

PREPARING LANGUAGE EDUCATION TEACHERS FOR CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES

OKUNOLA, ZECHARIAH PONNLE Ph.D

Faculty of Language Education, Federal University of Education, Kano.

E-Mail: Ponnleokunola@Yahoo.Com; Tel: 07069079626

Abstract

The place of teacher in the educational enterprise in Nigeria can never be neglected. The role being played by a teacher is that of a planner and executor of curriculum content to be disseminated to pupils. Language is used in the planning, execution and implementation of any educational Programme. As important as the role of language teacher is, the much expected support to the teachers is not being adequately provided. The aim of this paper is to advocate for the adequate preparation of language teachers who are saddled with the responsibilities of raising the future leaders. Language teachers need to be equipped with all it takes to discharge their duty of modeling the pupils and students at all levels. What Nigerians stand to gain when language teachers are adequately prepared are mentioned. It is the aim of this paper that all hands will be on deck to prepare the language teachers as major tools for proper implementation of the National Policy on Education as well as other education programs of the government.

Keywords: Language Education, Teachers, Contemporary Issues.

Introduction

Education in a global world community has continued to be the greatest tool for man and societal development. Schools are the most reliable avenues through which parents trust that their wards are taken care of to be modelled into adults that are self reliant and the society to rely on them for their continued good. Progress in education is considered to be essential for sustainable development, environmental protection and improvement in the maternal child health, and participation in democratic social and political process. Improving the quality of education and enhancing an improved access to basic quality education should be the priority of a developing nation. The Universal Declaration for Human Rights was proclaimed in 1948 and the aim was to promote an advocate for quality education worldwide. Much has not been done especially in the so called developing nations about the quality of education and dimension to accessing education by all, until much recently. It was on the World Declaration on Education for All (1990) and the Dakar Framework for Action (2000) that quality

of education was recognized as a prime condition for achieving education for All. Despite the declaration, most developing nations show poor achievement of the programs

Language is the means of communication and it is central to every activity of human beings. Ugwu (2003). This implies that the states of things in any given society, as regard social order, human development, economic growth, and governance have link with language. Ugwu (2023). Education remains the core of human development. It opens doors of opportunities for both individuals and groups empowerment. It is a vital tool for transformation and the key to the sustainable development of a nation. Okunola (2023). In affirmation to the status of education, the Nigeria philosophy of education as stipulated/stated clearly in section (1) sub section (5) of the National Policy on Education (FRN. 2014: 2) as follows:

1. The development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen.
2. The full integration of the individual into and effective citizen.
3. The provision of equal access to educational opportunities for all citizens of the country at all the Primary, Secondary as Tertiary levels both inside as outside formal school system.

To realize the vision and philosophy of education, the Nigeria government takes into consideration the role and importance of language to achieve these and for better citizens, thereby ascribing unique roles to and expressed numerous functions of language in the declarations in National Policy in Education (FRN, 2014) as follow;

1. Language is technically and vocationally, functional by the universal use of English language at the later stage of primary education.
2. Language is cognitive in nature, especially at the pre – primary and primary schools where Mother Tongue (MT) or language of the immediate community is used.

3. Language unifies, integrates and develops nation as reflected in the learning of the major languages; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.
4. Language is of religious importance.
5. Language encourages both regional and international communication as evidence in the status accorded foreign language e.g. French, Arabic.
6. Language promotes peoples' culture as reflected in the West African Sub-Region.

Language education is the practice of teaching and learning a variety of subject via the use of language. It is essentially an area of applied linguistics that deals with the teaching and learning of languages with the goal of enhancing the language abilities of students and learners, including listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In his own definition, Ilori (2023) describes language education as the brand of education in which students are taught the act of communication, using the language. According to him, Nigerian languages such as Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and foreign languages like English and French are taught in schools so that students see these languages as veritable tools for communication. Therefore, to ensure quality language education, language teachers must create the free learning atmosphere for learners to see the need for acquiring good mastering of language. Effective communication in every language is indispensable and to be able to understand other people and to be understood by others, requires a good knowledge of language. Language and education are mutually related in many aspects. Their harmonious relationship is explicated by Iwuchukwu (2021) who opines that 'education depends on human languages for its very existence and development'. This unique role of language in the educational sector is reciprocal in the sense that language, like other academic discipline also needs education for its existence and development.

So, the aim of this paper is to consider some of the issues that are presently affecting the teaching and learning of languages in our education at different level

and how to prepare the language teachers on combating these challenges in order to make the teaching effective.

Concept of Language Education

Generally, education means the process of imparting knowledge. Agbo (2010) opines that education is the means of imparting knowledge in people and helping them to develop their skills for their own good as well as for the societal good. Language education therefore, has to do with acquiring language knowledge. Language education could be viewed from different perspectives: language as subject or course of study, language as medium of instruction. Amola (2013). Language education can also be viewed as the brand of education in which students are taught the act of education, using the language. Haddy, (2011: 8), defines language education as a branch of applying linguistics that is more commonly used with regards to second language learning of a foreign language” In a similar vein Iwuchukwu (2021) who describes the relationship between language education as, reciprocal or independent, where each depends on the other for existence and development, further defines language education as:

... the use of language as a medium for teaching and learning various subjects and primarily a branch of applied linguistics. It involves teaching and learning of a foreign language with a view to improving the listening, speaking, reading, and writing (LSRW) skills of pupils/students.

Education is one of the prime factors for human development and learning, and language is central to the process of learning, knowledge acquisition and information dissemination. It is evident that education knowledge is connected to or begins with language. Nwanze (2013). This is a clear reflection of symbolic relationship between language, and for language to be meaningful and assume its ascribed status, it should be perceived within the concept of formal and informal education. The primary aim of education in any nation, Nigeria inclusive, is to

give young ones ample/ resilient opportunities to learn effectively in schools in order to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes and productive life as individual members of the society. At this point in the child's life, language education is an essential tool in the child's learning process. Language of instruction in any educational policy plays a very important role. Education of the citizen is rather a right and not a privilege.

Language education therefore encompasses the structured teaching and learning of languages focusing on skills like reading, writing listening and speaking as well as grammar and cultural context. It involves the systematic instruction and acquisition of knowledge about a language including its structure (grammar), vocabulary, pronunciation and the cultural context in which it is used. In the society, the study of language serve two purposes. It is employed as an academic project (language education) as well as an instruction. One thing is certain, it is an indispensable tool in the entire teaching and learning process, for it is the vehicle for transmitting the body of knowledge contained in every other school subject (Mekiliuwa, 2001: 67). It is important to note that, language and education enjoy some kind of mutually beneficial relationship. They are symbolically related in the sense that, each depends on the other for its existence and development.

Contemporary Issues in Language Education

If the word 'contemporary' is used in any work, the reader or audience of such work must recall the date it was written. This is 2025. Nigeria has passed through serious challenges due to issues like pandemic, changes in academic programs security and the like. So, contemporary issues in language education include adapting to diverse student needs, leveraging technology for multilingual learning, addressing language policy and ideologies, and promote students engagement and critical thinking skills.

Contemporary reading takes into consideration every aspect of, and element that enhances effective learning. Therefore, the relevance of effective

planning and syllabus design is a matter of discussion worldwide. The state of security in Nigeria today is unmistakably pathetic. The country whose citizens have been co – existing many decades ago on the basis of love and unity suddenly found herself in the trauma of tribalism, communal crises, political, religious, socio – economic, corruption and poverty, which gave birth to more crimes like terrorism, kidnapping, cybercrimes and virtual killings. Another aspect of insecurity that the nation is experiencing as of now is economic insecurity which gives birth to devaluation of naira, scarcity of food, joblessness or mass unemployment. All these factors are internal tragedies that are retrogressively affecting the development of our beloved nation. Although, both the government and the concerned citizens are claiming to be working round the clock to drastically find lasting solution to these catalogues of problems, it is also a wakeup call to our teachers of languages to contribute towards improving their teaching techniques to meet up with the current global challenges. Other contemporary issues related to language education include, but not limited to, non – implementation of some provisions of the National Language Policy on Education, falling students enrollment and performance etc. Iwuchukwu (2021: 3-14). The contemporary issues in relation to language education also involve how education has become increasingly more complex with new technologies and methods becoming available to educators. It also involve the role of languages in educational systems as well as recent trends that have emerged in the field

Suleman (2024), identifies the following as the contemporary issues in language education, which serve as obstacles towards effective implementation of language policy and curriculum in Nigeria:

1. Non – implementation of some provisions of the National Policy on Education.
2. Psychological issues
3. Falling students' enrollment and performance

4. Inadequate instructional materials
5. Lack of funds
6. Year abroad challenges
7. Language curriculum issues.
8. Lack of internal quality assurance mechanism.
9. Youth empowerment.

Other contemporary issues affecting language education include: Daily increase in the number of educational facilities without standard, challenges of global apparatus like zoom, and other media, low economic value of language education. If compared with other professional or business, adapting to diverse students' needs, leveraging technology language policy and ideologies etc.

Teachers being always in the intellectual vanguard occupy a central role in nations education reform and development. With the understanding and appreciation of teachers, intractable relationship with relations and development, most countries today including Nigeria have been so influenced to carefully and effectively prepare their teacher. In order to make such preparation very effective so as to yield result, language teachers need to be properly equipped with all it takes to meet up with the contemporary issues affecting language teaching. Abdul (2023).

An effective teacher education epitomizes sound manpower production for the diverse areas of human Endeavour thus the saying that no nation's education has ever risen above the quality of its teachers. This implies that the standard of education in a country like ours is often predetermined by the caliber of teacher available. The important function of teachers has become so significant that the federal government of Nigeria (2004) acknowledges and pursued, its programme to achieve among others:

1. Production of highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all the levels of our education.
2. To encourage further the spirit of inquiring creativity in teachers.

3. To help fit into the social life of the community and society at large, and to enhance their commitment to national objectives.
4. To produce teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate to any changing situation not only in the life of this country but in the wider world.
5. To enhance teachers commitment to the teaching profession.

In order to achieve the above, the above, the National Policy on Education (NPE) recommended the National Certificate in Education (NCE) as the minimum qualification for entry into the teaching profession. The National Policy on Education in Nigeria advocated the following teacher education institutions:

- a) Colleges of education
- b) Faculties of education
- c) Institutes of education.

Out of all the above mentioned teacher education institutions, colleges of education appear to be greatly favoured to prepare teachers for primary level education. Citing Ademola (2001), Ajayi (2001) states that the original intention of the above policy was to use two thirds of the NCE products primarily to improve the quality of primary school teaching.

The democratic regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo in the country between 1999 and 2007 like other previous regimes in the country realized the relevance of education in the development process of this nation. The administration introduced yet another educational reform to substitute the existing structure of the 6-3-3-4 system with a new one currently introduced, tagged 9-3-4. According to Ajayi (2001) the 6-3-3-4 system of education failed because the programme was left in the hands of general educationalist who were not really specialists as language, vocational or technological educations, which neglected training of resourceful personnel for the programme. The much desired technological, vocational, professional, language breakthrough and poverty alleviation that the reform was envisaged to realize have remained elusive. The

mal-functioning of 6-3-3-4 programme as well as other systems of education in Nigeria might have informed the most recent National Education reform. The most recent reform encapsulated into UBE in its policy statement would provide free and compulsory education at all levels of education to all Nigeria children (Dyel and Bot 2006). The success or failure of the reform which was to dictate the technological and scientific breakthrough of Nigeria by the year 2010 (as planned) largely depended on competent teachers trained and re – trained and the government commitment to the provision and availability of education resource and materials.

To effectively implement any system of education, at the primary and secondary schools as well as other education institutions, teachers are needed. Not just any teacher but trained teachers who are well qualified for the tasks ahead. Teachers whose preparation largely depends on the nature of training and curriculum contents, which must be relevant to the goals of education in Nigeria. In order to provide teachers with the needed intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in life or the country but also in the under/world. Harnghurst in Akale (2000) highlighted important roles performed by teachers in a school setting. These are:

- a. Mediator of learning
- b. Disciplinarian or controller of student behaviour
- c. Parent substitute
- d. Confidant of students
- e. Judgment of achievement
- f. Organizer of curriculum
- g. Bureaucrat
- h. Scholar and research specialist
- i. Members of teachers organization.

The place of the teacher is central because all the materials and equipment depends on the effectiveness of the teacher. He imparts knowledge, skills and attitude to the public (Ajayi 2001).

The Need for Training and Re-Training of Teachers for Effective Productivity

Every programme of education policy or reform calls for effective implementation to attain stated objective. Part of the characteristic of good reforms are that they must be simple, flexible, specific, realistic and complete. The most important ingredient in achieving any education reform objective is the teacher. The need to prepare teachers for the implementation of such objective cannot be over emphasized and should include the following:

- I. Teacher manpower requirement: It is important to note that for either the 6-3-3-4, 9-3-4 or any other type of education system to succeed in the clear context, quality teachers should be produced in quantity to meet the need of the schools. For the overall benefit of the society, the increasing challenges of training and re – training teachers falls equally on government, in supplying tools and funding the training. Failure to meet up with this condition will amount to fruitlessness in any system of education, no matter how good.
- II. Teacher – Re-Training on New technologies: The need for the teachers to be acquainted with new methods of technologies is very important. The current trend of globalization and Artificial Intelligence should be utilized in order to get the teachers relevant with the available methods of teaching. Matawal (2000) submits that teachers need to be acquainted with modern equipment in Information Technology and be very competent in handling new information system. In the words of Dewey (1916), “if we teach today as we taught yesterday, we rob our children of tomorrow.” This emphasizes the need for teachers adaptability to new teaching methods and materials.

The responsibility of the educationalists is therefore focused on providing better training to the future teachers for their better learning and proper development to enhance better performance of their students. Encouragingly, there is growing and widespread awareness that the pedagogical expertise of the teacher is absolutely critical. The fundamental factor in providing such a promising future for the young, are the schools, through the efforts of a teacher. Teacher factor has the most important influence on the quality education of any society. Bichi (2008) describes teachers in the following ways:

- Only the teacher can lay a solid foundation for national development. Economic growth and political stability alike depend on how well he does his work. He is a Nigeria ambassador to the world, and he deserves full rights and privileges from his countrymen. Eric Ashby (1960) in Bichi (2008).
- Teachers are the key to the effectiveness of any schools and teacher development is a top priority, in any move to change schools. Ford Foundation, (1985) in Bichi (2008).
- Not only are teachers a critical factor in National development, their quality makes a huge difference in how much learning achievement can take place; teachers possess high intelligence, knowledge, commitment, multiple approaches to problem solving and a contagious enthusiasm for books and learning. Adeyanju 2008.

Teacher training is therefore a fore runner in all educational enterprise. The focus on teacher education is therefore not a coincidence, but a deliberate effort, because without teachers expertise in the enterprise, the pupils are left to grope in the dark (Abubakar 2013).

Expected Qualities of a language Teacher

A teacher's enthusiasm, love and passion for the language can inspire students, which make the learning process more engaging and enjoyable. On top of that, a passionate teacher can also instill curiosity in their students, encouraging them to explore and discover, a critical aspect in their learning process.

Communication Skills: A language teacher must possess excellent communication skills to effectively convey complex linguistic concepts students of varying proficiency levels: Clear articulation, active listening, and the ability to adapt communication styles are essential.

At its core, the job of language educators is to facilitate language learning and help the students become proficient communicator in their chosen target language. Beyond that, however, they also act as mentors, supporters and motivators to their students.

In addition to the above, a language teacher should possess the following skills:

1. A good knowledge of the language being taught.
2. Knowledge of teaching and the ability to design courses.
3. Excellent verbal communication skills
4. Ability to create the best conditions for learning or teaching new things.
5. Excellent written communication skills
6. Analytical thinking skills
7. Persistence and determination.

It is important to mention that learning a language facilitates effective communication with people from different cultures and backgrounds and the roles of a language teacher cannot be overlooked in this challenging yet rewarding experience. A good language teacher can ensure an enjoyable and fruitful learning process. Some essential qualities of an excellent language teacher are listed below (these are in addition to the above mentioned ones):

- Ability to generate passion: A teacher enthusiasm, love and passion for the language can inspire students, which makes the learning process more engaging and enjoyable. On top of that, a passionate teacher can also instill curiosity in their students, encouraging them to explore and discover a critical aspect in the learning process.

- **Patience:** Patience is a virtue and a good language teachers must ensure that they can be depended upon to help students overcome other language learning challenges, developing their confidence.
- **Ability to adopt different teaching ways:** Each student has their own techniques of learning languages and this may result in different learning outcomes. Therefore, a flexible language teacher who can adopt different teaching methods and approaches plays a crucial role in ensuring all learning styles are well catered for.
- **Hopefulness:** Hopefulness and optimism in a mentor begets a supportive and nurturing learning environment, one that promotes growth and development motivating students through positive reinforcement and encouragement is a great way language teachers can enhance the language learning experience.
- **Development of good relationships with students:** A good language teacher should be able to develop positive and respectful relationships with their students. This builds trust and creates a comfortable learning environment. When students feel comfortable with their teacher, they are more likely to ask questions, seek help and take part in class discussion.

Conclusion

The role of education very society cannot be over emphasized. The quality of any human society. Teachers play the most important role in the education policy solely rest on them. Much is expected from teachers to make and develop any viable society. Language is the strong and indispensable tool in the educational system at every level. Language is used in the formulation and implementation of any educational policy. Man's ability to communicate, understand and comprehend whatever another person is saying rely solely in the on the means of communication, which is language. As important as language is in every human relationship, it appears that the much expected priority is not given to the teaching and learning of language in our schools. The different

educational policies in Nigeria that support the promotion of Nigerian languages are not adequately implemented. The expected mastery of English as an official language is lacking. This has resulted in poor performances among the students at all levels.

This paper has discussed on the need to adequately prepare teachers of languages for the great tasks of teaching as a profession. The concepts of education and language as viewed by different authors were considered. It is a known fact that the whole world has become a global village as a result of globalization that has brought us all together. The daily technological advancement is of no doubt having influence on the day-to-day activities of man. Teaching profession is not out in this development. The paper then called for the need of adequately equip the teachers of language with all it takes to remain relevant in the duty of raising and nurturing the future leaders.

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