

Co-existence of English and Nigerian Languages in National Development: Prospects and Constraints

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Abstract

This paper examines the prospects of using the English language alongside Nigerian languages for national development. The literature is replete with opinions on the developmental potentials of Nigerian languages. The paper hinges on the Exoglossic and Endoglossic Perspectives as theoretical frameworks. Scholars, who contend for an exoglossic option as a language policy for Nigeria, want English to be entrenched as Nigeria's National Language because apart from being void of ethnic sentiments, its vocabulary and grammar are developed. The Endoglossic perspective believes in the developmental potentials of a well-developed Nigerian language. This paper recommends the co-existence of the English language and Nigerian languages as a vehicle for national development. This paper opines that the above recommendation can be achieved if germane, result-driven and forward-looking language policies are created and implemented for the country. The study attempts to promote the use of other indigenous languages as a means to drive national development as against the initial emphasis on the three major languages. The data for this study were obtained from A report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) meeting which was held in 1951 among experts on indigenous languages and was published in a seminal papers titled *The Sociology of Language* edited by J.A Fishman. The finding of the study showed but not limited to the assertion that language is a development asset of society, particularly if its potential is fully recognized and exploited.

Keywords: Nigerian languages, English, co-existence, national development, Exoglossic Option and Endoglossic Option

Introduction

Language is very crucial in the growth and development of any nation. In Nigeria, the Education Ordinance of 1882 entrenched the English language as the medium of instruction in formal education. In 1896, the Certification System was introduced, and Credit Pass in English became compulsion for candidates seeking admission in Nigerian universities irrespective of the course of study. As English continues to play significant roles in the development of Nigeria, indigenous languages continue to suffer from the over-dominance of English. This paper aligns with the stance of scholars who believe that English can co-exist with Nigerian languages for nation-building. Therefore, the thrust of the paper is to discuss the prospects and constraints

of such co-existence. Nigerian languages such as Hausa language, Igbo languages and Yoruba languages can play a powerful role in national development when they are actively promoted and integrated into key sectors like education and literacy, political participation and governance, economic development, cultural preservation and tourism, media and information dissemination, national unity and inclusion, legal and justice system and technology transfer. Nigeria languages are not just cultural asserts. When properly used can serve as a tool for improved education, good governance and economic growth and development.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim and objectives of the study are to:

- i. identify the potentials of using Nigeria indigenous languages as a medium of national development;
- ii. state the roles which indigenous languages can play in resolving in conflict resolution, peace and confidence building, internal trade, health campaigns, early formal education and adult literacy as well as mass media; and
- iii. identify indigenous languages as medium of information and knowledge for national development;

Review of Previous Studies

Several researchers, such as Okon Angela Raymond, Carol Ohen and Florence Oghiator have researched on Indigenous Languages as a vehicle for National Development.

Okon Angela Raymond in her investigation on: ‘the development of indigenous language in nation-building’ perceived language as a means of communication where messages are conveyed from a speaker to the receiver(s). Such message can be instructional, emotional, conditions, viewpoints and philosophies. Nation building is underscored in the work as the framing or shaping of a national identity through the instrumentality of state power, aimed at unifying the people within the state and thereby engendering political, economic and socio-cultural sustainability and stability of the state. Consequently, five research objectives, commensurate research questions and hypotheses were presented. Also, the human capital theory by Adams Smith (1776) anchored the work, descriptive design utilized and key concepts such as the linguistic design in Nigeria, language history in Nigeria, the five characteristics of a language, the four language skills, nation building as well as indigenous language and nation building in Nigeria were treated. It was thus recommended among others that the implementation of the language policy of the National Policy on Education (NPE) should be held seriously by both the government and the stakeholders. This will go a

long way in enhancing their development and relevance in the task of national development; the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages should be compulsory in Nigerian schools including nursery and primary schools; and Nigerians should have a positive attitude towards the use and study of their indigenous languages. This is because language is a cultural identity and heritage which is indispensable in social interaction and national integration. This current work hinges on the Exoglossic and Endoglossic perspectives as theoretical frameworks. Scholars, who contend for an exoglossic option as a language policy for Nigeria, want English to be entrenched as Nigeria's National Language because apart from being void of ethnic sentiments, its vocabulary and grammar are developed. Okon on the other hand used the human capital theory by Adams Smith (1776). The current study also encourages the endoglossic option as a language policy for Nigeria; this emphasizes well-developed Nigerian languages to be used for the day to day activities of the nation towards national development.

. The previous study makes a case for the implementation of the language policy of the National Policy on Education (NPE). The current study also shares the opinion of the previous study as it regards the implementation of the implementation of the language policy of the National Policy on Education (NPE). The previous study tends to tilt favourable towards the use of only Nigerian languages as a means for national development while the present study encourages the use of English language alongside Nigerian languages as a means for national development

Carol Ohen & Florence Oghiator on their research on 'Language as a Tool for National Cohesion and Development in Nigeria' looks at the role that language plays in socio-cultural life, education, and politics of Nigeria. It employs library information with focus on the use of language as a tool for national cohesion and development in Nigeria. The article posits that language can be more instrumental to Nigeria's development economically, politically, socially and culturally, with the people remaining united in diversity. It shows that governance, socio-cultural interactions, and education cannot be successfully achieved in a given nation outside language. It is thus an necessary agent for peace, harmony, unity and progress in every nation. The paper recommends English as a lingua franca that should be taught to every Nigerian for better integration within the system. It concludes that language is a major tool if cohesion and national development are to be achieved in the nation. The previous study emphasized on the promotion of English language as Nigerian's lingua franca because of the multi-lingual nature of the Nigerian society. This position is shared by the present study when it makes a case for the use of an exoglossic option as opined by some scholars as a language policy for Nigeria, want English to be entrenched as Nigeria's National Language because apart from being void of ethnic sentiments, its

vocabulary and grammar are developed. The present study differs from the previous study which only emphasizes English language above Nigerian languages. The present study also encourages the endoglossic option as a language policy for Nigeria; this emphasizes well-developed Nigerian languages to be used for the day to day activities of the nation towards national development.

Theoretical Framework

The endoglossic and exoglossic policy were used as the theoretical framework for this research. An endoglossic policy involves the promotion of one or several indigenous languages as official or national languages, whilst the exoglossic policy refers to the adoption of the ex-colonial language, external to the country, as an official or national language.

Methodology

The data for this study were obtained from A report of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) meeting which was held in 1951 among experts on indigenous languages and was published in a seminal papers titled The Sociology of Language edited by J.A Fishman

The experts from the seminal came out with the following observations:

- i) The mother tongue is a person's natural means of self-expression, and one of his first needs is to develop his power of self-expression;
- ii) Every pupil should begin his formal education in his mother tongue; and
- iii) There is nothing in the structure of any language that precludes it from becoming a vehicle of modern civilization. (UNESCO, 1951; Fishman, 1968)

Data Presentation and Analysis

After independence, most of the African countries were faced with many challenges in an attempt to shape their nationhood and stimulate national development, with the focus to becoming modern states. Furthermore, they had to satisfy what Fishman (1971) referred to as unification, authenticity and modernity. Broadly, these countries needed unity among the many and diverse ethnic groups which made up semi-autonomous ethno-linguistic entities as well as identity of their sovereignty as states and development in an attempt to become like the modern world both socio-economically and technologically. Majorly, how to come to grips with the prevailing multilingual and multiethnic peculiarity was the most challenging issue facing these

African countries; thus, the need to adopt language policies. Nigeria was not spared from this challenge, this brought about the issue of the national policy on education which had the language policy of the country encapsulated in it as the law concerning the teaching of indigenous language.

One of the many tasks that the newly independent countries of Africa faced in the early 1960s was the choice of an official language that would not only facilitate communication and therefore support the various developmental efforts, but one that would also provide much needed unity among the many ethnic groups, numbering, in some cases, over one hundred. Expectedly, the sought after official language was to assist in establishing national identity as well as self-determination for the countries. These countries were therefore faced with choosing either of the two language policies; the endoglossic or exoglossic policy.

An endoglossic policy involves the promotion of one or several indigenous languages as official or national languages, whilst the exoglossic policy refers to the adoption of the ex-colonial language, external to the country, as an official or national language. In relation to this, most of the African countries took a short-cut by adopting an exoglossic language policy, in which the ex-colonial language was adopted as official language and, in some cases, served also as national language.

It is interesting to note that the importance of language was emphasized in the National Policy of Education as Revised in (2004) Edition when it was that “government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba”. The emphasizes here is for learning sake and not for use as an official language, rather according to the same document French language was to be used as our second official language while English language is the first official language with no room for our indigenous languages playing any role in our national life. The above quote from the Revised National Policy on Education (2004) is in Section 1. Section 2 deals with Early Childhood Pre-Primary Education. This includes crèche, nursery and kindergarten. The language for instruction in this level of education was not mentioned rather the emphasizes were on how the teachers will assist the parents of the kids look after them while preparing them towards primary education. Section 3 deals with basic education. This includes 6 years of primary education and 3 years of junior secondary education. The languages to be taught are the language of the environment, English, French and Arabic. This contradicts section 1 which emphasized on only Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The

language policy in section 3 also applies to senior secondary school but it is important to note that that the language of the environment which is meant to be taught is not compulsory as such some schools don't even teach indigenous languages to their students. At the tertiary levels, indigenous languages are not taught rather French and Arabic are taught as courses under the General Studies Division. From the above submission, the National Policy of Education which is the regulator on language policy in Nigeria is on the side of exoglossic policy rather than endoglossic policy.

Owing to lack of proper language planning and policy implementation, many countries in Africa haven't recognized the potentials that their languages can play in their national development. As Bamgbose(1991:111) opines most of their policy and decisions on national language are made up of either 'avoidance, vagueness, arbitrariness, fluctuation and declaration without implementation.' Oftentimes, the existence of these indigenous languages is seen as stumbling block to national unity, identity and development.

Language is a development asset of society, particularly if its potential is fully recognized and exploited. It can be a key contributing force towards nationhood and national development if properly managed, (Bamgbose, 2000:30). The indigenous languages of Africa can therefore be vehicles of national development if put to proper use. Such languages need to be looked at not as stumbling blocks, but as potential national development resources. As with all other resources, they need to be allocated in areas where they can be of optimal utility. For this reason the choice of languages and their domains of use need to be made on strictly economic grounds in much the same way as for any other resource in the nation's economy, (Fishman 1971, 1974; Jernudd & De Gupta, 1971). It is important that each country looks for optimization of the use of the national linguistic resource at the least possible cost with the aim to drive development. Conversely, recognizing that language is a resource with a social rather than an economic value, allowance is usually made for social and cultural factors which may affect its use. A nation's languages should be developed and used with the aim of fully involving their speakers, cognitively in the advancement of the nation as a whole.

Findings

1. Language is a development asset of society, particularly if its potential is fully recognized and exploited.
2. National Policy of Education which is the regulator on language policy in Nigeria is on the side of exoglossic policy rather than endoglossic policy.

3. The policy and decisions on national language in Nigeria and most African countries are made up of avoidance, vagueness, arbitrariness, fluctuation and declaration without implementation.
4. Most African countries took a short-cut by adopting an exoglossic language policy, in which the ex-colonial language was adopted as official language and, in some cases, served also as national language

Recommendations

- a. The National Language Policy on Education should be revised again but this time the teaching of the language of the environment should be made compulsory from early childhood education to tertiary level.
- b. Areas or environment where there are no materials or teachers the indigenous language that has teachers and materials should be taught in such environment.
- c. Government should encourage the training and re-training of our indigenous language teachers.
- d. English language should still be used as our official language due to the multi-ethnic nature of our society.
- e. Government should encourage the training and re-training of English language teachers so as to encourage competence among the teachers more so since English language is a language of the world.

Conclusion

Since the government of Nigeria recognizes the importance of language as stated in the National Policy of Education in the Revised Edition (2004) it is therefore pertinent for the teaching and learning of our indigenous languages starting from the early childhood education to tertiary institution. Teachers should be trained to teach our indigenous languages. Books, teaching aids and other education materials in our indigenous languages should be developed to facilitate the teaching and learning our indigenous languages. English language should continue to be used as our official language due to the multi ethnic and multi lingual nature of our country. This will help in fostering our unity in our diversity. The government should encourage the training and re-training of English language teachers in order to improve their competence bearing in mind that English is a world language. Nigerian languages such as Hausa language, Igbo languages and Yoruba languages can play a powerful role in national development when they are actively promoted and integrated into key

sectors like education and literacy, political participation and governance, economic development, cultural preservation and tourism, media and information dissemination, national unity and inclusion, legal and justice system and technology transfer. Nigeria languages are not just cultural asserts. When properly used can serve as a tool for improved education, good governance and economic growth and development.

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