

Challenges Of National Language Policy Implementation in Nigeria: The Role of Literature.

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Abstract- The basic challenges of National Language Policy Implementation such as diglossia supremacy of English language over Nigerian languages, less premium on the indigenous languages in both national and international labour force and poor policy implementation initiative by the government have formed the basis of our research. The paper aims at crystalizing the functions of literature for national language policy implementation such as inculcation of national consciousness, revalorisation of language for cultural integration and preservation, adequate sensitization of the public on the relevance of indigenous languages in nation building and fostering language policy provisions to abridge inequality between foreign and indigenous languages. The paper has adopted the analytic and discussive methods to unveil the challenges of National Language Policy Implementation and the role of literature. We have adopted communicative theory to show the relevance of indigenous languages in socio political and economic activities. We have used the socio-historical approach to look at the remote causes of non-implementation of National Language Policy in Nigeria. We have discovered that literature is a viable tool for fostering government provisions for National Language Policy Implementation, since literature is an offshoot of language; which is the product of the society.

Index Terms- Challenges, Language, Policy, Implementation, Role, Literature.

I. INTRODUCTION

The global inherent tendency of language in the human society is the distinctive feature that distinguishes man from other animals. The crux of human communication is built on human language, while that of animals is built on sounds. It is indeed based on this fact that language is being compared to a life-wire in an electric circuit which circulates current. Language is an inherent, well-structured and a coherent medium of communication by which human beings convey messages and decode them

both in spoken and symbiotic forms. According to Robert Henry robins and David Crystal (2024) language is a system of conventional, spoken, manual(signed), or written symbols by means of which, human beings as members of a social group and participants in its culture express themselves.

It is imperative to note that human beings are bound by language to reason, associate, transmit cultural values, harmonise their cultural differences and foster unity in diversity. In this perspective, they transmit language to the younger generation, through folklores, oral literature, government policies and cultural programs. The indispensable nature of language in human life has attracted the attention of linguists, literary writers, philosophers and government policies to reinforce the use of indigenous language in order to enhance sustainable development.

National language implementation policy in Nigeria is a step towards conceptualisation and acquisition of learning in the original or source language of the learner. The national language implementation policy envisages a linguistic platform of language connectivity with the learning content, where the learner can easily relate learning content in the classroom language to that of the source language. Tosin Akomolafe Window stated that,

The connection between language and education is very visible and paramount. Language has a profound impact on education. Many children start school with knowledge of concepts in their mother tongue but cannot relate to the same concepts in school because they are unfamiliar with the language of the classroom (2024).

It is in this perspective that the Universal Basic Education System (UBE) has been planned to help

the child to acquire numeric and literacy skills at the age of approximately 10 years. It is expected that at this point the child at this level will be in basic four with a certain degree of maturity to relate the content in the language of the classroom to that of the mother tongue.

Our major concern is to establish the role of literature for the effective implementation of language policy in Nigeria. Language and literature are linguistic catalyst platform for nation building, cultural heritage and transformation, rebranding of characters, integration of cultural diversities and a pivot for national unity. Literature is the fore runner of language in the society. it is a mirror of the society and a leveraging platform through which language numeric and literacy values are applied in the society for peaceful resolution of conflict, national transformation, elevation of human consciousness for sociopolitical and economic advancement.

Statement of the research problem

It has been observed that challenges such as diglossia supremacy of English language over Nigerian languages, less premium on the indigenous languages in both national and international labour force and poor policy implementation initiative by the government are the fundamental problems which are impedimental to effective implementation of National Language Policy. These challenges have formed the problem of this research work.

Objective of the research

The fundamental objective of this paper is to crystalize the functions of literature for national language policy implementation such as inculcation of national consciousness, revalorisation of language for cultural integration and preservation, adequate sensitization of the public on the relevance of indigenous languages for nation building and fostering language policy provisions to abridge inequality between foreign and indigenous languages.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The paper has adopted the analytic and discussive methods to unveil the challenges of National

Language Policy Implementation and the role of literature.

III. RESEARCH THEORY

We have adopted communicative theory to show the relevance of indigenous languages in socioeconomic and political activities.

IV. RESEARCH APPROACH

We have used the socio-historical approach to look at the reasons for national language policy and the remote causes of non-implementation of National Language Policy in Nigeria.

V. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Challenges

Challenges connote problems, difficulties or impediments that constitute barrier in human functions, performances or sociopolitical and economic engagements.

Language

Language is the inbuilt faculty in the humans which permits communication. Language can be acquired and transmitted from the old to the younger generation. It is a psychological construct and a mental process which gives us a social identity.

Policy

Policy signifies decision. It is an individual or collective decision of a people, group, an association, companies, ministries, parastatals or the government of a country to initiate a program.

Implementation

Implementation is the execution of policies. It is a crucial stage in a policy making process. Implementation is reinforced by law enforcement agents like police, civil defence, immigration, custom, correctional centres and the judiciary.

Role

The concept of role designates functions, duty or responsibility.

Literature.

Literature is derived from the Latin word 'literatura'. It entails the written works in both science and arts. Literature is an offshoot of language which has been considered as the mirror of the society. M. H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham state that, Literature has been commonly used since the eighteenth centuries, equivalently with the French belles lettres ("fine letters"), to designate fictional and imaginative writings- poetry, prose fiction and drama.

VI. NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY IN NIGERIA

National language policy is a collective and consensus decision of the policy makers, stake holders and professional bodies (linguistic Association of Nigeria and Language Resource Centres) to adopt some languages in Nigeria such as Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo as languages of communication, instruction, administration and commercialisation. Indeed, these three languages were selected based on their pedigrees as the languages of the most populated nations and the widely spoken languages in Nigeria. These languages are enshrined in Nigerian constitution, specifying the need for its implementation and sociocultural, political, educational and economic values. Maximal utilisation of academic potentials of the Nigerian child in native language, speedy literacy, preservation of our rich cultural heritage, enhancement of our democratic culture and participation through oral literature as well as a boost in economic activities for nation building are some of the values.

The national language policy in Nigeria has been a factor of vision 2020 which sought to harness the intellectual properties, the cultural heritage and economic potentials of the Nigerian child through harmonisation of multifaceted languages in our multilingual society. In the view of Habiba Mohammed

The vision 20: 2020 which is aimed at repositioning Nigeria to become one of the 20 largest economies in the whole world by the year 2020 was launched in 2003. The vision expresses the country's aspiration to improve the quality of life its people through the

development of an information and knowledge-based economy that the people can use to gain social, economic and educational benefits, and fulfil their potentials (Needs Assessment in the Nigeria Educational Sector, 2014). The vision, a blueprint for economic transformation, is aimed at meeting the government's need to enhance development in key sectors such as education (1).

This entails that the national language policy in Nigeria is designed to meet up with the United Nations Millenium Development Goals (MDGS) and her strategic home-grown-medium development plan for National Economic Empowerment. Nigeria became a key player of this vision by launching the programme in 2003, with a target of addressing the socioeconomic needs of the nation and repositioning Nigeria as one of the 20th largest economic countries in the world.

It is imperative to state that with the well-defined values of this great vision, the national language policy in Nigeria has called for a well-structured academic curriculum where the child will be exposed to her native language in order to reposition his thinking, a familiar and very friendly environment, active participation and ideations fluidity. Gabijila unveiled how the policy is captured in the national curriculum of education in Nigeria.

The National Policy on Education (6th Edition, 2013) stated,

- i. The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years in monolingual community during which English shall be taught as a subject;
- ii. From the fourth year, English shall be progressively taught as a medium of instruction and the language of the immediate environment, French and Arabic shall be taught as subjects;
- iii. In the Junior Secondary School, the core subjects (Languages) shall be English, French and Language of immediate environment. Elective language shall be Arabic; and

- iv. In Senior Secondary School, the core subjects on languages shall be English and one of the three major languages. Electives (Languages) shall be literature in English, Arabic and any Nigerian languages that has orthography and literature.

Language being a medium of communication that is prone to cultural identity and national development, the National language policy in Nigeria is a positive initiative that has placed premium on indigenous languages in the country to a bridge the gap between foreign and indigenous languages. If international languages such as English, French, Arabic, Spanish, German and Russia can influence international communication and global trade, our indigenous languages can also our communication, raise our consciousness of rebranding our characters for harmonious, peaceful existence and nation building.

VII. REASONS FOR NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY IN NIGERIA

It is pertinent to note that language is an indispensable social phenomenon and a product of the society. As a product of the society, it is dynamic, variational, preserved and modified by social interactions. It is a decisive factor in a multilingual society like Nigeria. It is a decisive factor due to the fact that language conditions our thinking, communication, conduct and influences our sociopolitical and economic views in the society. In this perspective, national language policy in Nigeria was launched in 2003 to reinforce harmonious peaceful coexistence, preserve our rich cultural heritage, harness the optimal utilisation of academic potentials of the Nigerian child, boost sociopolitical and economic activities and enforce national development. We shall look at them in seriatim:

Harmonious peaceful coexistence

Language is an instrument for national unity. Where there is unity, there is ideation fluidity, peaceful coexistence and a spirit of fraternity. People live together, interact with one another and be his brother's keeper. In the view of Linda Mandarin

National language drives national unity in any country, even if there are hundreds of other languages

and dialects present in the state. Apart from a name, a boundary, a currency, or a flag, a national language makes a county respectable. National language clearly indicates the national character of a country.

If you want to penetrate and understand profoundly into a society, you must know how to speak and write their language. If you are fluent in someone else's native language, their people will readily accept you and you can better understand the cultural aspects and nuances of that society.

This acceptance into a culture of a nation depicts harmonious peaceful coexistence in the society. In such communities, there is less or no communal clashes, no land disputes, religious crisis, absence of bandits and kidnapers. Camara Laye in his novel *African Child* unveils the spirit of communism and harmonious peaceful coexistence in Guinee, one of the African countries. Grade-Saver, A research body states,

As a teenager, Laye takes part in his community's ritual circumcision ceremony. For a week before the procedure, he dances in public with other uncircumcised boys. Eventually they dress in specially made boubou garments and undergo the operation at the same time in the same room. They also stay together in a hut for several weeks while a healer changes the bandages on their penises and makes sure, they are improving. Laye then re-enters the community, which celebrates his return as a man with a large feast.

It is clear from the view of Grade-Saver that language is a bond of human relationship that creates joy and paves way for peaceful coexistence. Nigeria, being a multilingual country needs national languages to strengthen unity and peaceful coexistence.

Cultural preservation

The fact remains that Preservation of cultural heritage is one of the factors that prone to national language policy in Nigeria. Habiba Mohammed shares in our compatible view by saying, "It is indeed clear that the government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion, cultural preservation and national development." The inclusion of indigenous

languages such as Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo in the national language policy is meant to actualise the goals of vision 2020 which are embedded in national unity, spirit of communism, fraternity and cultural appreciation. The cultural appreciation is anchored by our languages, literary creativity in terms of novels, drama and poetry, which play a significant role for cultural preservation of our cultural heritage such as our superstitious beliefs, religion, mode of dressing, eating habits and agricultural practices.

Harnessing the optimal academic potentials of the Nigerian child

It is a truism that when children learn in their languages, they have a better understanding of the content. Most international languages that attract global sociopolitical and economic development are indigenous languages of their people. Countries like Britain, Germany, France, Japan, Russia and China use their indigenous languages as national languages to educate their people and attract sociopolitical, economic and scientific transformation of their society. It is in this perspective that the Nigerian government also has taken a giant step by using the stipulated indigenous language and other languages in different geographical locations to teach her children in order to actualise the Millennium Development Goals of Vision 2020. Habiba states that

The vision, a blueprint for economic transformation, is aimed at meeting the government's need to enhance development in key sectors such as education. The goal is intended to develop a vibrant educational system that will give every Nigerian the opportunity and facility to achieve his/her maximum potential and provide the country with adequate and competent manpower. Thus, the logo of the Nigeria's Vision 2020 according to wikipedia, stated that: "By2020 Nigeria will be one of the 20 largest economies in the world, able to consolidate its leadership role in Africa and establish itself as a significant player in the global economic and political arena."

In order to harness the maximum academic potentials of our children for national transformation, the policy has laid down some principles for teaching and

instruction in our primary and secondary schools. According to Habiba

National Policy on Education (6th Edition, 2013) stated, i. The medium of instruction in the primary school shall be the language of the immediate environment for the first three years in monolingual community during which English shall be taught as a subject; ii. From the fourth year, English shall be progressively taught as a medium of instruction and the language of the immediate environment, French and Arabic shall be taught as subjects; iii. In the Junior Secondary School, the core subjects (Languages) shall be English, French and Language of immediate environment. Elective language shall be Arabic; and iv. In Senior Secondary School, the core subjects on languages shall be English and one of the three major languages. Electives (Languages) shall be literature in English, Arabic and any Nigerian languages that has orthography and literature.

Boosting sociopolitical and economic activities

Language is a viable tool for sociopolitical and economic development. Business can't operate in isolation of language. Commercial activities in communities function better with the use of language of the people. Languages which have gained international recognition and values attract better participation in both international labour market and diplomatic relationship. Language therefore wins confidence of a people in sociopolitical and economic ties. National language policy in Nigeria is considered a boost to sociopolitical and economic activities and step towards actualising the millennium Development Goals (MDG's) of vision 2020. Habiba reaffirms that,

The nation's commitment has hitherto, given birth to the implementation of such international protocols as the Education for All (EFA), the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG's) as well as her own home-grown medium-term development plan, the National Economic Empowerment

It is pertinent to note that the national language policy is an instrument for national economic empowerment. President Mohammed Buhari's administration introduced market money to empower petit traders at both local and urban centres whose

businesses are conducted in our indigenous languages and pidgin.

Challenges of National Language policy implementation in Nigeria

There are multifaced challenges that stampede the National Language Policy Implementation in Nigeria. Some of the challenges are diglossia supremacy of English language over Nigerian languages, less premium on the indigenous languages in both national and international labour force and poor policy implementation initiative by the government.

diglossia supremacy of English language over Nigerian languages

The dominion of English language, due to its sociopolitical and economic relevance over the indigenous languages in Nigeria has rendered our indigenous languages a shadow of linguistic reality, in a multilingual society like Nigeria. English language remains the insusceptible communication medium in Nigeria. Though the policy was initiated that Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo should be our national languages, alongside with English language as our official language, English language has supremacy over our indigenous languages. English remains the dominant language of our policy makers, language of business, administration and instruction. English language has taken over our homes. Parents or the natives who are the custodians of the indigenous languages have become the agents of linguistics chauvinism. Sewuese Veronica Swande and Jighjigh Leo Justus Ishima state that “Even in domestic settings where communication will ordinarily be possible and intelligible in local Nigerian dialects, they prefer to communicate in English”(5). This diglossia tendency of English language supremacy in Nigeria has limited the capacity of national language implementation policy in Nigeria.

Less premium on the indigenous languages in both national and international labour market force

Our languages have attracted less or no economic values both at the national and international labour market force. Consequently, a teaming population of our youth today pay heavily in international language centres for teaching and documentation to learn and acquire foreign languages such as English, French,

German, Spanish, Russia, Arabic and recently Chinese language to locate job opportunities in the international labour market force. Less premium on our indigenous languages and recognition have been a stumbling block to national language implementation policy in Nigeria. Swande and Shima reaffirm that, “the prevalent attitude of the people today, especially the youth, is that of abandonment of the indigenous language for English which they feel is more prestigious than Tiv”(6).

Poor policy implementation initiative by the government

The linguistic incompetence of most policy makers and the impaired vision of other government officials, agents, ministries, department and parastatals about the sociopolitical and economic values of our native languages have been impedimental to national language policy implementation in Nigeria. No proper measures to enforce the policy have been put in place by the executive and the judiciary, who are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring proper implementation of this crucial policy are reluctant of enforcing this law. Most schools and colleges don't key into this vision to include these languages as subjects in their schools.

Parental attitude

Most parents have discouraged their children from learning their native languages. Most of them have placed a stigma of “no academic importance” and as such, they want their children to be medical doctors, medical scientist, nurses, engineers, architects, and lawyers to attract more economic benefits to their families. This is true, since no economic value and prestigious positions are not really attached to linguists in Nigerian society.

Swande and Shima discovered that parents who are to inculcate the knowledge of these languages in their children are not really interested in encouraging the use of these languages even in their homes (7).

The role of literature in National language Policy implementation in Nigeria

Literature is a viable instrument for national language policy implementation in Nigeria since it reinforces

the use of native languages through poems, storytelling in terms of folk lore, proverbs, songs and dance which are embedded in oral literature. The poetic structure of native languages, the rhythms and sweet stories on our cultural beliefs motivate our children to appreciate our indigenous languages. Chinua Achebe consciously enriches his novels with Proverbs in Ibo language in order to enhance the use of native languages as an effort towards national language policy implementation strategy.

Literature is a symbolic and ideological representation of a people and culture which unveils the cultural values of the people. It brings out the roles of our traditional rulers who are the custodians of the culture of a people. The kings protect their land and cultural heritage which reduce the imposition of foreign cultural practices on our people. This role is rooted in traditional epics of Nigerian culture in Hausa, Yoruba and Ibo languages where the kings and the subjects are upheld to their cultures. Most of these plays are written in indigenous languages which are the symbolic and ideological representation of our people, which is an effort towards national language implementation policy. It is indeed in this perspective that Manasseh Teryima Akese and Roseline Mnguhemen Sokpo state that, “It is pertinent to know that literature gives the clear picture of the society, the reality of human behaviour, attitude and mentality based on our socio-political and economic practices” (158).

Literature is a catalyst of national language policy implementation through inundations of cultural transmission. George Yule said, while we inherit physical features such as brown eyes and dark hair from our parents, we do not inherit their language. We acquire a language in a culture with other speakers and not from parental genes. An infant born to Korean parents in Korea, but adopted and brought up from birth by English speakers in the United States will have physical characteristics inherited from his or her natural parents, but will inevitably speak English (14).

Literature operates as a linguistic hub for oral communication skills in the area of drama and poetic language. Morphology, syntax and semantics of our indigenous languages are integrated into literary

creativity which influence the implementation of national language policy. Kamru (K), Olayiwola(o), Usman O.K, Omniyi Aminat and Abdulsam quoted Olaoye, With education on literature and language catalysing, improving social cohesion and national security across Nigeria, the modern digital age offers a variety of technological platforms to expediate this learning process and improve the engagement and motivation of learners with learning disabilities (Olaoye, 2013).

It is imperative to also note that literature gives a holistic and well-rounded humanistic view of the society. By its function of cultural exposition and advancement, the natives develop a sense of belonging their cultures and as such appreciate their indigenous languages and cultural affiliations. The development of social conscious and self-identity increases interactions in our native languages. This compliments and facilitates the implementation of national language policy. Usman et al are of the opinion that literature gives students a rich and well-rounded humanistic education; exposes students to the beauty and potentials of language and as well encourages them to inculcate and develop healthy human values and attributes which are indispensable in community development.

Literature builds empires for sociolinguists and anthropologists to interact and ensure implementation of language policy in Nigeria. The sociolinguists study the relationship between language and society and interact with anthropologists on the issues of culture to ensure organisation of social groups for cultural enrichment. The relationship serves as a tenet of national language implementation policy in Nigeria. Yule says,

The term sociolinguistics is used generally for the study of the relationship between language and society... it has strong connections with anthropology through the study of language and culture, and with sociology through the investigation of the language plays in the organisation of socio groups and institutions (258).

VIII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The national language policy in Nigeria has been a factor of vision 2020 which sought to harness the intellectual properties, the cultural heritage and economic potentials of the Nigerian child. , national language policy in Nigeria was launched in 2003 to reinforce harmonious peaceful coexistence, preserve our rich cultural heritage, harness the optimal academic potentials of the Nigerian child, boost sociopolitical and economic activities and enforce national development. The paper has addressed some of numerous challenges militating against the effective implementation of national language policy in Nigeria. These include among others: diglossia supremacy of English language over Nigerian languages, less premium on the indigenous languages in both national and international labour force and poor policy implementation initiative by the government. The paper also addressed the role of literature in national language implementation policy in the following ways: literature reinforces the use of native languages through poems, storytelling. Literature is a symbolic and ideological representation of a people and culture which unveils the cultural values of the people, Literature builds empires for sociolinguists and anthropologists to interact and ensure implementation of language policy in Nigeria etc.

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