

EDUCATION REFORMS IN NIGERIA

Past, Present and Future

Edited by
Adebayo R. Lawal
Shehu A. Jimoh
Solomon A. Olorundare
Nike Y. S. Ijaiya

Preface

Education is globally recognised as the bedrock of individual and national development. No nation yearning for rapid development, such as Nigeria, can afford to be weighed down by a weak system faced by seemingly insurmountable challenges that have rendered it almost comatose to the displeasure of key stakeholders. While the system is no stranger to reforms, it seems to have become resistant to past efforts. The more recent attempts by the Obasanjo civilian regime had, however, appeared radical, generating a lot of public interest.

Since education is dynamic both as a process and a system, the more participation, consultation and contributions the reforms enjoy, the healthier it is likely to become. As part of our tripartite mandate of teaching, research and community service and our tradition of contributing to issues of national and international significance, the Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin, under my humble stewardship, organised a conference with the theme "Education Reforms in Nigeria: Past, Present and Future" with the following multidimensional and transdisciplinary sub-themes:

1. National Educational Reforms and Basic Education.
2. Implications of Pre-vocationalisation of Secondary Education.
3. Public-Private Partnership Initiative (PPPI) and the Management of Unity Schools.
4. National Reforms and Implications for Educational Planning, Administration and Quality Assurance.
5. National Education Reforms and Curriculum Development (e.g. Entrepreneurial Studies, etc).
6. Teacher Education and National Education Reforms.
7. Education Reforms and the National Policy on Education (e.g. Nomadic Education, The Mother-Tongue Medium, the 6-3-3-4 System, Special Education, Educational Guidance and Counselling, etc).
8. National Education Reforms and Consolidation of Tertiary Education.
9. Social, Political and Economic Contexts of Education Reforms.
10. Legal Framework of Education Reforms.

Over fifty (50) well-authored papers were presented and critiqued in lively and highly stimulating sessions. Three of my colleagues in the Faculty, unarguably some of the foremost educationists in the country, supported me in the arduous task of critically and painstakingly assessing the papers before arriving at this highly restrictive collection in this book form. This, therefore, is very far from just another amorphous set of conference proceedings, as all the chapters are united by profound professional insights and an incisive analytical approach.

It is therefore my strong belief that policy makers, educational planners and administrators, students and scholars of education as well as general readers would find this book quite educative, stimulating and enriching.

Prof. Adebayo R. Lawal
Ilorin, Kwara State
29th May, 2008

Reforming the Mother Tongue Content of Nigerian Education for Sustainable National Empowerment

15

Stephen Billy Olajide

Introduction

The role of language in intellectual development cannot be over-emphasised. Language makes man because it informs, invigorates and propels his mind in the acquisition of knowledge and values. A person's social, economic and academic achievements may be influenced by his level of language proficiency. The implication is that the human child requires full and sustainable language development before entering the formal school system.

The development of language in the child is gradual and phased. Akmajian, Demers, Farmers and Harnish (2004) recognised three main stages of language development-the babbling, one-word and multiword stages; and no child can get to a higher stage without having mastered the lower one. Chomsky (1972) described language development in the child as acquisition, affecting the mother tongue mainly. The period of language acquisition is of great significance, not only to the child and the surrounding adults, but to the entire community and the larger world. It is the period the child forms a world view and prepares for future learning. Much of what the child would become in life is determined at the stage. By the time he or she gets to school, the child thinks in the language - the mother tongue he has acquired - before expressing ideas in the target language (Adegoke, 1979; Awoniyi, 1982; Olajide, 2007).

The extrapolation undertaken unconsciously by the child constitutes an intellectual jigsaw that has implication for creativity. This problem affects the personality of the child, too. Hence, all advanced nations avoid getting their children to learn in borrowed/imposed languages. Skutnabb-kangas (2004) and Lawal (1989b; 2007)

It is agreed that genuine technological advancement may not be easy to attain by developing nations when education is given and received in non-indigenous languages and globalisation is embraced uncritically.

Nigeria, like other multilingual nations, recognises the role that indigenous language plays in education. Hence, she is categorical as to the place of native languages in the school curriculum. The country's Policy on Education states how the "major" languages should be used in classroom instruction (FRN, 2004, revised). However, the policy seems to call for review. Apart from the implementation problems it faces, it allows English to continue to dominate, and makes French (another Foreign language) more popular than before. It is easy to assume that English is beneficial to the country for being a unifying language. One may also be tempted to dismiss the indigenous languages on technical grounds (for example, there are not enough linguists to make the languages serve large-scale international purposes, and the nation lacks the political will to evolve an indigenous national language). However, what is the future of a country if administered perpetually through a borrowed language?

The Language Situation in Nigeria

Nigeria is a country with a complex linguistic structure. Bamgbose (1970) puts the number of Nigerian languages at 400. According to Babatunde (2001), of the four types of language existing in Africa - Afro-asiatic, Khoisan, Niger-Kordofanian and Nilo-Saharan - only Khoisan is not present in Nigeria. Most of these languages lack orthography and cannot compete in the national scheme of things. It is still likely that more languages would emerge, because when more and more people speak a dialect, it gains status.

The situation gives problems: the different languages represent different ethnic nationalities who merely tolerate one another, and majority of the speakers of these languages do not understand English, because they are illiterates ravaged by poverty. As such, the people are somehow excluded from governance and national communication. Not even the use of selected indigenous languages in national broadcasts can fully integrate the different linguistic entities and eradicate distrust among them. Although linguists (e.g. Olagoke, 1979;

Awoniyi, 1982; Abiri, 1983; Lawal, 1989; Oladosu, 2007) believe that the use of an indigenous language as Nigeria's lingua franca can eradicate mass illiteracy, ensure effective mass communication, and make the education of the Nigerian child richer and more functional. Bamgbose (1991) doubts if there could be immediate viable replacements for colonial languages in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Banjo (1994) specifically laments Nigeria's being unable to benefit from the advantages that using an indigenous language in education confers on a nation. The situation is so bad that Babatunde (2001) urges the country to do something urgently "to develop and exalt Nigerian languages" (p106).

Mother Tongue Provisions in the National Policy on Education

Education starts with the correct use of language. Government knows this in Nigeria, and has expressed it in the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004, revised). The indigenous language is the child's best access to education as revealed by the 1966 Ife Project (Fafunwa, 1974). This probably informed Nigerians outrage when the English Language Centre was established in the country following the report of the Ford-foundation-sponsored survey of English language teaching in the country (Babatunde, 2001). People felt that a national language centre for the development and promotion of Nigerian languages was more desirable than English Language Centre. Since then, Nigerians have been clamouring for improved language policy and planning.

Government has responded positively, especially in relation to the use of indigenous languages in education. The relevant components of the National Policy on Education (NPE) may be paraphrased as follows:

- Each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue, the three major languages being Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa.
- The medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment, after which English takes over.

- The business of the National Assembly would be conducted in English, while the State House of Assembly may, in addition to English, conduct its business in one or more other languages spoken in the state as the House may deem fit.

It would seem the foregoing provisions could foster national unity, bring progress, increase nationalism and patriotism among the people, and project Nigerian culture.

However, scholars feel that the country has not gone far enough regarding the use of indigenous languages in education. For example, Adegoke (1979), Adegbija (1989b) and Lawal (1989b) are worried that provisions in the NPE, as already paraphrased, could develop ambivalent attitudes in learners towards the indigenous languages.

The higher the level of education, the vaguer the relevant NPE provision becomes. The tertiary and university levels are hardly affected by the policy, and it does not apply to the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme at all. Also, promoting three out of the many languages may not be fully acceptable to the speakers of the other languages (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004; Lawal, 2007). Every language is major to its speakers, hence, regarding certain languages as being minor would seem an attempt to repress the speakers of such languages. Olagoke (1979) notes that the speakers of minority languages in Nigeria "may rightly be angry because their languages are neglected. They may even come to feel they are gradually detribalised" (p.24).

Increasing the Mother Tongue Content of Nigeria Education

Though language planning may be difficult in multilingual Nigeria, it is a task that must be done, especially considering the risks involved in the continued use of a foreign language as national language and the advantages of using indigenous languages in education. Recipients of education through a foreign language may not be able to appreciate Nigerian culture fully (Olajide, 2007a). In addition, the English language alienates the majority of the citizens and prevents the establishment of genuine national identity, a verdict shared by many scholars (Adegoke, 1979; Lawal 1989b; Babatunde, 2001). This implies that

the country should take bolder steps towards indigenising the language of Nigerian education, particularly now that Nigeria, as clarified by NERDC (2007), has adopted the home-grown National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in response to global reforms in the social and economic context. The core elements of NEEDS are "value re-orientation, poverty eradication, job generation, wealth creation and using education to empower the people" (p3). A vibrant language policy translated into appropriate pedagogic activities would help the realisation of NEEDS objectives.

Thus, linguists, applied linguists and language curriculum planners need to work together. Linguists would determine the scope of language planning to be undertaken appropriate to the goals of Nigerian education and the context of achieving an indigenous national language, while applied linguists and language educators would specify the pedagogic content and activities that could make the language(s) evolved to be of educational value. Omamor's (1994) twelve steps in language planning and development may be of good help here:

1. selection of code;
2. standardisation of selected code variety;
3. satisfaction of a perceived need for expanding the scope of a linguistic code;
4. responding to the necessity for distinguishing varieties of the same code by cultivation-oriented planning;
5. vocabulary extension or expansion;
6. adoption of a new language, or a change in vocabulary, writing, spelling, or pronunciation in a given language;
7. establishing the norms of good writing and speaking;
8. ensuring the adequacy of the language as an expression of the identity of its users;
9. revitalising the language into a tool for scientific and creative thinking;
10. working out ways and means of coping with problems of lack of understanding among different language communities;
11. choice of medium of instructional system and exchange of knowledge; and
12. determining necessary restrictions on the use of specific language in particular societies or circumstances.

the steps appear adequate because they reflect the multilingual nature of Nigeria and address socio-political and cultural issues that may be raised by the people. Nevertheless, Omamor has failed to suggest the possible language(s) the steps could be specifically applied to. She has also not included pedagogic and curricular considerations, though her proposal has taken care of the socio-emotional angles to language planning. Thus, her framework may pass simply for a linguistic model of language planning for multilingual contexts.

Lawal (1989b) has offered a framework that relates linguistic communication to educational, socio-economic and political needs in a multi-lingual setting such as Nigeria. He suggested the use of language spread for choosing zonal languages that should be allowed to function (at zonal level) the way English functions at national and international levels in Nigeria. He further recommends that citizens in every zone should be encouraged to be bilingual, regardless of their literacy status. His framework could lead to multilingual citizens who would command their mother tongue, another Nigerian language, the English language and possibly French which the country has declared as second official language (FRN, 2004, revised & Idoko, 2007), and Arabic that Olajide (2004) as considered as vital to the country because of its spiritual and economic value. Lawal's framework is as follows:

Table 1: Lawal's (1989b) Framework for Evolving an Indigenous National Language

Level	Language	Proposed Roles and Functions
Tertiary	English	1. Official use at international and interpersonal levels, e.g. for broadcasting, business and economic transactions. 2. Medium of (and subject in) higher education, etc.
Secondary	Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Fulfulde, Kanuri, Edo Efik, Ijaw and Nupe, etc.	1. Official use at the interzonal level, e.g., for broadcasting, justice, administration, e.t.c. 2. Medium of primary and lower secondary education. Subject at all levels of education in each zone.
Primary	Others	1. Informal use. 2. Semi-formal use at interzonal level, e.g., in customary courts at lower level of administration, etc.

Though the foregoing framework may have to be modified to accommodate such languages as Tiv, Igala, Ebira, Idoma and Baro in the light of the increased status they seem to have enjoyed, it presents a very viable approach to making Nigeria convert her burden of multilingualism to great advantages, particularly if the political strategies suggested are implemented whole-heartedly. Lawal's (1989b) and (Omamor's 1994) models may be married for better results in the efforts to improve the indigenous content of Nigerian education. That a learner may be required to learn several languages while in school is not likely to constitute any harm to him, because the more languages a person can use efficiently, the better he becomes intellectually. Incidentally, the human brain is schematic and elastic enough to take several languages alongside other worthwhile experiences of life.

Conclusion

Language is central to human development and progress and must not be wrongly located in strategic national reforms. A multilingual country like Nigeria may not find languages planning easy, not only because of ethnolinguistic factors, but also colonial experience and the subtle threat posed by globalisation. Yet there is need to use indigenous languages, especially in education, to empower and secure the nation. The content of Nigerian education in relation to the status and role of the mother tongue requires an overhaul, so that education will help to reposition the economy as envisioned. In so doing, linguists, applied linguists and language educators need to work together, utilising agreeable parameters and models. The mother tongue is a most crucial tool for achieving sustainable national empowerment, and its development must not be left to chance.

References

- Abiri, J. O. (1983). Problems and Methods of Teaching Initial Reading in English and Nigerian Languages. *Literacy and Reading in Nigeria*, 1, 51-62.
- Adegbija, E.E. (1989). The Implications of the Language of Instruction for Nationhood: An Illustration with Nigeria. *ITL Review of Applied Linguistics*.
- Awoniyi, T. A. (1982). The Teaching of African Languages. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Babatunde, S. T. (2004). The English as a Second Language Phenomenon in Nigeria. *Contemporary English Usage: An Introductory Survey* (pp. 122-203). Ilorin: Haytee Books.
- Banjo, A. (1994). On Citizenship in a Multilingual State. In Asein, S. O. Adesanoye F. A., (Eds.), *Language and Polity: Essays on Language and Society in Africa*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman.
- Bamgbose, A. (1970). The English Language in West Africa. London: Longman.
- Bamgbose, A. (1991). Language and the Nation. Edinburgh University Press.
- Chomsky, N. (1972). Language and the Mind in Cashdan, A. et al. (Eds.), *Language in Education. A Source Book*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Fafunwa, B. (1974). A History of Education in Nigeria. London: Unwin.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004). National Policy on Education. Lagos: Government Press.
- Idoko, C. (June 24, 2007). FG committed to encouraging study of French. *Saturday Tribune*, p 5.
- Lawal, R. A. (1989a). Relationship between Attitudes to and Achievement of Goals in the Learning of Second Nigeria Language. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ibadan.
- Lawal, R. A. (1989b). Towards the Evolution of an Indigenous National Language for Nigeria. In Lawal R. A., Olugbade, K (Eds). *Issues in Contemporary African Social and Political Thought*, 1, 32-39.

- Lawal, R. A. (2007). Linguistic Globalisation and Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria. Paper delivered at the 2nd National Conference of School of Languages Federal College of Education (Special) Oyo, 12th - 15th November, 2007.
- Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (2007). The 9-Year Basic Education at a glance. www.nerdcnigeria.org
- Oladosu, A.G.A.S. (2007). Ethical Rebirth and Good Democratic Governance in Nigeria: The Role of Nigerian Languages. Paper Delivered at the 2nd Annual Conference of School of Languages, Federal College of Education (Special), Oyo, 12th - 15th November.
- Olajide, S. B. (1996). Reading-related Skills of Thinking in English among Students of Nigerian Colleges of Education. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ilorin, Ilorin.
- Olajide, S. B. (2004). A Cognitive Study of the Reading Comprehension Performance of Advanced Trained Teachers in an ESL Context. *African Journal of Information Technology and Educational Media*, 1, 2, 1-10.
- Olajide, S. B. (2007b). Promoting Thinking Skills through Enhanced Reading Instruction in Language Education Programme. Paper presented at the 1st mid-term Conference of the Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN). Held at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan, 9th - 13th October.
- Olagoke, D. O. (1979). The Mother Tongue and ESL in Nigeria Education. In Ubahakwe, E. (Ed.), *The Teaching of English Studies*, Ibadan University Press, 5 - 26.
- Omamor, A. (1994). Language Planning: Theory and Practice in some African Countries. In Asein, S. O. & Adesanoye F. A. (Eds.), *Language and Polity: Essays on Language and Society in Africa*. Ibadan: Sam Bookman, 32 - 63.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2004). Linguistic Genocide in Education or Worldwide Diversity and Human Rights. *File/NPC04/Documents Linguistic % 20 genocide % 20 in %20 education % 20 - % 20 worldwide % — 5/2/2004*.
- Whorf, B. L. (1996). *Language Thought and Reality*. Cambridge Mass: M.I.T. Press.