

## LANGUAGE EDUCATION AS A PANACEA TO A VIRILE WEST AFRICA COOPERATION AND INTEGRATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Language is the major medium of communication among human beings. The complexity of human interaction in the modern world cannot go on without language. It is key to mental relationship and understanding, leading to promotion of peace, cooperation and nation building. It is the fulcrum of a people's culture and whatever affects it has direct impact on the people. This paper gives the unquantifiable number of languages and their advantages, x – rays the derivable benefits that await the nations that form the ECOWAS, highlight the various approaches through which they can suppress rancour and forge ahead at national and international level through the medium of language.*

### Introduction

Before the advent of the colonialists, nations had hundreds of local or indigenous languages. With the colonial interventions, most nations were ranked by the language of the colonial masters. This also accounted for geographical demarcation between the nations in African. Those nations colonized by France had French as their official language and they were referred to as *francophone* nations while those of great Britain retained the English Language as their official language. For these nations of different colonial masters to enjoy co-operation in areas of peaceful resolution of conflicts, peaceful co-existence, development, strategic planning at national and international levels, a common language was required.

The need to form a united front arose for nations, International bodies like United Nations Organisations (the mother of all international bodies). The African Union, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The commonwealth, the *Francophone*, etc were therefore created. There was need for communication among the various nations in organizations. This is quite in consonance with Fromkin and

Rodman (1978: 1) assertion that, “whatever else people may do when they come together, whether they play, fight, make love or make automobiles they talk”.

The importance of language cannot be compromised no matter the status of such a language. For the ECOWAS, with her 16 member nations, English, Portuguese and French are the three official and functional languages as stated in Article 87 (2) of the ECOWAS Treaty of 1993. These languages are used to achieve the primary objectives of promoting peace and raise the living standard of the people of the member nations.

The Treaty of ECOWAS, 1993 Chapter II, Article 3 (1) states:

- - - - to promote cooperation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West African in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among member states and contribute to the progress and development of the African continent (p. 7).

Looking at these humanitarian objectives, and for its realization, it is a must to have a uniform language i.e. these nations must share a common language. The objectives of globalization could only be attained with the removal of linguistic barriers. Nations must share language (s) in common before they can be of assistance to one another. This lack of uniform language or the larger percent of one nation not linguistically mobile makes many West African nations not being able or willing to realign their policy frameworks to combat the deepening socio-economic and cultural crises of development that is plaguing them. This factor could be said to account for these countries not make any meaningful progress towards economic liberalization and democratisation which results in declining agricultural productivity, escalating unemployment and crime, malnutrition, worsening political and civil strife, rampant corruption and increasing poverty, socio-economic points make the West African nations among others, remain undeveloped. For all these hindrances to be overcome a function language education is necessary. Language they say is an indispensable tool and a catalyst for the promotion of international peace and solidarity. It then beholds the English speaking nations of West African to learn the French language and those of *Francophone* to learn the English Language for international co-operation.

### **Need for Language Programme**

As we have said earlier, languages play a dominant role in the development of any society. This era of accelerated globalization makes use of language as a major working tool. The nations in West Africa among other nations cannot stand aloof

from this development for these countries to benefit maximally; they all need to be bilingual in French and English. For example Nigerian, an Anglophone nation, needs to make French language her second official language to enable her play a meaningful role in world affairs through effective communication and interaction with her neighbours and her other big sister nations in the world Ajiboye (2001) states:

The French language and the contemporary society are hardly separable as the modern world appears to see it and one of the major languages upon which civilization and technological forward-march depend (p. 7).

Hence, to “forward-march” scientifically, diplomatically, technologically and economically, knowledge of the second foreign language is a must for future development of nation. For nations to enter into bilateral and multilateral agreement and treaties on economic, scientific technological, commercial and entrepreneurial issues a common language is paramount. As the knowledge of French language is paramount to the Anglophone nations, so also is the learning of the English language to the *Francophone* nations.

Amosu (2005) as quoted by Yekinni (2007) states “to speak the languages of others is to obtain a warmer welcome”.

Ability to share a common language enhances socio-interaction among users. Therefore to further enhance the existing relationships, sharing common language is an advantage.

The need and role of media, both printing and electronic, cannot be overemphasized. This further underscores the place of English in *Francophone* nations and French Anglophone nations.

There are Peace Keeping Forces, Cease-Fire Monitoring Groups and Mediating Bodies whose objectives cannot be achieved without a functional language. Nations collective wars against child-abuse, drug trafficking and all sort of social vices can only succeed when there is effective communication. A trans boarder and collective responsibility in getting rid of these bastardized acts can be achieved maximally through aggressive language programme by nations.

Education is the bedrock for development; for these nations to benefit from the various educational programmed a common language is quite indispensable. It beholds these nations to have a language programme that can make this educational partnership a reality.

National and international securities give room for well meaning development. A nation can only think of progressing under a secure atmospheric condition. There must be peace within and with the neighbours. There could be an enhanced joint boarder patrol to combat crimes; this joint security officer may include the Police, Army, Immigration, Customs, and NDLEA and so on. A common language makes the job of these bodies to be easier. They all have a mission to accomplish with the aid of a common language. Those to be involved in peace-keeping, restoration of peace, peace building, disarmament etc should be able to communicate at least in two languages (English and French). The understanding cooperation and integration that can engender peace are subject matters that a common language can resolve if language is properly utilized.

To live in unity and harmony and for the promotion of inter-African solidarity, world peace, international cooperation and understanding mutual comprehension via a common language is so paramount.

Iyanda (2003) citing Manning (1995) opines as follows on language:

From the written word comes gentleness, from the lines - -  
- patience, from the phrase - - - - joy, from the poems - - - -  
compassion, from epic - - - - courage: from saga - - - -  
perseverance, from the essay - - - - justice, from the  
dialogue - - - - love from the forward - - - - hope, from  
prose - - - - tolerance, from narrative - - - - understanding,  
from the literacy odyssey - - - - wisdom (p. 6).

From the above point of view, we can see that language encompasses all the aforestated characteristics. It then behooves nations to work towards achieving all these attributes as they cannot do away with wisdom, understanding, tolerance, love justices, perseverance, patience etc.

If all these nations of ECOWAS could be bilingual, they stand to gain more from international relations in all spheres of life, science, technology, education, social and political affairs. All developments and researcher across disciplines in these languages will be beneficial, so also professionals in various fields will be more acquainted with findings from others, which in turn will boost their performance and competence.

For social cohesion and the dissemination of a shared system of values a common language is required. When the Anglophone nations can make use of French language comfortably as those of English and the *Francophone* nations on the other hand, there will be meaningful development for the two communities more than it is now.

If dual language is practiced in the member nations, it will reduce the expenses on translation and interpreting, so also it will make the actions to be taken faster and enhance productivity.

Once again, learning opportunities of students whose native languages differ from the predominant language of instruction will be enhanced for example, the Ibo migrants from Nigeria in the Republic of Benin find it difficult to be educated in that country because of lack of a working language of instruction. They find it very difficult to be enrolled in schools; therefore it affects the productivity of the region as a whole and its contribution to the entire host nation. In order to learn, students must have the ability to engage in meaningful discourse with other students and teachers of different linguistic backgrounds. They will also sit comfortably well amidst others to acquire more knowledge.

Conclusively, we want to agree with Bright and McGregor (1979) that:

----- it is indispensable that a man acquainted  
with two literatures is no worse off than a man who only  
knows one, for the more a man knows the more he is worth  
----- (p. 89).

To know a literature of any society, it requires knowledge of the language of such a community. Therefore to have ability of using more than one language is a blessing.

### **Suggestions**

Bilingual education enhances divergent opportunities. For this to be a reality, we want to advice that these nations incorporate a dual language programme for Nursery and Primary Schools. In essence, we want the *Francophone* and Anglophone nations to come together (at least for a start) and formulate policies that will encourage this programme. The early age is suggested for this programme because language acquisition is done best at the early ages. The younger the child is, the easier it is for him or her to learn a second language. The curriculum needs to accommodate Mathematics and Science Subjects along with these two languages. The time table should give room for the language to be taught every other day. Official language of a nation will be the first to be introduced while the other language will be the next. It is just a matter of harmonizing the existing curriculum.

Another way of enhancing this is through seminars and workshops to bring professionals across disciplines from member nations. This will afford them the opportunity of gaining knowledge in the other language.

Exchange programmes across our institutions of learning should also be put in place. As learning is all embracing, the language and the social and cultural aspects of the language will also be mastered.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has analysed the derivable advantages that await the West African nations with common language for the objectives of the ECOWAS to be achieved, a mutual comprehension is compulsory. To achieve this, a common language must be readily available. The Anglophone nations, like Nigeria have already known the merits of speaking French. To this end French language is made a core subject in her National Policies on Education. Other nations should also emulate this golden step so as to benefit maximally from the present day global village relationship.

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