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The Pursuit of Social Change in Nigeria: The Language Education Alternative

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Abstract
Nigeria is on the verge of collapse, our social structures are fast crumbling and there is a general state of anarchy which is fueled by ethno-religious sentiments and insecurity to mention just a few. This is because as a nation, we have lost our national heritage which is deeply rooted in our cultural identities; there has been a social shift towards foreign and Non-African ways and fashion. It is expedient that we engineer a social change if our nation will survive this onslaught.Change is constant and inevitable in every human society. Social change is any alteration in the social structure of a people and it is a product of a number of factors chief of which is culture. Culture cannot be divorced from language, thus, there can be no meaningful change in the society without language education. This paper seeks to examine the efficiency of language education in the realisation of social change in Nigeria. Recommendations are also made on how to rebrand language education programmes in universities and the colleges of education to align with the pursuit of social change.
Keywords: Language Education, Social Change, Social Integration, Indigenous Languages

Introduction
Change is the only permanent thing in life and it is ubiquitous in any society, particularly in a society with a strong desire to fulfill human needs. Social change is a product of a true, patriotic and committed leadership. Dike (2008) opines that Nigeria's short life has been packed with successions of social changes which cut across the different strata of the nation. There has been the shift from regions to states, farms to cities, agriculture to petroleum and now, political power has shifted from the north to the south. The irony however is that these changes have not been for the benefit of the common man. The changes recorded in the Nigerian society since independence cut across the different sectors of the national life such as politics, economy, education etc.

The link between language and society is very strong, to the extent that a change in one ultimately affects the other. Language is the custodian of a people's culture and culture in itself is the essence of any society. A society cannot be created until a group of people has some values in common and these values can only be articulated with language. It is language that brings people together and sustains them together and so, there can never be a society without language. Therefore, the process of social change cannot be complete without language. Heath (2003) states, 'Language always precedes society. Even in small groups this relation holds: for example, in a political discussion group the people come together because they already have, or want to learn, a common political language.

Heath (2003) believes that changes in a society will produce changes in the language. The fact that language incorporates culture and social values means that any change that occurs in the society will affect the way of life of the people in no small ways. Nworah (2005) defines social change as any change in social relations that causes a change in a society or transformation of its social structure.

A more workable transactional approach would have been more appropriate, this will involve the introduction of a feedback loop in the process, and such a process will also be dependent on the active involvement and cooperation of those at the bottom of the chain who will feel the impact of the change more. The preference for a bottom-up approach as compared to the traditional top-down approach, which the change agents in Nigeria seem to prefer is desirable as it will give those at the bottom a sense of belonging, shared understanding and values.

Language is a vital tool in education because it is the vehicle through which the teacher conveys the concepts to be learned to the learner. Scholars such as Awobuluyi (1992) and Obanya (2004) seem to be in agreement that language plays a number of roles in education. Thus there is a difference between language in education and language education. Language education is when language functions as a subject on the school curriculum, and this permits one to talk of Language Education in much the same way that one would talk of Physics Education, Science Education, Economics Education, etc (Awobuluyi (1992)).'

Language Education In Nigeria
The Federal Government of Nigeria has made a bold statement concerning language education by including a subsection into the country's 1989 constitution which deals with the educational objectives of state policy. The subsection in question, sub-section 19(4), states that "Government shall encourage the learning of indigenous languages." To further confirm the commitment of the Nigerian government to language education, the National policy on Education (NPE 2004) Section 1 Paragraph 10 (a) states 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 languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

The (b) aspect of the paragraph states:

For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in primary and the Junior Secondary Schools but Non – vocational elective at the Senior Secondary School.

Also, the Nigerian government through the NPE assigned roles to the different categories of languages in the nation's educational system. Some are to take the status of school subject while some are to function as the language of instruction. Other languages such as French and Arabic are to function as non-vocational electives. The NPE (2004) Section 4, Paragraph 19 (e) and (f) reads as follows:

The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the environment for the first three years. During this period, English shall be taught as a subject. From the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as a medium of instruction and the language of immediate environment and French shall be taught as subjects.

In the course of implementing the provisions of the National Policy on Education (NPE), a good number of indigenous languages have been developed to meet the demands of modern education and are now being taught in Nigerian schools. Obanya (1992) lauded the efforts of state ministries of education with particular reference to projects such as the Rivers State Readers' Project, the NERDC (Nigerian Educational Research Development Council) and the Gaskiya Corporation (for the Hausa language) in the development of curriculum materials in indigenous languages but he was quick to note that there is more to be done, especially in the area of non-text materials.

In addition, some external examination bodies such as the Joint Admission Matriculation Board (JAMB), West Africa Examination Council (WAEC) and National Examination Council (NECO) now administer examinations in some of the indigenous languages. Awobuluyi (1992) observes that some indigenous languages are being taught and examined as Single Honours subjects at first and higher degree levels, particularly in the case of Yoruba and Hausa. For example, an indigenous language like Efik/Ibibio has also long featured as a school subject. Efik/Ibibio with the three major languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) forms the four indigenous languages that have been examined for several decades now by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), and may by now have started being examined at Certificate and first degree levels as well. Awobuluyi (1992) concludes that Edo and Kanuri are currently taught for some years in Primary School, and are also taught at Certificate level and as part of first degree programme, all in an attempt to increase the number of people that could be employed and deployed to teach the two languages in Primary School.

The NPE recognizes the link that exists between language and culture. To this end, the government in its quest to promote cultural tolerance; considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother-tongue. In this connection, the Government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba. One major shortcoming with the National Policy on Education is that it is providentially cast in such general terms and filled with a lot of ambiguities. Notable amongst the flaws in the document is the definition of the term 'Language of the immediate environment' in a multilingual state like Cross Rivers or Edo if they are to implement the language education policy as expressly stated in the NPE. This obvious lapse in the policy has made a very strong case for ethnic-biased sentiments in the implementation of the language education provisions in Nigeria.

Through the NPE, the federal government of Nigeria has been able to make a statement concerning the potency of language (indigenous or foreign) in initiating and sustaining social change. Awobuluyi (1992) considers language as a vehicle for a people's culture and a means of maintaining and indefinitely preserving that culture. Language education is one of the most reliable ways by which a nation can preserves her national identity and rich indigenous cultures, to achieve this lofty dream however, efforts must be redoubled to ensure wholesale teaching of our indigenous languages. Awobuluyi (1992) concludes that indigenous languages are veritable and practical means of communication, and they could very easily be harnessed for effecting national integration. This will definitely bring to an end the incessant ethno-religious crises in the country and facilitate social change in Nigeria.

The Trend of Social Change in Nigeria

Nigeria is a West African nation with a population of about 140 million people (Ajulo (2008). It covers an area of 923,766 square kilometers, with over 200 different ethnic groups. Presently, the country is politically

composed of 36 States and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory. It is estimated that over 400 languages are spoken in Nigeria (Crozier and Blench (1992), Elugbe (1994)). However, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are spoken by over 50 percent of the population and have been declared the major national languages. English enjoys the status of an official language and is widely spoken especially by the Nigerian elites (Source: Clark and Sedgwick (2004) www.wes.org/ewenr/04Sept/practical.htm). The linguistic plurality of the Nigerian nation suggests that the Nigerian society will be multicultural and prone to constant changes.

Nworah (2005) cited Kurt Lewin (1951) described change as a three-stage process. The first stage (Unfreezing) involves overcoming inertia and apathy and tackling the existing 'mind set', the second stage (moving to the new level) is when change actually occurs. At the third stage (Refreezing), the new mind set is stabilised to prevent regression to the old ways. Nworah (2005) concludes that Lewis's model appears too linear and simplistic to be applied in a complex environment like Nigeria

The Nigeria social system has witnessed different types of change or reforms since independence. Previous governments in Nigeria have tried to introduce and implement different reform programmes especially in the areas of social, economic, educational and political sectors of the nation with varying degrees of success. Nworah (2005) opines that reform programmes could neither be described as successes nor failures because a greater percentage of such reforms were abandoned half- way. Some of the factors responsible for this is lack of continuity in leadership, insincerity on the part of the government etc. Some of the notable or landslide reform programmes in the nation's history include the War Against indiscipline (WAI) which was started by the Muhammad Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon-led government in 1984. The programme despite the hype and euphoria that surrounded its introduction was subsequently cancelled when Ibrahim Babangida took over as military head of state in 1985; his government replaced the WAI campaign with what it called the Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance and Social Justice (MAMSER) campaign, as part of what it called the social re-engineering process.

Babangida's social re-engineering programme also included political and economic reforms. At this period, new phrases were introduced into Nigeria's national life, for example the International Monetary Fund (IMF) - inspired Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), the infamous Option A4 political programme. His government also congregated the Constituent Assembly, set up the Peoples Bank, a government bank charged with the responsibility of providing micro-credit to the poor who were not able to provide the collateral security requested by the traditional lenders and banks. The Late Sani Abacha initiated the NOA (National Orientation Agency) to replace MAMSER, and Family Support Programme (FSP) which eventually led to the creation of the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Welfare.

Also, Former President Olusegun Obasanjo government continued from where the previous governments stopped, with the introduction of the Child Care Trust, another first lady pet project to replace Myriam Abacha's Family Support Programme. The Obasanjo government however introduced various reform programmes in the area of agriculture and anti-graft campaign. The late Yar 'Ardua also introduced series of reform programmes under the coined name: '7 Point Agenda'. Notable among the reform programmes of the late Yar 'Adua are the electoral reforms, the Land Use Act, Rule of Law to mention just a few.

Language Education: A Catalyst for Social Change.

Lauer (1982, p.4) citing Fairchild, ed. (1955) defined social change as variations or modifications in any aspect of social process, pattern, or form; and it is also any modification in established patterns of inter-human relationships and standards of conducts. Social change can also be defined as an essential shift of established social structures. Moore (1967) describes social structures as patterns of social action and interaction such as: norms, values, and cultural phenomena. Language is a vital aspect of any human society because it is a tool for communication and it creates cultural identity and social integration. Language education engenders social change because it exposes learners to different cultures.

Language is unique to man and a powerful tool for social change. Nworah (2005) opines that change is required in any society as old procedures must be turned into new processes and concludes that the immediate realities in Nigeria portend the need for radical changes in our social, economic, and political lives. Change is inevitable in any human setting and it is a product of a number of factors. Dike (2008) submits that the direction of change in a society depends on the manner in which resources are mobilized by the leader, and the attitude of the people toward change.

The factors responsible for social can either be internal or external, some of these factors are: political, economic, demographic, technology, cultural, education etc. Social change can occur through cultural or language contacts between different societies. Through contacts, societies with different cultures, values, beliefs and languages meet to exchange or borrow cultural traits from one another. Language plays an important role in social change because as speakers of different languages meet to interact, they exchange cultural values and ideas. The current trend in the Nigeria music, fashion and entertainment industry is patterned after the style of the western world.

Globalization has reordered our world and created a major shift in the social life of Nigerians. Language

of the world powers and technology is the fuel of globalization, and it is taking a serious negative toll on the teaching, learning and use of our indigenous languages in education. Nigerians have abandoned the communal life that Africans are known for and have since embraced the violent and everything-goes carefree way of life of the western world. We cannot take the language of the western and globalised world and reject their culture because language and culture are inseparable. Ohuabunwa, (1999) described globalisation as an evolution which is systematically restructuring interactive phases among nations and people by breaking down barriers in the areas of culture, commerce, communication and several other fields of human endeavour.

Education is as potent as language in the area of engendering social change. This is because education is responsible for transmission of cultures, knowledge, skills etc from one generation to the other. Education is an agent for social change and language is the vehicle of education. Language education according to the NPE is capable of preserving our diverse cultures and sustaining national integration. Exposure to the country's indigenous languages through education will drastically curb value disintegration and create a new social order in the Nigerian society.

Social change involves cooperation and commitment from all the parties concerned. Lauer (1982) opines that many factors are involved in social change; this is because no single factor can adequately account for it. Some of the factors responsible for social change are physical environment, population changes, social structure, attitudes and values, cultural factor, technological factors etc. Language and culture are Siamese twins that are inseparable; any nation that is serious in her quest to preserve her culture must take the issue of language education with all the dexterity that it deserves.

Heath (2003) outlined a sequence of social change that shows that every society is really a language community. Social change begins when an individual transforms his meanings into social values via language. These values have to become incorporated into language before they can become incorporated into the stock of social values. Language brings forth social reality and the social change is disseminated through education. Society cannot be created until a group of people has some values in common and these values require a language to embed them and articulate them. Heath (2003) concludes that it is language that brings people together and keeps them together.

Singer and Pezone (2003) cited Durkheim (1897/1951: 372-373) and describes education as the image and reflection of society. It only imitates and reproduces the latter; it does not create it. This is because education can only bring about a change or reorder the scheme of things in the society; it cannot create a new society. Culture or cultural related factors influence the direction and character of technological change Culture not only influences our social relationships, it also influences the direction and character of technological change. It is not only that our culture, beliefs and social institutions must correspond to the changes in technology but our beliefs and social institutions determine the use to which the technological inventions will be put.

Language education in Nigeria as stated in the NPE seeks to expose Nigerians to multilingualism and multiculturalism which will in turn bring about social tolerance in the country and eradicate the incessant ethnic and religious related crisis in the country. Heath (2003) opines that social values and language are one; this further confirms that language education programmes if properly managed and implemented can foster social change and preserve our cultures.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Education is the solution to all human problems, Nigerians have long been educated wrongly by the western world through colonization, imperialism and globalization (the internet, diversity visa lottery, science, technology, entertainment etc). There is therefore the need for Africans and Nigerians in particular to be 're-educated' through language education. The prevailing social structure in the country which is alien to our culture needs to be altered. Language is a very powerful tool and so, it must be channeled through the system of education in order to achieve an enduring change in the social order.

Having considered the importance of language education to social change in Nigeria, the researcher has come up with a number of recommendations which are as follows:

i. Language education programmes in the universities and colleges of education need to be repackaged to cover the aspects on societal values and culture.

ii. There is a need to develop more indigenous languages in both the area of text and non-text materials.

iii. The potency of language as a factor in social change needs to be maximized by developing different means of educating people through entertainment such as music, games etc.

iv. The government should improve on the implementation of the language provisions of the NPE especially in the private owned schools and institutions.

v. The government, school administrators, teachers, parents and other stakeholders in the education must come together to wage war against the problem of attitude against indigenous language teaching and learning.

vi. There should be incentives in form of bursary allowances and/or scholarship awards for students who

distinguish themselves in the field of language education.

vii. Knowledge of at least one indigenous language apart from a candidate's mother tongue should be a requisite for admission in any Nigerian university.

In conclusion, as a nation we need a change in every aspect of our national life – our value system, disposition to our traditional African beliefs and culture etc but these transformations cannot occur if we continue to educate our children in another man's language. Our very essence as a nation which is our rich cultural heritage will be replaced and totally go into extinction if the language education provisions of the National Policy on Education is not rigorously pursued with all the attention it deserves.

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