

achievement of these core objectives English languages is included as one of the core subjects of the basic education curriculum in Nigeria. The contemporary issues now are:

- The multi-lingual challenge.
- Poor policy implementation.
- Teacher quality.
- The problem of curriculum materials.

5.1. The multi-lingual challenge

Language is a component of culture along with other elements of values, beliefs and norms. In Nigeria, for instance, the language for education at the basic level has been an issue of debate among scholars for decades. As a multi-lingual nation with at least 400 indigenous languages, Gbenedio [10] noted that only about 65 standardized orthographies and only three major languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have documented efforts of teacher education. One challenge Musa [17], envisaged, is the lack of adequate vocabulary for most indigenous languages. The problem is accentuated with school subjects like mathematics, sciences and vocational education content areas where words in the local language will not exactly name concept except to describe them. The best education a child can get at the basic level is that given in the indigenous language. Children accordingly to Baker [4], absorb concept much easily in their own familiar languages and can gain a fundamental understanding of them. However, in a second language (L2) situation, in the case of English language in Nigeria, they simply became words that are learnt but not absorbed. Musa [16] reiterates that psychologically, the proper development of the child bound with the uninterrupted use of the language in which he has acquired this first experiences in life, the one in which he dreams and thinks and in which he can effortlessly express his feelings and emotions. To ignore this familiar language and begin to teach him a foreign and unfamiliar language and as soon as he comes to school, is like taking the child away from his home and putting him among strangers.

Language is a spontaneous social activity expressing thoughts, moods and ideas. It is a hallmark of any group of people, community or society. In a multilingual situation as is the case with Nigeria, the challenge is therefore the identification, development and adoption of over 500 languages for the primary schools in the country. There will be the need for a thorough linguistic analysis of these languages in terms of their phonology and grammatical structures. There is the challenge of developing a body of science and technological knowledge which is needed for the products of primary education in Nigeria to favorably compete with their counterparts within the continent of Africa.

5.2. Poor Policy Implementation

The use of the child's primary language for the first three years of primary education, as stated in the National Policy on Education (9) is ideal. Concepts will easily be understood and children will gain competence in the use of the language, however, several factors are known to have contributed to the low achievement of the educating goals for primary school in Nigeria. Prominent among them is the large number of indigenous languages within the country and any attempt to compress similar languages to promote one that will represent a cultural area will meet with staff opposition and complaint about marginalization. Another challenge is the low turnout of trained teachers in the various indigenous languages. Yet others are the lack of teaching and learning materials and where they are available, they may not be equitably distributed to urban and rural areas.

5.3. Teacher Quality

The issue of language education at the primary school level cannot be exhaustively discussed without making reference to teachers. We lack competently trained teachers to implement education in this regard. A teacher does not qualify to teach a language just because he or she can speak it. A teacher, who himself has difficulties in speaking the language, is not going to succeed in giving his pupils a good command of the spoken language (Ighofuota [11]). It is very common to see many teachers at the primary school level who do not know how to read or write their native languages. They can at least speak it and even at that, with a lot of semantic errors. It must be noted that primary education is a major component of the entire education system in Nigeria. It serves as the foundation for the entire education structure. Therefore, the proper implementation of any curriculum is essentially a function of the quality of the teachers and this, according to Mohammed [14], lends credence to the need to update the knowledge of teachers who are responsible for primary school language education curriculum implementation.

Teachers are the foundations of quality in schools, says Iyobhebhe [12]. It is upon their number, their quality and efficiency that the future of organized education depends. A competent language teacher holds the key to the training of students in language mastery for good performance in school subjects. In Nigeria, teacher education programmes are set to achieve the following:-

- To produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teachers for all levels of the educational system.

- To encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers.
- To help teachers to fit into social life of the community and the society at large and enhance their commitment to national goals.
- To provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and make them adaptable to changing situations.
- To enhance teachers commitment to the teaching profession. FRN (9).

Government's effort is commended here, but there is still a large room for improvement.

5.4. The problem of curriculum materials

With the proliferation of publishers like Longman, Evans Brothers, Macmillan and others working in conjunction with the National Educational Research Development Council (NERDC) and the Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC), course materials and supplementary books in indigenous languages for primary schools, are in short supply. This obviously is because many of the languages do not have orthographies. With the non-availability of these texts, pupils' interest will be poor, teaching will be void of the ability to arouse and sustain pupils' interest and educational goals will be unattainable. Although some indigenous languages have been developed, course books printed and are in use in some states of the country, much still needs to be desired for effective primary schooling.

6. New direction

There is the need to develop a good language education programme for primary school level in Nigeria. This is because the effective functionality of the children in their educational or vocational pursuit is dependent on the solid foundation laid at the lower primary school. Teachers should jointly help the pupils to develop competence in the use of their language and that of the immediate environment of schooling. The government has to make adequate funds available for the provision of regular and intensive professional capacity development for classroom teachers in the Universal Basic Education – Federal Government of Nigeria (UBE-FGN) funded in service training scheme. While the training of teachers is on course, experts who can develop the orthography and prepare content materials in the languages should be mobilized. There is no gain saying that instruction in the indigenous languages will in no small help the child to internalize in his own cultural values if one of the aims of educating him is to mould his character and develop sound attitude and morals in him.

However, since language serves as the tool for instruction, there is the need to ensure that those who have the responsibility to teach it or use it to teach other school subjects, are adequately trained and qualify to do so. The selection should be by a combination of certification and aptitude test to avoid the mistake of employing mediocres. Since teaching at the primary school is activity –oriented, well written, colourfully illustrated texts should be distributed freely to primary school children. Supplementary course materials like dictionary, story books and others elementary reading materials, should make the full package of primary education.

In all this, the role of the supervisory ministry of education should be emphasized here. It is necessary that regular supervision of school be made, to set, maintain and improve standards of primary education. Since language is the live wire of the success of primary education, a team of experts in the subject area need to visit schools from time to time to ensure that those whose responsibility it is to teach the subject do so conscientiously and appropriately.

7. Conclusion

This paper reflects contemporary issues in primary school language education in Nigeria in a search for new direction. Educating the child is a collective responsibility where all concerned parties take on the challenge to ensure its success. Language holds the key to the success of the teaching and learning process at the primary school level and should therefore be properly developed in the child of today who will become the adult of tomorrow. Competence in the use of indigenous languages at the lower level or English language at the upper level of primary education is the golden keys that will open doors of various fields of study to Nigerian Children. It is needful therefore, that orthographies of the various languages be developed and teachers who will translate them in the classrooms be adequately trained and equipped for the job. Teacher education programmes should be expanded and enriched to make room for the acquisition of appropriate knowledge and skills in language teaching at the primary school level. Since the proper implementation of any curriculum is essentially a function of the quality of teachers, it lends credence to the need to update the knowledge of teachers who are responsible for teaching language at the primary school level.

The current training and re-training of primary school teachers in the six geo-political zones of Nigeria is a good step in the right direction. The executive secretary of the Universal Basic Education Commission, Abuja [14] has explained that the exercise which is in collaboration with the Teacher Education in Sub-Sahara Africa (TESSA), is to

provide regular professional capacity development opportunities for classroom teachers in UBE-FGN funded in service training scheme for teachers and managers of basic education in Nigeria. It is therefore required that primary school teachers in Nigeria will avail themselves of this opportunity to improve on the required impetus for high teacher effectiveness in the teaching of language at the primarily school level.

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