AWKA JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERARY STUDIES (AJELLS)

Volume 12 Number 2
June, 2025

National Development and Multilingualism in Nigeria

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Abstract
Multilingualism and national development in Nigeria highlight that Nigeria's linguistic diversity is both a national resource and a potential source of conflict. While some sources argue that multilingualism can enhance literacy, economic growth and cultural cohesion when supported by strategic language planning, others point to the potential for exclusion and the role of English as a unifying official language. This paper ex-rays the indices of national development, language planning and the implications of language policy and planning to national development. It suggests a need for inclusive language policies that leverage linguistic diversity for equitable socio-economic transformation and national unity.
Keyword: Multilingualism, national development, language, policy, planning, unity

Introduction
In Nigeria, the multiplicity of languages presents a complex situation for national development. While multilingualism can be a valuable asset for cultural richness and understanding, it also poses challenges for national unity and effective communication, particularly in education, governance and economic activities. The importance of promoting and preserving indigenous languages cannot be overstated. Indigenous languages are deeply tied to the culture and tradition of the people that speak them. By promoting these languages, we can help preserve cultural heritage. Language plays a crucial role in building and maintaining community

relationships. Promoting indigenous languages can help strengthen community bonds and foster a sense of identity. Of particular importance are Oyetade, (2001); Ogunsiji, (2001); Adegbite, (2003 & 2004); Ogunwale, (2013) and Owolabi, (2013). Ogunsiji, (2001), for instance, discussing the utilitarian dimensions of language in Nigeria, stresses the fact that all the languages in Nigeria, both English and the indigenous languages have a role to play if we want all round development in the country. He thus highlights the utilities of English and indigenous languages in Nigeria. Oyetade (2001) argues that the indigenous languages are as important as, if not more important than the English language in Nigeria; everything humanly possible should therefore be done to change our negative attitude to the use of indigenous languages in Nigeria. Adegbite, (2003) expressly and clearly writes on multilingualism and national development. He x-rays the indices of national development, language planning and national development before dwelling on the implications of language policy and planning for national development.

Adegbite (2004) toeing the same line, contends that lack of development of most African nations can be traced to lack of recognition of/ under-utilization of the indigenous languages in favour of the English language. He finally argues that all the socio-economic, political, educational and technological problems of Nigeria in particular and Africa in general will be immensely mitigated if many languages are used. Owolabi (2013) though does not oppose the use of English in Nigeria, strongly contends that the use of indigenous languages need to be encouraged if sustainable development will be achieved in Nigeria.

Since nothing has changed with all the works on the need for the use of many languages for sustainable development in Nigeria, this paper is out to join others to argue that the blessings in multilingualism can be harnessed to make a change for better in Nigeria. It is believed that the paper will be of immense benefit to

the curriculum planners and policy makers. Students of sociolinguistics will find it very useful and scholars working on multilingualism and national development will also find it very resourceful.

Concepts in Multilingualism

Multilingualism, as succinctly defined by Akinjobi (2004), is speaking or using several languages. On the other hand, bilingualism is using two languages while monolingualism deals with using one language. An individual or a society can be multilingual. A multilingual person has many languages in his linguistic repertoire, i.e. he is able to speak more than two languages. That person is also regarded to as a polyglot. However, as argued by Adegbite (2003), a multilingual person can be said to be bilingual in a technical sense if the many languages in their repertoire perform only two socially recognized functions.

For instance, as contended by Adegbite, a polyglot can be regarded as a bilingual when only two of their many languages perform social roles as mother tongue and second language while the other languages are used to perform personal/special purposes. Similarly, Nigeria can equally be said to be bilingual rather than multilingual if all her several languages, that serve as mother tongues of several ethnic groups, serve as mother tongues while English, Nigeria's official language, serves as the second language. In a situation like this, all other languages in the country can be said to be foreign because they serve specific/ personal functions rather than social needs of their users.

However, considering the number of languages in Nigeria, it can be regarded as a multilingual nation. While Adegbite (2003) submits that Nigeria has about 400 languages, Akinjobi, quoting Grimes (ed.) (1996) contends that she has 470 languages. Ogunsiji (2004) quoting Adegbija (1989) also argues that there are over 400 ethnolinguistic groups in Nigeria and each of them has its

language, meaning that there are over 400 languages in the country. He however contends that only three; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are politically recognized as the major languages, and they don't cut across their regional boundaries. In addition to the indigenous languages are English, Arabic and Pidgin, among others. The point here is however that Nigeria has many languages.

As chronicled by Ogunwale (2013), apart from the languages spoken by those who fall at the border lines who, by virtue of their location, must acquire more than one language to perform their day-to-day activities, there are the three big languages of Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo, referred to as the major languages. These are classified as the deprived languages. In the words of Bamgbose (1995), deprived languages are used in formal education and as a means of communication beyond their immediate communities but they are subordinate to a foreign language functioning as an official language. There are the majority-minority indigenous languages and minor-minority indigenous languages that are referred to as endangered languages. These are not used for formal education, and their communication functions are limited to the in-group and for the purposes such as rituals, festivals, etc. and informal contacts. Iwara (2008) quoted in Ogunwale (2013), submits that Nigeria's minor-minority languages are around 396, while the major minority languages are about 12, which include Kanuri, Tiv, Nupe, Jukun, Ebira, Edo and Urhobo among others.

And, the population of the speakers of each of them ranges between 800 thousand and 8 million. As submitted by Ogunwale, these languages enjoy officialdom at their states, "have a relatively standard orthography and a vast body of literature". He however concludes that, going by UNESCO record, there are around 400 indigenous languages in Nigeria.

Although there is no nation in the world that is absolutely monolingual, some are however officially seen as being

monolingual. Some of these are: Great Britain, Japan, Germany, Botswana, Burundi, Lesotho, Somalia and Swaziland.

Some of the countries that are officially regarded as being bilingual are: Algeria, Canada, Finland, Kenya and Namibia. And, apart from Nigeria, some other countries that are considered to be officially multilingual are: Belgium, where Flemish, Dutch and French are spoken; Pakistan where Bengali, Urdu and English are spoken and; Switzerland where German, French and Italian are spoken. In the words of Adegbite (2003), "Nigeria stands out as the most linguistically diverse country in Africa". In the report of the study conducted by Wolff (1998), he submits that most Nigerians speak between two and five languages; sixty percent of the subjects used for the study used two languages, thirty used three while ten percent used over four languages.

English in Nigeria

In Nigeria, English serves as the official language and plays a crucial role in various aspects of life, including governance, education media and business. While Nigeria has a multitude of indigenous languages, English was adopted as the official language due to its neutral status and its ability to facilitate communication across the country's diverse ethnic groups. The amalgamation of the country in 1914 facilitated the use of English as the language of administration since it unified all the parts and peoples in the country. It has since then been serving as the language of inter-ethnic communication in Nigeria. The Nigerian elite prefer and rate it higher than all other indigenous languages and cultivate positive attitude towards it. These people believe that being literate is tantamount to being competent in English. They see the language as a prestige staff that can be destroyed by speaking indigenous languages. It functions as the official language of the country. It is therefore the medium through which official records and publications are kept. It is also the language of education and politics. The country carries out most of her international

businesses with it and sees it as the best language of science and technology; it is the only language that can plug the country to modern civilization and technology.

But the arguments in support of the use of only English for the performance of the major functions in Nigeria are not strong enough. As most scholars have rightly argued, we are not saying that English should not be used; but it should be combined with the indigenous languages. For instance, to say that multilingual nature of Nigeria is an obstacle to national unity is fallacious. As argued by Ogunwale (2013), it is the management of the diversity of the country that matters. Conflicts in Nigeria, as contended by him, usually result from economic inequalities and struggles for power and not for any other reason. It is unfortunate that Nigeria, as contended by Odebunmi (2001), has constant ill-luck with leaders, which has forced it to grapple with a bad economy.

It is also part of the argument of some people that Nigerian indigenous languages are too weak to serve as media of instruction. But we also want to say that as media of instruction, multilingualism has worked in some other countries of the world, and can work in Nigeria with good will, after all, where there is the will there is a way. Kenya, Somalia and Tanzania are examples that readily come to mind. In fact, it has been practiced in Nigeria before; it is only our leaders that did not allow it to stay. The Ife six-year project of Prof. Babs Fafunwa where the pupils were encouraged to use their mother tongue, Yoruba, as a medium of instruction in the primary school worked. The experimented pupils were found to be by far better than their counterparts who had their instruction in English in all areas- Arts, social science and science. In fact, apart from the academic achievement of these pupils, it is reported that those of them who ventured into technical areas were found to be more resourceful than their counterparts they met in the technical school.

Fafunwa, Macauley and Sokoya (1989) specifically contend that if the local languages are developed, there would be an improvement in the standard of living of the people in the rural areas since the languages will function as the means of imparting basic technology in the adult education class. Odebunmi (2001), while condemning Ayeni (1997) for opposing the use of indigenous languages to teach Mathematics, submits that Ayeni himself states that Mathematics originated from Egypt, and Russians and Chinese teach Mathematics in their own languages, rather than English. If indigenous languages can be used to teach highly technical subject like Mathematics in these countries, they can be used in Nigeria too, if the determination is there. This is possibly what informed Dirven's (1989) lamentation that irreparable harm could be done to the folk wisdom in science and technology and the culture, if indigenous languages are not developed into instruments of all the so-called higher domains of life.

Ogunwale (2013) quoting Klaus (2003) also presents the case of multilingual Island of Papua New Guinea with about 800 languages that is able to manage the challenges of multilingualism through gradual process of multilingual education starting from Kindergarten. The children are exposed to many languages right from the primary school, and by year 2000, the country had developed around 380 local languages. For the communication of technical terms, as contended by Ogunwale, metalanguages can be used when a language is found to be deficient. It will also not be an understatement to say that acquisition of local languages will be cheaper.

It was also the argument of the colonialists that competence in English was an indicator of intellectual soundness and tendency to be creative. They also believed that the person would be socially immobile and politically limited if they are not substantially competent in English. But the researcher maintains here that only 20% of the Nigerian population which constitutes a minority is

competent in English. So for a person to be highly relevant in Nigerian politics, they must be able to speak many indigenous languages. For instance, Nigeria has six geo-political regions, and each region has many languages. For instance, Adegbite (2003) submits that each of the states like Taraba, Plateau and Cross River has over sixty languages. To make headway politically in these states demands ability to speak many languages, especially indigenous ones. Language, as submitted by Eva Englholm quoted in Adegbija (1994), "is the key to the heart of a people. If we lose the key, we lose the people, if we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches". The implication of this is that for a person, a politician, for instance, to win the heart of a people, they must be able to speak the language(s) of those people, and not a foreign language they do not understand. Politicians like Azikiwe, Akintola and some others could turn stone to bread politically in their days because they could speak many languages.

Measuring Development in Nigeria

Nigeria's development is often assessed using the Human Development Index (HDI), which combines indicators of life expectancy, education, and income. While Nigeria has seen a 22% increase in HDI over 19 years, it remains at a low 0.548, indicating low human development, according to the United Nation's Development Programme. Inequality significantly impacts this score, with a 32.7% loss in HDI due to inequality. Development is the ultimate goal of every individual and nation. However, not every individual or nation achieves this goal. This is obviously the reason for inequality in the world. There are the wretched, poor, average and the rich people. Even poverty and wealth have categories, depending on the level at which one's goal is realized. Similarly, some nations are referred to as developed, some developing and some underdeveloped based on whether their goals are realized or not. As observed by Adegbite (2003 and 2004), the commonest means by which development of a nation is determined is Gross Domestic-Product (GDP) of such a nation. He is also

quick to add that the GDP may cover up the lopsidedness in the distribution of wealth among the population of a nation. Quoting Seidman (1976), he then argues that development should be measured by the spread of productivity and increased level of living of the common people. By this he means the wellness or comfortability of the common people in a nation. Seidman's opinion is supported by the World Bank's (1999) report that the development of a nation is better measured based on the provision of basic facilities such as health service, food, education, security, portable water, good roads, electricity, etc. which show very clearly the condition of most of the people, particularly the common people in a nation.

As observed by Adegbite (2003 &2004), development can also be assessed based on whether some political goals such as unity and peace, foreign relations and cultural preservation are realised or not. Some other indices of development suggested are achievement of success and effectiveness in some areas of human experience like administration, education, language, arts and technology. As observed by Adegbite (2003), it is uncommon for people to connect development to language since language is generally believed to function as a means of communication. What we must however realize is that language makes a society functional. It gives meaning to a society. In the words of Babajide (2001), we cannot have a society without language. It is when members of a community communicate with one another that the community witnesses progress. We think and express ideas and experiences through language. In short, language keeps a society moving. In most cases, national development correlates with language development. That is why the advanced nations of the world seem to be those that are able to manage their languages well.

Multilingualism and National Development

Multilingualism can be used to bring about development in the areas identified above if the many languages in such a nation are

effectively planned and managed by the nation. In the words of Spencer (1962), the many languages and cultures in a multilingual nation can be exploited for all round development in the world. Some of the areas where multilingualism can bring about development are discussed below.

Language and Cultural Development

The people in some nations have contact with the modern world and have plugged into it with the language introduced to them by their colonizers, and their "language with older, lee feverish, more stable tradition. And, although we all in the modern world want technological progress, we all also need stability." Spencer here emphasizes the integration of both modern and traditional cultures for national development in a nation. In such a nation, the indigenous and the second language will be assigned different roles. The indigenous languages will function as the primary means of communication while the second language performs complimentary roles.

Similarly, the integration of the two media can lead to the indigenization of the second language is indigenized. As submitted by Bamgbose (1995), one major linguistic influence of English on the Nigerian languages is the existence of a large vocabulary of English in these languages which is traceable to loans or loan translations. This leads to the inroad of words like sitiriti (street), doti (dirty) kilaasi (class) and redio (radio), among others, into Yoruba and Igbo. On the other hand, as submitted by Ogunsiji (2001), English has also been indigenized through the introduction of indigenous language words like dodo (fried plantain), iroko (a type of tree), ogbono (a type of soup) and megida into English.

This apart, Ogunsiji also observes that with multilingualism, the indigenous languages in Nigeria also develop through borrowing from one another. For instance, alaafia (peace), ankali (wisdom) and alubarika (blessing) with Hausa origin are now in Yoruba

language and Nigerian Pidgin also benefits maximally from the indigenous languages so that we have words like wahala (problem). wayo (deceit) and katakata (confusion) in it. In fact, multilingualism makes switching from one language to another possible. For instance, a bilingual person may switch from English to Yoruba and any other language especially when he is sure that his/her co-interactants will understand him/her.

Area of Education

In the area of education, language can function as a subject and a medium of instruction. If pupils are exposed to two indigenous languages and at least one foreign language right from the primary school, as contended by Akinpelu and Odekunbi (2021), the cognitive domain of such students will be sharpened, they will be able to see things from different linguistic and cultural perspectives and consider a variety of strategies for communication, persuasion and interaction, and it is evident from the study carried out by Christopher (2016) that multilingual individuals have cognitive advantages over monolingual people. Also, when two or more languages are used to teach either through translation or code-switching, the students will understand the subject better, and they will be more useful in the society.

What is saddening here is that, knowing the educational benefits in multilingualism, Nigerian government herself incorporated it in paragraph 19(14) of the National Policy on Education that "in selecting two Nigerian languages, students should study the languages of their own area in addition to any of the three main Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, subject to availability of teachers". The implication of this is that the government/policy makers expect the students to select two Nigerian languages, one in their region and the other one in another region, in addition to the second language, English. But it should be stated categorically here that the government and the policy makers knew right from when the policy was being made

that they will to implement it. They knew the teachers might not be there. That was why the clause was added. If the readiness to enforce the implementation of the policy is there, the government will see to the provision of the needed teachers.

In fact, in Paragraph 11(3) of the NPE where it is categorically stated that "...Government will... ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community" of the child in the pre-primary school, the status-quo remains the same till today. Most private schools owners completely discourage the use of the indigenous languages; instead, they use English to teach their pupils right from the kindergarten level and government does nothing about it.

Similarly, in the document prepared by Nigeria's National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) that is seen as the response to the development challenges of Nigeria cited in Owolabi (2013), it is stated that the local crafts people should be involved in the delivery of vocational education in schools to accelerate the number of such people and improve access to their products. This, no doubt, will enhance the development of the country. But if this is to be done, many languages, the indigenous languages of these people and English, will be used.

Area of Politics

In the area of politics, development will take place in Nigeria if all the people, particularly the uneducated ones, are carried along in the politics of the country. One, the Constitution of the country is written in English, so it is only the educated people that can access it; the uneducated and barely educated people, who constitute the large percentage of the country can't react to it. The document will have little influence on them. Secondly, as observed by Bamgbose (2000), it is unfortunate that most legislators address their constituencies in English on the pretence that they would like to reach a wider audience. The masses are therefore excluded from

the governance while democracy is seen as the government of the people, by the people and for the people. For political development of Nigeria therefore, many languages, English, major and minor languages, have to be used. Awobuluyi (2010) also observes with chagrin that the legislators at the state level are not convinced that indigenous languages can be used for serious deliberations when it is stated in Section 97 of 1999 Constitution of Nigeria that "the house may in addition to English" conduct the business of the house in some other languages spoken in the state. It is however interesting to discover, as reported by Owolabi (2004), that when Yoruba was used by Ogun State House of Assembly for the conduct of the business, the gallery was jam-packed with spectators, since everybody could understand their deliberations, and the legislators themselves discussed with great zeal and gusto. This practice would develop the masses politically. But it is saddening to state that it is doubtful if the practice still continues till now.

Area of Health

Health education will make Nigerians to be more aware of their rights and obligations concerning health services and disease prevention. For instance, people need to be educated on how to prevent drug abuse, protect themselves from HIV/AIDS and some other sexually transmitted diseases as well as Covid19 that ravaged the world in 2020. This is better done through the use of many languages that are accessible to the masses. This apart, people understand doses of drugs to use and the side effects of every drug taken when they are written in their languages.

Area of Agriculture

It is no news to state here that Nigeria is blessed with fertile land for farming. However, for the country to benefit maximally from agriculture, the languages of the masses have to be used to reach them. For effective strengthening of agricultural research, revitalization of agricultural training and strengthening of the extension delivery system, the use of many languages have to be

encouraged. The farmers are better reached through the languages they understand. Owolabi (2013) made reference to the case of some young graduates of Agriculture who wanted to impart new farming technologies to the rural farmers in various parts of Africa, but who on the first day of their job realised the importance of indigenous languages that they were not taught in the course of their training. As submitted by him, in spite of all their academic theorizing about sharing new technologies, they had to resort to the use of indigenous languages.

Conclusion

The issue of multilingualism in relation to national development in Nigeria has been well discussed here. It has been made clear that national development may be slow if many languages are not used especially in the areas that affect the masses of the country. We have also recommended that Nigerian government needs to be serious with the implementation of the language policies in both National Policy on Education and the Nigerian Constitution, and the Nigerian people also need to change their attitude to the use of our indigenous languages.

Recommendations

Having discussed the importance of multilingualism to the development of Nigeria, the following recommendations are made:

1. The government should see to the implementation of the language policy in the National Policy of Education.
2. The government should ensure that the language policy in the constitution of the country is enforced, particularly, the one that concerns the state house of assembly, after all, legislators are expected to come from among the people.
3. It can be made a law that anybody contesting for a political position, particularly at the state level, must be able to speak his indigenous language very competently, and not that they will come from abroad without being able to communicate with the masses.
4. People also need to change their attitude towards the speaking of indigenous languages.

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