

Poor Performance in English Language and Issues of Security and Good Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examines the poor performance of Students in English language and takes a look at the position of security and good governance in Nigeria. In other to achieve this, the paper considers the language policy and the of it in ensuring effective communication. The crisis of security and good governance as discussed by writers like Oladejo and Akinwumi are the determinant factors militating against considerable performance of Students in English. The study brings to the fore the concerns of educationist on issues of security challenges in the society. The study reveals the theme of security threats as menace to education and good governance in Nigeria. The writers assert that unless the teaching and learning of English language is given the priority it deserves, issue of security and challenges of leadership and good governance will remain unattainable. The study recommends that the Nigerian government at all levels should take the security of life and property of the citizens seriously so as to bring about the expected and effective teaching of English that may result into outstanding performance of students in examinations.

Keywords: Social interaction, security, leadership, social unrests, language policy

Introduction

It has been established by (Okeke, 2012) through daily human activities that English Language is a basic requirement and a tool for communication in Nigerian society. Without the effective use and good understanding of English Language, Education nothing can be meaningfully achieved. In fact, Okeke (2012) cited in Jan (2019) believes that ineffective use of English language can threaten national security as it causes disagreements, hostilities and unhealthy rivalries (Where?). There is no doubt that language of wider communication provides a country of multilingual orientation with the possibility of communicating ideas, transmitting values, feelings and goals from one person to another. These ideas may border on issues of preservation of life and properties; mutual trust, confidence and comfort in the language village that is regarded as a nation

It seems like Nigeria does not have a well- articulated and explicit national language policy that can be found in one document and this constitutes problems of security (Cadiero, 2015). This policy is, sometimes, explicitly and, sometimes not clearly stated in some sections of the National Policy on Education (2004) as may be seen in Chapter X 'Special Issues in Nigerian Politics' Paragraphs 270 - 272, pp. 62 - 63 entitled: 'National Language' of the government views and Comments on the Findings of Recommendations of the Political Bureau (National

Association of State Directors of Teacher Education and Certification (NASDTEC, 1997). The actual National Policy on Languages (in Education) recognises the multidimensional, multi-lingual three tier political-polity which tries to capture the multi-ethnic and, thereby, multi-lingual polity which Berlin and the British have hammered into a rough existence.

The Policy provides for:

- (i) Mother-Tongue (MT) and/or Language of the immediate community (LIC) and the Language of initial literacy at the pre-primary and junior primary levels, and of adult and non-formal education.
- (ii) The three major (national) Languages - Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as the languages of national culture and integration.
- (iii) English - the official language - as the language of formal literacy, bureaucracy, secondary and higher education, the law courts, etc.
- (iv) Selected foreign languages especially French, and Arabic, as the languages of international communication and discourse. These are the languages for which language villages have been set up.

In terms of unstated policy, the NPE policy on languages:

- a. Advocates multilingualism as the national goal.
- b. Recognises English as the actual official language in the bureaucracy and all tiers of formal education.
- c. Treats Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as potential national languages which are to be developed and used as L1 and L2 all through the formal educational system.
- d. Considers all Nigerian languages as meaningful media of instruction in initial literacy, and in life-long and non-formal education (FME, 2003).

The policy statement as articulated in the National Policy on Education (NPE, 2004) are as follows:

- *education is an instrument for national development; to this end the formulation of ideas, their integration for national development, and the interaction for national development and interaction of persons and ideas are all aspects of education;*
- *there is the need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, and united Nigeria; to this end, school programs need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine the individual's direction in education.*
- *education has to be geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity,... with specific goal of inculcating the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society... because it is the most important instrument of change through which any fundamental change (like security and good governance in Nigeria that is currently in vogue) in all intellectual discourse has to be preceded by an education revolution.*

Majority of the students who are admitted into the University in Nigeria have no ample opportunity to study English Language any more, except those who are admitted to study English language and related subjects such as Literature in English. Though, all students admitted into the universities in Nigeria are encouraged to take a course in the use of English, the contents of this course is grossly inadequate for the students to acquire requisite skills in

effective use of language for communication and for the give and take of social experience. In order to study English as a second language and be successful at it, the student must be helped by the teacher to acquire the four language skills; namely: Speaking, reading, listening and writing (Cadiero, 2015).

Language is the vehicle of social interaction and we need it to function properly in the work place and indeed, for good governance. It must be emphasized that a person is functionally literate when he has acquired the knowledge and skills in reading and writing which enable him to engage effectively in all those activities in which literacy is normally assumed in his culture or group (Awosusi, (2018).

English Language in Nigeria

English is one of the languages of the world. The language remains the predominant means of international and inter-ethnic communication despite the attempt to weaken its roles in some regions (Afiya, 2018). It is a living language with very powerful intrinsic potentials. Linguists believe that globalization changes the status of a language. Today, English language is used regularly by many people and second only to Chinese. English belongs to the Germanic languages. In Nigeria, before and after independence, English was an xenoglossic language of colonial masters. The indigenous languages of the people served as the first language of the native then. English language in Nigeria is a second language that a child learns after the acquisition of the mother tongue.

Today, English is the first language of many homes in Nigeria. It occupies prominent place in the school system. Politically, one would have thought that the language should have gone with the burden of imperialism after the country independence but English language became strong and dominant in Nigeria as a result of the acute linguistic complexity existing in the country. It became an intermediary, or better still an alternative in the quest for a national language. English language is playing many roles in Nigeria which makes it inevitable in the citizens' national life. The impact of English language in Nigeria is also felt in areas such as education, politics and administration, mass media, religion, business and commercial activities. English indeed has assumed the status of language of utility in Nigeria language community.

Concept of Security

Security refers to all precautions that are taken to protect lives and properties and governance is the activity or manner of controlling country, city or people. This implies that Schools where security is not guaranteed, studies will be difficult as academic programs are always interrupted. states where teachers and students are prone to kidnapping, robbery, insurgency etc. are most likely to perform poorly in examination It is the process of decision making and the process in which decision is implemented (or not implemented).

The challenges of security and good governance include the following:

- Corruption at various levels
- Centralisation of power and authority
- Criminalisation of politics
- Violation of human rights
- Weak legislators with criminal records, poor knowledge about development and low level of education

- Poor people's participation in development processes
- Less active civil society
- Poorly empowered grassroots democratic institutions
- Poor coordination among the political, administrative and community organisation and institutions
- Delay in delivery of judicial decisions
- Poor participation of disadvantaged in decision making process

Given that English is a compulsory subject, one that must be passed at credit level for a candidate to qualify for admission into any tertiary institution, this repeated poor performance is most worrisome because it shows the percentage of the country's youths that fail to proceed to higher levels of education. A World Bank study came up with a report which shows that university education in Nigeria has degenerated in the past 15 to 16 years (The Guardian, February 19th 2022). According to the report, the poor performance of Nigerian graduates is particularly evident in two areas; poor mastery of the English language and lack of requisite technical skill. It was ascertained in the report that the deficiencies in both vital areas make Nigerian graduates of the past fifteen years unfit for the labor market, and sometimes the larger society. Shortcomings were particularly observed in oral and written communication.

Concept of Good Governance

Governance is the way in which governments exercised power for the management and distribution of a country's social and economic resources (Ogundiya, 2010). It is the process by which a state's affairs are managed effectively in the areas of public accountability, fiscal responsibility, administrative and the political responsibility, responsiveness, and transparency, all of which must show the interest of the governed and the leaders. The basic features of good governance include the conduct of a comprehensive management wherein all the critical stakeholders are allowed to have a say in the decision-making process (Odo, 2015).

The scope of governance is wide as it includes all the day-to-day activities of the government, such as the exercise of authority on the economic, political and administrative in all level in the nation. According to Odo, institutional and structural arrangement, decision-making processes, policy formulation and implementation capacity, development of personnel, information flow and the nature and style of leadership within a political system part of the governance.

Good governance by implication is when the government can carry out the activities mentioned above for the good of all the citizens. Good governance is integral to economic growth, the eradication of poverty and hunger, quality education and sustainable development. The issue of good governance is a problem that has crippled the growth of many countries in the world particularly, Nigeria. Good governance is, among other things, about being participatory, transparent and accountable. Good governance is described as the government of the society. Good governance is the rightly exercising of authority, the ability to problem-solving and conflict resolution, the capacity to manage resources efficiently for development, and high level of responsiveness to the needs and the interest of the citizens (Onyene, 2017).

The Sorry State of English Language Performance

In an analysis of the senior secondary school certificate results in English language between 2010 and 2020, Olapopo (2021), indicated that the percentage of failure was between 53.36% and 72.71%. Statistics released by JAMB revealed that from 2010 to 2020, a total of 2,993,197 candidates sat for the University Matriculation Examination, but only 427,777 of them secured admission in universities nationwide. (14.3%) this analysis is a clear indication that security challenges in most parts of the country is responsible for the poor performance.

Similar reports from WAEC indicate that the level of attainment of candidates in all papers over the years has been appalling. The result of 2010 November/December West African Senior School Certificate Examination did not come as a surprise when only 20.4% of 310,077 candidates obtained five credits in core subjects which are English Language and Mathematics. A review of past performances indicates that in 2005, only 27.53 % obtained five credits in core subjects, while 15.56 per cent passed in 2006. Also, in 2007, 25.54 per cent scaled the line; with the worst performance of 13.76 per cent recorded in 2008. There was a slight improvement in 2009 when 25.99 per cent passed the examination, a figure that went down in 2010 (Daily Champion, 13/4/2011)

The Daily Champion of 13/4/2011 quotes the Registrar and Chief Executive Officer of the National Examination Council (NECO), Prof. Promise Okpala as saying that 2010 November/December result of the Council shows 80% failure in English Language. This, he says "is as embarrassing as it is instructive". This implies that only 20% of the candidates who sat for the examination obtained a credit in this core subject.

Given that English is a compulsory subject, one that must be passed at credit level for a candidate to qualify for admission into any tertiary institution, this repeated poor performance is most worrisome because it shows the percentage of the country's youths that fail to proceed to higher levels of education yearly. A World Bank study came up with a report which shows that university education in Nigeria has degenerated in the past 15 to 16 years (The Guardian, February 19th 2010). According to the report, the poor performance of Nigerian graduates is particularly evident in two areas; poor mastery of the English Language and lack of requisite technical skill. It was ascertained in the report that the deficiencies in both vital areas make Nigerian graduates of the past fifteen years unfit for the labor market, and sometimes the larger society. Shortcomings were particularly observed in oral and written communication.

Effects of Poor Performance on Security

The official language of governance in Nigeria is English. No doubt the problem of poor performance in this is the root of all the difficulties in efficient governance in Nigeria. Suffice it to say that the reverse is the solution to most if not all challenges facing the Nigerian government. If the government cannot communicate its policies and programs to the least of her citizens, there is bound to be great misinterpretation and misunderstanding between the government and the people. This will lead into social unrests and sectional agitations in a multilingual nation as Nigeria (a case of Biafra agitation). Although the National Orientation Agency is doing its best by consistently raising awareness for positive change of attitudes, values and behavior, there are still much to be done. The body is tasked with communicating government policy, staying abreast of public opinion and promoting patriotic, national unity and the development of Nigerian society.

Since English is the official language of education in Nigeria and the medium of instruction for teaching all other subjects, poor quality teaching and comprehension of this core subject inevitably, will negatively, affect the rate of assimilation of other subjects. When majority of the candidates fail to comprehend English, mass failure becomes the overall result. This development is really worrisome because mass failure in English in NECO or WAEC examinations means that majority of youths, who should have been better trained to assume leadership positions in the future, become drop outs with the prospect of joining criminal gangs or the army of social miscreants parading many urban centers in the country. Majority of the youth killing people (under whichever umbrella) are school dropouts.

The few youths who manage to scale through the secondary school level to acquire tertiary education can hardly write or speak good English, yet they are threat to security. Regrettably, it is these same half-baked graduates that would go into such sensitive areas as the civil service, the diplomatic service, politics, the industrial sector and the leadership cadre of the armed forces. Nigeria must not continue to watch this clearly unwholesome development. If we hope for a better future, practical steps must be taken immediately to reverse this disconcerting trend.

Influence of Bad Governance on English Language Education

Research in the Nigerian universities has been rendered useless because of the paucity of fund. The government has money to build personal houses for the government officials but no money for research. They also have money to sponsor political party campaign and rally. Many of them are so naïve to have gone as far as buying properties in the developed countries and had bank accounts in foreign countries but no money for educational research. Most educational research institutes are mere names but can do nothing.

Corruption of our government officials had killed and buried research in English language education for decades. Education is evolving all over the world which should include Nigeria. In Nigeria, there is no new thing in English Language education; it remains as it was for decades ago. Teachers and Lecturers are not innovative: they read and teaches what others discovered while themselves do not bring new knowledge. It was not their fault but because the government had not encouraged credible English language education as a result of corruption. Because of corruption resources from the national treasury meant for research are in the hands of a few individuals who are politically powerful (Gimba, 2006).

Teachers' education and training

Teachers Education and Training in Nigeria is very poor when compared with other developing countries in Africa. Due to the lack of sound teacher education and training in Nigeria, the teaching and learning of science are perceived difficult by both the teachers and the students. Most teachers lack adequate pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) for science teaching. Anadi (2009) had once queried that science and mathematics teacher need a pedagogy that is subject matter specific, and not as it is presently in Nigeria. Consequently, many of these graduates are jobless after graduation.

Infrastructure

Infrastructure in the Nigerian educational institutions is in a terrible condition. It is worrisome and nasty for students to learn science under the tree in some part of the nation today. This reflects the poor budgetary allocation to education by the government. Good governance requires that enough funds be made available for all educational programs. The Nigeria experience shows that poor budgetary allocation to education is meager, and this against the UNESCO recommendations of 26% of the total allocation to the education sector (Akindutire and Ekundayo, 2010, p. 120).

A visit to some of the Nigerian universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education reveals that the Nigerian government is not serious about education. There are poor office accommodations for lecturers and working conditions. English Language is a cognitive course that requires a conducive environment for its teaching and learning. Many lecturers cannot spend thirty minutes in his or her offices for reading and preparation for students teaching because of the hostile nature of the offices. Most offices do not have good furniture, lighting system, and air conditional conversely, the offices of the Vice- Chancellors, the Rectors and the Provost including other management staff are well equipped. The result of the preceding is what we are witnessing today in the country, high rate of unemployment among our youths; insecurity everywhere, hunger and deprivation. Something must be done to improve our science education. Otherwise, the situation may not be better in the nearest future. This brings the paper to the next subtitle, the solution.

Utilization of English Language as an Instrument to Solve Security Problems

Babalola (2012) believes that Language is used to effects motion on things. The language of prayers and incantations go into the supernatural world to get things done. We should know that apart from supernatural power a language possesses, we use it to organize our world. Do you know that language can be used to get more friends or more foes? The language you hold can make you happy or sad. It can elevate you or relegate you. A person is known to be of good character or otherwise through the language he speaks. Language, if realized in its utmost positive essence, can turn the whole world into a close loving family unit and we shall be able to do away with confusion, turbulence and war (Babalola, 2002). Okeke (2012), believes that ignorance, unguarded utterances and rumor lead to conflicts or crises.

The place of English language is an essential entity in solving Nigeria security problems. It is the most commonly spoken language not only in Nigeria but throughout the whole world as international language. It can be used around the world to settle disputes and to promote peace. Security is the state of being free from danger or threat, while insecurity is the state of being open to danger and calamities but there is no society that is absolutely free from conflicts and crises. Insecurity are integral parts of the history of mankind. Insecurity can have a major effect on language as they bring about language contact situations which can disturb or change the language ecology of a region. Language remains the major viable tool that can be used to mobilise people for good or for evil (Ogundepo, 2017).

Peace has always been a concept that has kept its prominence from the time people of the world started to live in communities; however small or large the population, there is a mechanism put in place to resolve conflicts occurring between individuals and nations. English

language teaching materials are different from the teaching materials of every other course in that the flexibility of the contents is not comparable to any other course. The reason for this is that the aim is to teach not a single subject, but the target language as a living thing. Every other subject has its own boundaries but English language teaching can include information in all subjects and peace education is not an exception. The United Nation and other international bodies have made noteworthy efforts to establish peace in all parts of the world and in the minds of people, to make our world a peaceful and more inhabitable planet. Okeke (2012), say peace education is not just about the elimination of violence, although that is a central tenet, but also about creating preventive structures and conditions that better align educational policies, pedagogies and contents toward peace, social justice and human rights principles. The concept of peace transcends military force. Facets of peace include food security, family security, human right security, job security, health security among others. Security captures means of developments towards positive hemisphere in the society. Moreover, one of the postulates of modern peace education, Odo (2015), notes that peace education teaches alternatives to violence. If the aim is to develop generations of people sensitive to others, English language classes may shoulder its share of the responsibility to accomplish this prominent and worthy mission.

This mission will convince students that, all human lives are of equal value and that all human beings to be seen and treated in the full richness, beauty and complexity of each life (Ogundepo, 2017). As a matter of fact, the effectiveness of peace education is not only an ambitious stand, but a necessary goal in order to have peace in the nation. Therefore, as a concept denoting the significance of the serenity and tranquility of human life, peace should take the place it deserves among the items in most of the course contents in English language as much as possible. Language pedagogy that downplays violence and bitterness in our social relationship should be embraced. According to Mirici (2008), the importance attached to English language teaching is in line with the level of education, the basic underlying aim must be to initiate peace, friendship and understanding between individuals and nations. English language teaching is to educate people for a better understanding of others, in other words, to lay foundation stones in the building of a peaceful world and to prepare people for a better living. A good dichotomy must be deliberate created between words that build morals and the words of a language that generate wars and avoidable conflicts.

Conclusion

From the discussion, good governance may be said to have revolves around effective communication between the government and the people. This paper has identified English language as the official language of governance in Nigeria. It is therefore necessary for the government to give this subject the priority it deserves in the scheme of things especially in our education system.

The problems bedeviling effective teaching and learning of English language must be tackled from the lowest level of education. It is a clear fact that most of the teachers of the language learnt it as a second language and this calls for training and retraining of existing English language teachers. Efforts must also be made to recruit and groom more English language teachers. International collaboration and exchange programs among teachers of English language will go a long way in assisting our nation. Since the problem of English

language has direct effect on other disciplines, genuine effort to solve this guarantees the solution to other problems of education and takes care of issues and challenges of leadership and effective governance in Nigeria.

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