those facilities that aid teaching and learning will make it very difficult to produce the manpower. Furthermore, Webb (2013) asserts that language conflict also affects the role of language education in Nation-building. This is due to the fact that when one language is preferred to the other, it does not give room for national cohesion. Thus, if language education is to take its place in Nation-building, all the stakeholders in the education sector should take a synergic approach to enhance the role of language education in Nation-building.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The use of language education for National development is a welcome development. This is because it will enhance the needed development of the South-east, Nigeria in the political, economic, socio-cultural and religious life of the Nigerian. This will also help to make our learners in all areas of life to be functional in the society. Based on the foregoing, the researchers recommended as follows:

1. Resource persons on language and Nation-building should be invited to schools to talk to students on the importance of language education in Nation-building.
2. All the stakeholders in education sector should take synergy approach to enhance the enviable roles of language functionality in Nation-building.

3. Qualified teachers in language education should be recreated with the tenets of Nation-building as a bias to realize the development of the Nation.
4. The government should establish language laboratories and centers which will show care the National values for indelible integration among the more than 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria.
5. The planners in education sector should streamline the dialectical differences in tune with Nation-building.
6. The language curriculum in like with nation-building aspirations should be integrated by the educational planners.
7. The integration of local languages in the curriculum for our primary, secondary and tertiary education as a school subject in line with the Nation-building aspirations for development purposes.
8. Language education teachers should be exposed to sensitization programmes like seminars, workshops to broaden their intellectual horizon on the importance of Nation-building for the development of Nigeria state.
9. Authors in language education should incorporate Nation-building in their texts to keep the people abreast on the essence of Nation-building through language to enable the individuals to be functional in the society.
10. The government and other stakeholders in language education should provide instructional materials that have nation-building bias to enhance a holistic approach to Nation-building.

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