

## Effective Language Use: Option for Education for Human Empowerment, Competency and Citizenship in Nigeria

Queen Ugochi Njemanze<sup>1</sup> and E.B.J. Iheriohanma<sup>2</sup>

*Directorate of General Studies, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria*

*E-mail: <sup>1</sup><ugonje@yahoo.com>, <sup>2</sup><iherioha2005@yahoo.com>*

**KEYWORDS** Effective Language Use. Education. Human Empowerment. Capacity Building. Citizenship. Nigeria

**ABSTRACT** Effective language use is a dynamic construct which reveals the consciousness of an intellectual attribute of an individual. It is also an important concept which is the criterion to the processes of education and human empowerment. Education, empowerment, competence, capacity building, knowledge and good citizenship on the other hand are fundamental to individual growth, competitive performance, economic and professional growth of individuals in modern nations and in this globalized economy. These concepts are interdependent. Thus, this paper affirms that effective use of English will be a better option for education, which consequently aids human empowerment, competency, capacity and knowledge building and good citizenship in Nigeria.

### INTRODUCTION

The challenges of human encounters pass through change which in turn yields development. This is the case with Nigeria, a nation that is marked by both individual and societal multilingualism. Apart from the indigenous languages spoken by the various ethno-linguistic groups, we also have English language which the nation adopted as part of its colonial heritage and for official use.

Colonization brought about Western education which is propagated through English language. This language appears to be the dominant world language, thus, learning it is necessary in the Nigerian environment.

Language holds the key to academic progress of a nation. The Nigerian educational context requires the individual to use English language and one of the major indigenous languages; Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, largely because language is the medium of instruction in the educational systems. In Nigeria, language is taught as a subject as well as used in transmitting knowledge which begets change through the education of its citizenry.

In a nation, change propagates meaningful progress in an individual's life in a nation. Citizenship education aims at making the people conscious of themselves and their nation, in order to pursue the common goals of self-actualization for better citizenry and development. Citizenship learning makes use of both organized and unorganized learning (formal/informal), as well as the learning potentials found in

daily circumstances. However, whichever form of learning that is adopted, there is the use of adequate language for communication and which must be encouraged through adequate support systems of knowledge know-how, capacity building, problem-solving method, and educational materials. These are used in organized settings. This is because citizenship education is one that should be accessible, open and focused on social issues of immediate interest. This will further enhance human empowerment for adequate competences and capacity building in the Nigerian nation which is rapidly being globalized.

Globalization as a phenomenon is characterized by increased connectedness as well as major inequalities between countries and within nations. In the words of Njemanze (2010:31), globalization is described as "a conceptual trend which has introduced departure point in our (Nigeria's) shared values. Njemanze (2010:32) further stresses that "...Nigeria's social forces are not strong enough to compete with the advent of globalization. This is because the global trend tries to suppress national communalism which allows fair-play, justice, equal opportunity, true federalism and sustenance of good heritage".

There is therefore the need to curb the impact of globalization on Nigeria's education and practice using effective language. Such concepts like restructuring, reform, identity, citizenship, competency, multiculturalism, knowledge and skills acquisition, communication skills, and capacity building should be made the major con-

cerns for the growth and development of Nigerian nation and economy. There is also the need for a positive change in Nigeria to accommodate the positive effects and changes brought about by globalization trends.

Change begets human development and growth, no good progress can be made in anything without a process of change, especially in this globalized economy. This change affects both the individual and his language of communication. This comes in form of progressive deviations or departure points which are prolific on the impact of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Nigeria. This change could be positive or negative. However, the new technologies have helped in the improvement of communication and information dissemination in Nigeria.

### Objectives

Issues concerning new communication technologies have also revolutionized the nature and conduct of development in Nigeria. As new systems develop, so does the society and its ways of communication. ICT develops knowledge skills and competencies which are acquired and imbibed through citizenship education. Thus, language use, education, human empowerment, competency, knowledge and skills development, capacity building and good citizenship are inseparable constructs. This is the thrust of this paper. This will be explored through the following headings;

- The role of language in national development
- Education and human capital/capacity development
- Citizenship education, competency and empowerment

The interdependence of these constructs is the base for the re-affirmation of this paper's emphasis on effective use of language for all-round development.

### THE ROLE OF LANGUAGE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Language is an indispensable tool in national development. National development in its wider conception emphasizes on a full realization of human potentials and maximum utilization of the nation's resources for the benefit of all citi-

zens. It is a situation where people utilize the resources within their reach in order to achieve meaningful development. In the words of Bamgbose (1981), 'National development is usually described in terms of economic growth, attainment of economic targets, growth rate, increase in gross national product (GNP) and Gross Domestic Product (GDP), rise in per capital income etc.' In a similar view, Elugbe (1990:14) sees national development as the growth of the nation in terms of education, economic well being, mass participation in governance etc. Both definitions rest on economic growth, educational advancement, political awareness and full participation in government. These are achieved through effective use of language for efficient communication and development. National development thus, emphasizes full realization of human potential and maximum utilization of the nation's resources for the benefit of all citizens.

Bamidele (1999) cited in Upah (2008:3) confirms that "language plays an important role in national development as it fosters understanding, unity and sense of belonging among the various members of the different ethnic and social groups that constitute a nation." In other words, national development ranges from growth in politics, economy, science and technology, education, health etc. Information in these areas is transmitted through language. Language is used to achieve proper co-ordination of activities in these areas. A self conscious and unified population working towards being economically self-reliant cannot be co-ordinated without effective communication.

Similarly, language is used to transact trading activities between people from different linguistic, social and political backgrounds. Language is central to the growth of science and technology in any given society. Language is used in the training of technicians who work in factories where they build or manufacture high technological gadgets for national development.

In the educational sector, language is used as the medium of instruction. It is used in writing textbooks, magazines, journals and news papers. Language is also used for both formal and informal education. All these education materials help the individual to acquaint and improve himself, his community and the nation.

Language is used as a detribalizing force because of its neutralizing effect on the various

ethnic languages which struggle for supremacy and dominance against one another. The English language brought unification for better administration in Nigeria. It is also used for the sustenance of democratic proceedings, governance, economic restructuring and re-arming. All these have helped in the development of the Nigerian nation. This view is supported by Afolayan (1986) when he says: "...it has been the language of its politico-economic unification and administration...." A further support is seen in the 1979 Federal Republic of Nigeria constitution, section 51 which adds:

The business of the national assembly shall be conducted in English, Ibo, Hausa and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof.

It is, therefore, obvious that language is a major 'player' in issues concerning national development. This is because, "language and thought processes are inseparable entities". Wardhaugh (2006), cited in Upah (2008:4) confirms that; language expresses an individual's thought which facilitates positive thinking for meaningful development. This paper thus, goes further to examine the impact of education on human capacity development in Nigerian nation.

#### **EDUCATION AND HUMAN CAPITAL / CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT**

Education is the most important factor for development and human empowerment. Education provides the individual with the knowledge, skills and information that bring about desirable changes in the life of an individual and in any economy. It deposits into a person a strong sense of self esteem, self-confidence and contributes to the realization of the person's potentials. Education is considered as a social instrument for developing human capital resources.

According to Fafunwa (2003:2), "education is the engine of economic, social and physical growth and development of any nation". He goes further to define education as

"...the aggregate of all processes by means of which a person develops ability, aptitude and other forms of behavior of positive value in the society in which he lives."

In order words, education is the force that develops and empowers an individual to func-

tion effectively in promoting cultural, political, socio-economic and intellectual development in any society or economy. Thus, education is important to the individual as well as the nation.

Development on the other hand is a purposeful change in a society that contributes to social and economic well being and advancement/empowerment of its people without creating any disharmony. It is also a process of enlarging people's choices which reflect their desire to acquire basic knowledge, practical skills and competence so as to have access to resources that will give them a good standard of living.

Education and development are two concepts that aim at building a capable individual in any society. While education focuses on the cultivation of literate individuals, development empowers people and promotes important changes in their lives. Proper knowledge-building, skills and entrepreneurship development and competences are also part of individual development. All these contribute to human capital/capacity building and development.

Human development could be physical, intellectual, educational, social and even technological. It is physical, when an individual has all it takes to cope with the demand of his environment so as to meet up with the basic needs of life and contribute meaningfully to the development of his society and nation. Cultural emancipation also aids development through language acquisition. An individual develops intellectually when he is able to use and manipulate his language effectively because every stage of intellectual development is guided by sound language construction.

Educational development involves the acquisition of good literacy level that will make the individual functionally capable to participate effectively in his environment. Functional literacy, in the words of Njemanze (2008:4), is "...the ability to use reading and writing skills to widen and expose ones intellectual and academic achievements in a manner that the individual will be able to communicate across all social levels as well as effectively handle all educational and social needs confronting him in his environment/society."

Apart from developing intellectually, an individual is also expected to develop socially. He is expected to interact, communicate and commune with members of the society where he lives. Language is facilitated through commu-

nication, communication facilitates interaction, and interaction in turn creates harmonious living in a society. This can be achieved through effective language use. All these are necessities required in this knowledge economy and age of globalization.

The tools of technology and science play important role in human development. Man's survival depends largely on scientific and technological advances in engineering, medicine, agriculture, transportation and more. These factors are science and technologically oriented. Thus, Iheriohanma (2003:21) "asserts that science and technology are twin brothers in national development". Accordingly, 'they constitute a body of knowledge which is useful and developmental to the individual in the society'. It is therefore obvious that intellectual developments, physical development, societal development, scientific and technological development which constitute human development are all achieved through effective language utilization and communication.

Lending a support to these analyses, Iheriohanma (2011:131) affirms that, development should be dictated by the forces of knowledge, capacity building and utilization, information and communication technology and management. Furthermore, Iheriohanma (2011:136) describes capacity building and development as being equivalent to the entire entrepreneurship, enterprise, productivity, critical knowledge-leadership qualities, hard work, competitiveness, introspection with regard to developing indigenous knowledge and technology.

Thus, capacity building is defined by Wikipedia (2011) as; "the assistance that is provided to entities, usually societies in developing countries, which have a need to develop a certain skill or competence, or for general upgrading of performance abilities that will allow them to achieve measurable and sustainable results". Capacity building is at par with 'education for critical consciousness, that is, education that must be transmitted through the process of a dialogue (language) among equals.

A fundamental goal of human capital/capacity development is to enhance human resource development and strengthening of managerial systems that will evaluate and address the crucial question relating to policy making/choice, mode of implementation, development options and needs of people in their environment. It also

aims at equipping individuals with understanding, skills and access to information, knowledge and training that will enable them to perform effectively and be competent in their various areas. All these are linked to education which is achieved through language which in turn equips and empowers the citizens. This is also germane in entrepreneurship development needed to leapfrog many economies into space in this knowledge economy and globalization.

### **CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION, COMPETENCY AND EMPOWERMENT**

The term citizenship "commands definite rights and corresponding obligations within each and every society" (Anah 2003:2). Accordingly, citizenship of a state entitles an individual with the rights and commensurate responsibilities that such a state accords its members in any nation (whether developed or developing). Every citizen is as important as any other citizen that resides in a state whether he is a member of that state or not.

Citizenship education aims at promoting responsible, ethical and community minded behavior by developing and facilitating citizenship programmes which will super use the conduct system and hold those accountable, who violate the code of the community responsible. It encourages dialogue between participants and facilitators; thus they learn from, and educate each other. This type of education enables people to make their own decision and also take responsibility for their own lives and that of their community. Since Nigerian citizens contribute to the overall aims of national development they should be successful literates so as to build a good confidence that will empower them to make positive contributions to their society and nation.

Empowerment is the process that assists citizens in taking on responsibilities. It is a process of individual and group transformation that helps develop skills in interpersonal influence and participatory competence through group problem-solving and collective actions. It is also an educational strategy that encourages personal development, a sense of efficiency, self-confidence and critical awareness and maximizes the internal potential of each individual (Internet Document, see CDCC/Delphes (99) 4, iii. p.10 (12/4/11)). Empowerment is associated to in-

crease in competence, political, social, economic or educational strength of individuals and communities which give them greater confidence in their own capacities. Wikipedia (2011) defines empowerment as; “the process of obtaining basic opportunities for marginalized people. Empowerment emphasizes encouraging and developing the skills of self-sufficiency aimed at eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the lives of individuals or group concerned”.

Empowerment helps individuals or groups to fully access personal/collective power through knowledge, skills and motivation for proper functioning in their society and contribute to the economy. Empowerment is synonymous with competence. Thus, to be empowered means to be competent; an individual who attains this level is expected:

- To make decisions about prevailing circumstances.
- To be able to exercise assertiveness in collective decision making.
- To increase one’s positive self-image and overcome stigma.
- To access skills, think positively about the ability to make changes and choosing what is right from what is wrong.
- To be able to access information and resources for decision making.
- To increase one’s ability in discreet thinking, exchange of views, education and decision making.

Empowerment and competency thus place more responsibilities on individuals and societies through effective communication.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has been able to establish the fact that language plays a vital role in human development through education. Education is realized through effective language and communication process in order to produce a competent citizen who is empowered to perform his designated tasks in whatever form they come. He does this as he wants it, in his own capacities and competence, within and outside his environment.

This paper x-rayed the interrelationship between the process which enables an individual to think, learn, change, take action and take decisions that will be beneficial to himself, his

community and the nation at large. The paper thus, concludes that; because the above attributes are inter-related, they are achieved through effective communication (language). This is the best option for the realization of a better citizenry who will be competent in many areas that will enhance decision making and development of the Nigerian nation.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper recommends that grassroots languages should be acquired by every individual. This is because such remains the base to all-round development which empowers and aids individual growth through citizenship education, knowledge development and interaction. This, in turn, catalyzes and crystallizes into national consciousness, human capacity building and development.

### REFERENCES

- Afolayan A 1986. The English language and development oriented higher education in Nigeria. In: R Freeman, M Jibril (Eds.): *English Language Studies in Nigerian Higher Education*. United Kingdom: British Council, pp. 102-119.
- Anah Cletus I 2003. Citizenship education: An introduction. In: E B J Iheriohanma (Ed.): *The Nigerian State and Development: Issues in Citizenship Education*. Owerri: Ugonna Ventures (Nig.), pp. 1- 7.
- Bamgbose Ayo 1981. *Language and the Nation: Language Question in Sub-Saharan Africa*. Edinburg: University Edinburg.
- Elugbe Ben O 1990. National language and national development. In: E N Emenanjo (Ed.): *Multilingualism, Minority Languages and Language Policy in Nigeria*. Agbor: Central Books 102: 16-32.
- Empowerment and Responsibility: From Principle to Practice. (internet Doc) CDCC/Delphes (99) 4, iii, p.10, (Retrieved 12 April 2011).
- Federal Republic of Nigeria 1997. *The Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria*: Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information
- Iheriohanma E, Bonaventure J 2003. Fundamental objectives and directives principles of state policy and Nigeria people. In: E B J Iheriohanma (Ed.): *The Nigerian State and Development: Issues in Citizenship Education*. Owerri: Ugonna Ventures (Nig.), pp. 112 – 133.
- Iheriohanma E, Bonaventure J 2011. Capacity Building, Leadership Question and Drains of Corruption in Africa: A Theoretical Discourse. *Asian Social Science*, 7 (3):131-138. From <www.ccsenet.org/ass > (Retrieved 10<sup>th</sup> July, 2011).
- Njemanze Queen U 2008. The Impact of Use of English on Literacy Attainment in Nigeria. *Paper Presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of English Language Teachers Association (ELTAN)*, University of Port-Harcourt 1<sup>st</sup> - 5<sup>th</sup> December 2008.

- Njemanze Queen U 2010. The Challenges of Globalization and the Use of Children's Literature in Achieving Cultural Literacy in Nigeria, *Studies in Literature and Language*, (4): 30-36. From <[www.cscanada.net](http://www.cscanada.net)> (Retrieved 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2011).
- Upah B N 2008. English Language and Literacy as Basic Tools for National Development in Nigeria. *Paper Presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Conference of English Language Teachers Association (ELTAN)*, University of Port-Harcourt 1<sup>st</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> December 2008.
- Wikipedia 2011. Capacity Building. From <[www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/capacitybuilding](http://www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/capacitybuilding)> (Retrieved 13 May 2011).
- Wikipedia 2011. Empowerment. From <[www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/empowerment](http://www.enwikipedia.org/wiki/empowerment)> (Retrieved 13 May 2011).