

## NATIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY IN NIGERIA AND THE VISION 20:20:20

**Habiba Mohammed**

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*The world is undergoing a global transformation in every facet of human endeavor especially in the aspects of language and education. Nigeria has shown its desire to break away from an exogenous policy situation in which a nonindigenous second language alone is used by a fraction of the population. The National Language policy has however, give room for the use of indigenous languages in education sectors for national development. This paper tries to examine the issue of language policy as it relates to education. Two selected area of priority of current research activities were considered. Early Childhood Education (ECE) and ICT-Mediated Programme for Distance and adult Literacy. The findings of this paper however, show that the activities have really helped in developing learner's language skills. Even though they are not without some challenges, some recommendations such as the government should continue to create awareness and sensitize people on the value of education to states local government and communication were, made among others.*

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**Keywords:** Vision 20:2020 Language Policy Early Childhood Education and Distance Adult Literacy, ICT-Mediated programme.

### Introduction

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 fulfill 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. 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."

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 and Development Strategy (NEEDS). However, the goals of vision 2020 on education cannot be achieved in the absence of the nation's language policy. There will be insignificant revolution and very little growth in the nation's educational sector if language is not considered. In fact, the impetus for the positive changes that is expected from the nation's commitment to the implementation of quality education delivery is language education. Education is believed to be a tool for the promotion of peace, integration, and unity, so, language education can be as a roadmap to national development and democratic greatness (Olaoye, 2013). Based on the above points, it is pertinent for the government of Nigeria to be serious with its language policy in order to make her vision a reality.

## Language Policy in Nigeria

Although, nations historically have used language policies most often to promote one official language at the expense of others, many countries now have policies designed to protect and promote regional and ethnic language for national development. Language policy is defined as what a government does officially through legislation. Court decisions or policy to determine how languages are used to cultivate language skills needed to meet national priorities or establish the rights of individuals or groups to use and maintain languages. The scope of language policies varies from state to state (Wikipedia, 2017). Language policies play a significant role in the spread of literacy. There is a strong link between language policies and the attitude towards choice and development of indigenous languages as noted in EFA report (2005).

The creation of a democratic culture or policy depends on language, especially indigenous languages for proper articulation. Language is an indispensable cultural legacy with which all forms of human interactions are carried out (Nwadike 2004). This explains why 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.

The NPE also states that the business of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English and in Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo when adequate arrangements have been made thereof. Also for smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is advisable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria and it shall be compulsory in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools but non-vocational at the Senior Senior School.

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 identification of indigenous languages in the policy alongside. English expresses the desire to break-away from an exogenous policy situation in which a non-indigenous social language alone is used by a fraction of the population for governance (Adegbite 2008). However, this paper believes that programmes and related activities need to be carried out for the fulfillment and achievement of the national goals.

### **Current Research Activities Related to Language Policy**

In the educational context, a lot of activities and programmes have been introduced in relation to the language policy on education, the Federal Ministry of Education in collaboration with other government and non-governmental agencies are making efforts in repositioning Nigerian's educational system for global competitiveness.

As a matter of priority, this paper intends to look into two areas of language policy on education and the activities related to them. The areas are; Early Childhood Education and ICT-Mediated Programme for Distance and Adult Literacy. This paper is interested in these areas because the first area signals the foundation of knowledge for future language development and the latter is meant for those who were not opportune to have said foundation of knowledge at the early stage of life through modern communication technology but given another chance to strive.

#### **Early Childhood Education (Ece)**

In every modern society, it is believed that education is the key to national development and there is the need to maintain every level of education especially, the pre-primary stage because it is the bedrock upon which all other educational levels are built (Obiweluzor, 2015). Early Childhood Education or pre-primary education is defined by the National Policy on Education (FRN, 2012) as the education given to younger learners before the age of enrolling into the primary school it is an education given in formal setting for children aged 3 to 5 years. This type of education include crèche, nursery and kindergarten. Early childhood is currently provided to private entrepreneurs, although the official recognition of it was in the National Policy on Education 1977, revised 1981, 1998, 2004, 2007 and 2012.

Since the goal of language policy is to develop the language skills in individuals especially in their indigenous languages, the NPE (2012) in its implementation guideline states that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment. It is intended that the orthography of many of the Nigerian languages will be developed and textbooks will be produced in those languages and the method of teaching shall be through play. Learners are exposed to activities such as; identification of letters, graphics, pictures, singing of rhymes and listening to music and stories. At times, television is provided for them to watch children's programmes.

Early childhood education is enriched by the informal traditional upbringing given to children from 0 to 3 years which makes them ready for school. The sustenance of the policy couldn't have been possible without the joint collaboration of the Federal Government of Nigeria, United Nation Education Scientific and Cultural

Organization UNESCO). United Nations Children Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and United Nations Developments Programme (UNDP). ECE has indeed given our young children the sense of belonging in the educational arena.

The importance of ECE is that it builds the learners language skills, enhances their level of understanding, sharpens their cognitive domain through learning and while playing, and it helps in emotional development. In order to curb aggressive behaviour group activities

are introduced. It also includes the spirit of enquiry through exploration of nature and environment, music, arts and playing with toys. Despite the advantages of the programme, this paper opines that the objectives of the government on ECE can be fully achieved if the programme is not solely in the hands of private entrepreneurs.

### **ICT - Mediated Programme for Distance and Adult Literacy**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is an umbrella term that includes any communication device or appliance encompassing radio, television, cellular phones, computer and network hardware and software, satellite systems and so on. It is an extended term for Information Technology (IT) which stresses the role of unified communications and the integration of telecommunication (Wikipedia). The essence of ICT is to encourage literacy in a modern way. According to Robinson (2007), literacy is about communication, and it is therefore, a fundamentally language-based activity. There can be no literacy without a language. In fact, the consensus is that Distance Learning and ICT can provide opportunities for formal and non-formal literacy to adults.

ICT is expected to serve as a catalyst in making mass access to learning possible through the use of appropriate technologies. An example of new ICT with potential benefits of encouraging literacy is the use of mobile phones. Many activities that are carried out in distance learning include the use of short text messages in form of questions to learners by their instructors in which the learners are expected to reply via text too. Learners can also access other facilities that enhance learning and language development such as internet browsing. Even though the spread and use of mobile telephone has 83% coverage of the population according to World Bank (2008) the indigenous languages are yet to be given prominence.

As part of Nigeria's commitment to attaining the goals of Education for All (EFA), a National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-formal Education was established in 1990. The commission was concerned with the delivery of formal education through Literacy-by-Radio Programme. The radio programme was used to supplement the face-to-face interaction sessions with the learners. The activity involves the learners meeting at a specific time and location to listen to an organized broadcast and assessment is conducted at the end of the period. Primers are given for graphics and illustrations with facilitators to coordinate them. This programme is discovered to be effective for adults especially men and women who do not have time to attend formal education. The result of this programme shows that the learners develop literacy skills within a short period of time and drop-out rate was very low. A report from Niger State which is one of the 12 states used for the pilot study has it that, 213 females and 6 males participated from two local government areas; Agale and Lepai (Niger State Agency for Mass Education 2008) and they performed considerably well.

Another activity carried out through ICT-Mediated programme is the **training of distance learners via the internet**. The course content is assembled into modules. And, each module is made up of lessons divided into sub-topics. The lessons include; an introduction, objectives,

structured content, summary, and references to consult for further reading. In this form of activity, the students are expected to participate in online discussions, quizzes, test, or projects at the end of module (Ofule 2011). Unfortunately, the programme which assumes computer literacy skills is basically in English language.

### **Challenges of the Research Areas and Activities**

Even though there are many benefits derived from the above areas and activities in the development of language skills in learners, it is essential to note that there are some challenges faced by learners and instructors in the process. The language policy stipulates that primary 1-3 pupils are to be taught in their local languages, but it is only applicable in context where the native languages have been developed in terms of instructional materials and teachers. Also, most of the nursery schools in Nigeria are privately owned and mostly in the urban areas. The children that attend those schools are mostly from the rich or educated background and the medium of instruction is always English. The implication of this is that children will be denied at the early stage. This however contradicts the objectives of the policy on Early Childhood Education in Nigeria.

More so, there is no sincere commitment on the part of the government in the implementation of this programme as public schools have not been involved. There is poor motivation and monitoring of the implementation, coupled with wrong curriculum objectives that failed to look into the availability of language teachers, language materials from various languages and infrastructures.

On the aspect of ICT-Mediated Programme for Distance and Adult Education, the activities carried out are very much in line with the current trend on language education because it gives opportunity for an inclusive delivery of formal education through telephones, radio and the internet. However, the use of telephone is limited to a set of people who can operate the device effectively. Prominence is given to English at the expense of other indigenous languages in Nigeria. The people in the rural areas have limited opportunities of involvement because of lack of exposure and access to internet facilities. The most worrisome is the incessant power supply which is considered the greatest challenge in the utilization of these devices.

### **Conclusion**

The question of developing indigenous Nigerian languages for teaching and scientific competitiveness has been a daunting and protracted one. Therefore, this paper has pointed out that a linguistically heterogeneous country like Nigeria requires an efficient language policy to enable its citizens acquire and use English alongside their indigenous languages for nation's identity and national development. For Nigeria to achieve its goal of inclusive education through the EFA and Vision 2020, programmes and activities that involves both young children and adults (men and women) were discussed. Even though, many achievements have been recorded in the areas touched in this work, it is observed that there are challenges which need to be looked into for more achievements in the implementation of language policy in Nigeria.

## Recommendations

Based on the challenges observed in the implementation of the language policy through the two areas discussed in this paper; Early Childhood Education (ECE) and ICT-Mediated Programme for Distance and Adult Literacy, the following recommendations are hereby given for more successes to be recorded in language education in Nigeria.

1. The government should continue to create awareness and sensitize people on the value of education to states, local governments and communities.
2. The government needs to be more serious and committed to bilingual/multilingual education programmes that will strengthen local languages and foster national development.
3. Public schools must be involved in the running of Early Childhood Education Centres in both urban and rural areas with proper monitoring government agencies.
4. Teachers need to be given solid training programmes for specialization in ECE and ICT management
5. Enough teachers should be given adequate training in the various indigenous languages with available orthographies.
6. There should be adequate language teaching materials at all levels of education in Nigeria.
7. Language facilities and adequate infrastructures need to be provided in schools and language training centres especially for children and adults in both urban and rural areas.
8. Government should ensure constant power supply in order to record reasonably success in ICT-Mediated programmes.
9. Proper exposure to the internet must be given to people especially those in the rural areas in order to meet up with the current trend as a nation.
10. Prominence must not only be given to English but also to other indigenous languages in the teaching of learners for language and national development as clearly stated in the National Language Policy on Education.

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**Habiba Mohammed** is a Lecturer in the Department of General Studies Education, Federal College of Education, Zaria, E-Mail: [mobsy4real@gmail.com](mailto:mobsy4real@gmail.com)