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German Studies in the Nigerian Educational System

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Abstract

It would not be far from the truth to say that communication plays an important role in the search of development, be it educational, social, political, technological or any other form of development. An important role because knowledge, which is the life wire of any development is acquired only through information and information comes through communication, which is made possible through the use of language. This paper will take a look at German Studies in Nigerian universities with a view of revisiting the history and the challenges facing the effective teaching and learning of German language in our environment. It will also discuss the efforts made by stakeholders to solve the problems in order to enhance German Studies in Nigeria. From these points conclusion will be drawn.

Introduction

The teaching and learning of languages in the world is as old as man. For effective interaction and understanding of one another especially people with different languages, we need to learn and understand one other's languages. Frankly, man cannot live in isolation. He must live as an integral part of the system. According to Roger:

> Man and communication are inseparable.... The wheel of human endeavour moves forward ever faster ever more smoothly. Yet footprints in the sand, or wall paintings, tell of the desperate solitude of man. Our hop, in the end, must be to erase that Solitude (qtd. in Onuko 49)

As human beings in this time of globalisation, we need to relate with people of different languages and cultures, in order to cope with the turn of events in different areas of human endeavours. It is only through communication that ideas and new knowledge can be

shared and this is only possible through the use of language the people understand. According to Onuko, language offers many opportunities for people to express their opinions. In her paper, she notes that:

> Language offers opportunities for man to communicate his feelings, opinions with fellow beings, and at the same time, enables him to learn new ideas and information from them. In the course of interacting with other people, he acquaints himself with new ideas and information available within his environment. It is the vehicle of communicating both individual and collective norms of the society. It embodies peoples' culture and their societal values. (90)

Communication in isolation without the use of languages other than the language in a particular polity is impossible. Thus, there is the need to learn foreign languages, which facilitate communication with people of different cultures. The teaching and learning of foreign languages have been a major concern for linguists over the years. According to Richard and Rodgers "It has been estimated that some sixty percent of today's world population is multilingual". (1) Today, English and French are the two languages dominant among the other foreign languages studied in Nigeria. This can be traced to the colonial rule of the country by Britain and its use as the lingua franca and teaching medium in our schools and French on its own part is a result of the country being surrounded by francophone countries. It is important to recognise that Germany as a result of its economic power has carved out a niche for itself in Europe. It is one of the official and working languages of the European Union.

Every nation needs to view the demand for foreign language teaching and learning within the contexts of national development, globalisation and communication. Nigeria cannot be said at this point to have outgrown these phases of developments in its nationhood.

The argument for the inclusion of the German language like its French counterpart cannot be ignored in this globalisation age. Witte cited by Oyebola pointed out that the involvement of German language in Nigeria's national development started far back as 1859. (75) Oyebola noted also that 'Germanistik' as a field of study has become established in Nigeria institutions of higher learning. He noted further that this has led to the concept of "afrikanische Germanistik". (75) Feuser who gave this definition to German Studies in the continent listed in his studies of ´´Twenty Years of German Studies in Nigeria, all scholars of German Studies who had had their stay in Nigeria´´. (75) Uzuegbu noted that scientific German was introduced after the take of University College Ibadan in 1948.

> Nach der Gündung des University College Ibadan 1948 Wurde die deutsche Sprache in den fünfziger Jahren versuchsweise in das universitäre Curriculum eingeführt, und zwar in Form von „Scientific German´´, einem Deutschkurs für Studierende der Naturwissenschaften. (100)

The kick off of German Studies in Nigeria began as a course for students of the sciences in the then University College Ibadan. The first DAAD lecturer, Wilfried Feuser was sent to Ibadan immediately after Nigeria's independence. The new DAAD lecturer was given the mandate to go and simulate an interest in German Studies. Uzuegbu outlined the duties of the DAAD representative as thus, "to simulate an interest in German language, literature and culture generally and to work towards the establishment of degree courses in German." (Feuser 1979, quoted according to Uzuegbu, 101)

Wilfred Feuser started German Studies in the then department of Modern Languages of the then University of Ife similar to the curriculum of University College Ibadan. Between 1961 and 1987 German was a service course (Wahlpflichtfach) in the University of Nigeria

for students of other faculties and as an alternative to Russian or Spanish. Ihekweazu cited by Uzuegbu remarked that:

> In der Zeit von 1967 bis 1967 war Deutsch an der 1961 gegründeten University of Nigeria, Nsukka ein Service Course, das heißt ein Wahl-pflichtfach für StudentInnen aller Fakultäten und – als Alternative zu Russisch oder Spanisch- ein obligatorisches Nebenfach für Französisch-studentInnen. (101)

As a result of the civil war, German Studies was interrupted in the University of Nigeria Nsukka. German Studies experienced a turn around as the late Prof. Ihekweazu, (a Germanistik married to a Nigerian) came to the university. She worked a Single and combined Honours degree program with the assistance of the then DAAD lecturer. The success and the building of the German section would be dedicated to the effort of the late Germanist. (1974-1991)

Given all background, this article attempts to portray the challenges facing the teaching and learning of the German as a foreign language in Nigerian universities. It will also revisit the Nigerian policy on languages and the current status of the German language in the Nigerian higher education system.

German Studies in Nigeria

The decision concerning the status of German language cannot be said to be articulated like French in the language policy of Nigeria. This is clearly reflected in the National policy on education. One major issue is that the Nigerian policy makers did not include German Studies on the same level with French and Arabic on the National policy on education. In section 4 of the National Policy on Education on secondary education, only French and Arabic were listed on the Non-Vocational Electives. These two electives are optional and the students are allowed to choose the elective subjects based on the choice of

their careers. In the francophone nations, the learning of foreign languages has been well built in the educational system and it is compulsory for students in the secondary school to offer any of German, English or Spanish and this has equipped the francophone nations with people who can interact with other languages than French. The francophone nations do promote foreign language education, in addition to French in a move that seems to be a growing trend in Francophone West Africa. The learning of foreign languages is well established in the educational curriculum.

Although German was not included as a subject either as a core subject for the primary and the junior secondary or as an option in the Non-Vocational Electives for the senior secondary in the national policy on education, the language has carved a niche for itself as a result of the efforts made by the German government immediately after Nigerian's independence to stimulate the interest of her language and literature in our nation.

A look at the curriculum in the primary education subjects will show that German was not list among other foreign languages like French and Arabic.

(i) Languages:

(a) Language of the environment
(b) English
(c) French
(d) Arabic

(ii) Mathematics
(iii) Science
(iv) Physical and Health Education
(v) Religious Knowledge
(vi) Agriculture/Home Economics
(vii) Social Studies and Citizens Education
(viii) Cultural & Creative Arts (Drawing, Handicraft. Music. And Cultural Activities
(ix) Computer Education (NPE 2004, 19)

The curriculum planner did not see the need to introduce German at basic level of education. In the junior secondary, only French was included in the core subject while French and Arabic were list among the Non-Vocations Electives.

Group A. Core

(i) English
(ii) French
(iii)Mathematics
(iv) Language of the environment taught as L1
(v) one major Nigerian Language other than that of the environment
(vi) integrated Science
(vii) Social Studies and Citizens Education
(viii) Introductory Technology (NPE 2004, 19)

Group C. Non-Vocational Electives

(i) Biology
(ii) Chemistry
(iii) Physics
(iv) Further Mathematics
(v) French
(vi) Health Education
(vii) Physical Education
(viii) Literature in English
(ix) History
(x) Geography
(xi) Bible Knowledge
(xii) Islamic Studies
(xiii) Arabic
(xiv) Government
(xv) Economics
(xvi) Any Nigerian Language that has orthography and literature etc (NPE 2004, 22)
(iv) Language of the environment taught as L1
(v) One major Nigerian Language other than that of the environment
(vi) Integrated Science
(vii) Social Studies and Citizens Education
(viii) Introductory Technology (NPE 2004, 19)

A study of the primary and secondary curriculum will show us that the curriculum planners did not understand the gains of German language in Nigeria. An important feature of educational development today is the growing awareness of positioning primary and secondary education for better performance in the system, since it is the preparatory ground for the basic entry into the higher institution.

Challenges of German Studies

So far the teaching of German has experienced a lot of set backs as a result of instability of the country at that time. With the out break of the Nigerian civil war the service course was interrupted and this hindered the continuation of the studies in University of Nigeria Nsukka. German Studies also received its share of the problems emanating from the indecision of Nigerian political makers in the 1980s. Oyebola bemoans that:

> With the advent of ultra-nationalism in political decision making, particularly in the education sector. The prospect of German in Nigeria went into recession. The language became a scape- goat on the murky altar of ultranationalism. (73)

The policy makers emphasised the use of our indigenous languages especially in the primary school and no importance was attached to the learning of German. Thus, Nigerians see no need to learn a foreign language like German beside her lingua franca.

Unfortunately, with the turn out of events in this period, the University of Ife, which was the only university that offered single honours in German, removed German Studies from its curriculum. This decision taken by the University made the students who were yet to complete their program to finish it in a sister university. But the program has since been restored in the curriculum.

Between 1980 and early 1990, German Studies experienced another set back as the students who went to Germany did not come back to complete their studies. The abandonment of the program for greener pastures can be traced to the economic break down in the country in those years. The university could not produce many graduates in German language owing to the fact that the students who went to year abroad in Germany were no longer coming back. As a result the three universities running the degree program cancelled

the year abroad program in Germany and replaced it with Equivalent Year Abroad Program (EYAP) in Goethe Institut in Lagos. This alternative took off in 1998 and has affected the communicative competence of Nigerian learners of German due to lack cultural immersion and interaction with native speakers of German. Witte cited by Uzuegbu noted the drawback in the language ability of the students as she complained about the situation:

> seit dem Ende der achtziger Jahren eine Senkung im sprachlichem Gesamtniveau der Deutsch- Studiengänge zu beobachten, die vor allem auf zwei Faktoren zurückzuführen ist. Einerseits werden aufgrund der verschlecterung der wirtschaftlichen Situation, der instabilen politischen Lage und der daraus resultierende sozialen Unruhe der Universitäten immer häufiger und für immer längere Zeit geschlossen. (110)

Nigeria experienced political instability in the eighties owing to intermittent military take over of power and this resulted in insecurity and non-implementation of policies. At present there seems to be a ray of hope for the survival of the program in Nigerian higher institutions of learning. For example the three universities (University of Ibadan, University of Ife and University of Nigeria) have continued to offer the studies amidst the challenges and have tried to stabilize it in the higher education curriculum. It is however interesting to note that in spite of the difficulties that confronted German Studies, stake holders have continued to promote it by providing books, scholarships for both the teaching staff and students and this has helped in improving the language abilities of learners. Besides, German language is taught as an elective course for students studying other foreign languages in other Nigerian universities such as Nnamdi Azikiwe University, University of Jos, University of Ilorin, University of Benin, Delta State University, Abraka and University of Calabar.

With the reintroduction of postgraduate programs in Obafemi Awolowo University Ile Ife and the University of Nigeria in 2007, the German sections have produced four MA's and one PhD in Translation in OAU and three MA's in German Literature in UNN respectively.

Worth mentioning is the reintroduction of scholarship program by the DAAD for Nigerian Learners of German in the postgraduate studies. In 2009 DAAD awarded scholarships to two Nigerians for MA in Germanistik at the University of Bielefeld. The need to further strengthen the quality of the learners of German language in Nigeria made the DAAD to grant two months scholarship to two postgraduate students of UNN two month research stay in Leibniz Universität Germany in 2010. The DAAD scholarship has continued up till 2013, in order to enable Nigerian learners of German to have access to research materials, well equipped institutions as well as a good research environment. With this new development there is no doubt that German Studies will take a deep root in the future, when there will be enough teaching staff to man the program in other universities. In the opening address at the congress of Nigerian Association of Teachers of German, Adjai Paulin Oloukpona –Yinnon reiterated the need to make German Studies an integrative science, in order to create more prospects for the studies in Nigeria. In his words he said, „Die Germanistik in Nigeria hat noch eine großere Zukunft vor sich. Es ist nur eine Frage der Innovation. Die Germanistik als integrative Wissenschaft verlangt vor allem Innovation und Kreativität." Because of the importance of language in communication, innovation and creativity in the teaching will open up a lot of opportunities for the future of German Studies.The result of this practice will be the integration of German Studies in the nigerian educational system.

Conclusion

This paper has presented a historical view of German Studies in Nigeria. It has also discussed the challenges that German Studies faced in the past and the efforts made by stakeholders to improve the teaching and learning of German in Nigeria. This development will avail the Nigerian learners of German the opportunity for solid intellectual development.

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