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Language Policy and Planning for Education in Cameroon and Nigeria

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Introduction

The goals and overall philosophy of education in any nation is the pre-requisite to the formation of language policy and planning for education. Language generally is always a crucial phenomenon and it becomes more crucial and controversial when it has to do with formulation of policies in education (Dada, 2005) part of the reason for this is simply because most of the language problems in many African countries are colonial legacies. The language problem is even volatile in some African countries like Cameroon and Nigeria. As it is going to be explicated in this write-up, both Cameroon and Nigeria are linguistically fragmented countries. This has affected the language policy and planning for the education of the two African countries (Oyetade, 1995).

Further still, these two countries have not escaped the problem of which language to be used as a medium-of-instruction for education still plaguing most other African countries and this is a major breakdown in the process of achieving educational goals and objectives of the two countries.

However, the formulation of a national language policy is one of the major ways through which most countries proffer solutions to language problems; surprisingly, when these policies are made in most African countries; they are not explicit enough and then becomes very difficult to implement because of ethnic loyalty and political interpretation frequently attached to them at implementation state of the “so called policies” (Obanya, 2009).

Therefore, a survey of the relationship between the language policy in education of Cameroon and Nigeria show that language policy situation in most African countries; especially the multilingual states, need serious government attention if national educational goals and philosophy of education of each country should be relevant to the needs of the learners (Ajolore, 1978).

Language Policy and Planning in Education

The preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity in today's world is a major concern to many scientists, artists, writers, politicians, and leaders of linguistic communities. Up to one half of the six thousand (6000) languages currently spoken in the world are estimated to be in danger of disappearing during the 21st century (Gordon & Raymond, 2005).

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 languages whose viability is threatened.

On the other hand, language planning refers to deliberate efforts to influence the behaviour of others with respect to the acquisition, structure, or functional allocation of language. Typically, it will involve the development of goals, objectives and strategies to change the way language is used.

At governmental level, language planning takes the form of language policy. Language planning can be divided into three sub-dimensions; i.e. corpus planning, status planning and acquisition planning. Summarily, it is important to examine the relevance of language policy and planning in education.

Language is a very important tool in achieving the goals and objectives of education. As such, it helps in:

- preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity in a multilingual state like Nigeria and Cameroon;
- assigning roles to the different languages in multi-lingual states (Nigeria and Cameroon);
- promoting one official language at the expense of others;
- protecting and promoting regional and ethnic languages whose viability is threatened (Awoniyi, 1995 and Gordon, 2005).

Historical Development of Language in Cameroon

Cameroon, like Nigeria is a multilingual state, comprising 247 indigenous languages, two official languages and Cameroon Pidgin English (Breton and Fohlung, 1991; Sadembono, 1999). These number of indigenous languages was challenged by Wolf (2001) for not being an accurate reflection of the current language situation, more so since dialects of the same language are sometimes considered as different languages.

The languages of wider communication are Fulfulde, Ewondo, Basaa, Duala, Hausa, Wandala, Kanuri, Arab Choa and Cameroon Pidgin English (Breton and Fohlung 1991).

The language question in Cameroon could be traced to the colonial period, a period characterized by language conflict between the colonial administrations on the one hand and missionaries on the other hand.

The issue at stake in Cameroon language situation today is a seemingly pathetic one. It has been a battle on how to cope with its highly multilingual situation, resolving the national language issue, while coping effectively with the official language bilingualism option as well as its implication.

In order to delve into the main focus of the paper, the Cameroonians language situation could be briefly summarized:

- the heterogeneous language situation does not facilitate linguistic communication, in view of the absence of a nation-wide lingua franca with a common linguistic idiom;
- no recognition and promotion for indigenous languages, except during the pre-colonial period;
- the unequal distribution in the usage of English and French as official languages which affects

negatively the policy of official language bilingualism (Cameroon was colonized by both Britain and France);

- there is no guarantee for appropriate implementation of official language bilingualism;
- the state was divided between Britain and France, but France has the lion share of French speakers and administered it as an independent territory (West Cameroonians and East Cameroonians);
- the creation of the three (3) lingua franca zones:

- (i) The Fulfulde lingua franca zone in the North.
- (ii) The pidgin English lingua franca zone in the West and,
- (iii) The French lingua franca zone in the rest of the country (Wolf, 2001:155).

In all, Fulfulde lingua franca zone covers 34.8% of the total area of Cameroon and being spoken by close to 3 million people as a second language. Also Fulfulde is recognized to be Islamic language, spoken majorly by the Muslims; while Cameroon Pidgin English (CPE) is recognized as the Christian language and widely used in churches, market places, motor parks, railway stations, streets, as well as in other informal situation. In short, CPE is no longer perceived exclusively as a lingua franca of the English-speaking population, but a language that has a possible national dimension, being used in both urban and rural areas.

Considering the above political patterns and language situation in Cameroon, one can perceive the difficulty of having a clear-cut policy statements in language(s) for education (Adegbija, 2000).

Language Policy in Education of Cameroon

There is no clear-cut objectives, and orientation in language policy for education in Cameroon, just like most multilingual states in Africa. Infact, there are two subsystems of education in Cameroon: the Anglophone system of education based on the Anglo-Saxon model and the Francophone system based on the French model. Although the two are used side by side, a bilingual system of education is also in operational at the University level where studies are carried out in both English and French. With this system and according to 1995 estimates, the literacy rate is evaluated at 63.4% of the total population (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1995).

As a result of the language and political peculiarities stated above, it has been very difficult for Cameroon to have specific language policy statements for education, the two official languages, English and French, came into the Cameroon scene in 1916 when Britain and France shared Cameroon into two unequal parts after defeating the German forces in the country (Todd, Loreto, 1983).

Globally, speaking, the linguistic scenario in Cameroon like in most sub-Saharan African countries is characterized by dense multilingualism, the official dominance of ex-colonial languages; the official neglect of indigenous languages, the unserved colonial umbilical cord and socio-politically interwoven language-related problems; (Adegbija, 2000) are all parts of the inability to have clear-cut language policy in education.

Thus, the language policy on education in Cameroon could not be divorced from the nation's socio-political situation. The situation could be categorized as follows:

(i) The Language of Education in Pre-Colonial Cameroon

Some indigenous languages had already gained a considerable degree of prestige and were standardized and used for teaching long before the arrival of the German missionaries e.g. Bamun and Fulfulde languages.

(ii) The Language of Education in the Colonial period

The colonial powers encouraged the use of their respective languages. In spite of the undeveloped nature of the German public school system in Cameroon, the colonialists still tried to impose the use of German in schools by exerting pressure on the missionaries. Though the missionaries preferred indigenous languages like Basaa, Bulu, Duala, Ewondo for teaching an evangelization (Mbuaghaw, 2000:135). Thus the missionaries continue to be in control of the language situation, since they had a serious stronghold on the school system (i.e. German colonial period).

The language policy situation changed after the defeat of Germany in Cameroon.

- The British colonial powers used indigenous languages for instructions alongside with English, since they governed through traditional authorities.
- The French speaking Cameroon gave little or no attention to indigenous languages since the policy of assimilation aimed at transforming Cameroonians into Frenchmen. In fact, the French colonial administration instituted a special subvention for schools that used French as language of instruction and eventually schools that taught in indigenous languages were closed down (Stumpf, 1979).

Therefore, this systematic linguistic persecution was carried out with vigour, until French became the sole language in use for education and indigenous languages serve not only for evangelism but also for popular communication. Thus, language policies put in place by the Germans, the British, the French did in no way favour the emergence of an indigenous language that could easily serve as a national language at independence.

(iii) The Language of Education in Post-Colonial Cameroon

After independence, French and English were adopted as the official languages. Official bilingualism was instituted in the new Federal Republic 'neutral' foreign language option was accepted to avoid language conflict and financial implication of learning other languages (Fonlon, 1963).

Early bilingualism was adopted for the Cameroonian school child i.e. English and French will be introduced in the early years of primary education; and indigenous languages virtually had no place in the early years of the post independence. In 1998, a bill which was later promulgated into law by the Head of State was passed; with special emphasis on the teaching of national languages, but was a mere statement of law like the case of Nigeria because nothing was done to implement it.

In summary, the policy of official language bilingualism constitutes the main core of Cameroon's

language policy. Article 1, paragraph 3 of the constitution of 18th January 1996 is abundantly clear in this regard.

The official languages of the Republic of Cameroon shall be English and French, both languages having the same status. The state shall guarantee the promotion of bilingualism throughout the country. It shall endeavour to protect and promote national languages.

Although successive constitutions of the country since independence have always reiterated the policy of official bilingualism, there exist no well-defined language policy till date as to its implementation.

Nigeria Language Policy and Planning for Education

As stated earlier, Nigeria like Cameroon is a multilingual state with several indigenous languages. Nigeria is a typical example of those countries of sub-Saharan Africa that are not only saddled with an official colonial language to which only a minority of the population have adequate access, but which also possess many rival ethnic languages from which it is generally considered to be politically inexpedient to choose one as a national language for use throughout the country. This situation is replicated in those other African countries, whether they are colonized by England, such as Ghana, Sierra Leone and Gambia, in West Africa and Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Zimbabwe, and Malawi in East Africa (Iwara, 2008).

In a multilingual country as Nigeria, the provision of a well-spelt out language policy through an onerous task is highly imperative for a virile national unity and development. For such a policy to evolve, language planning is very crucial. This calls for a deliberate choice and allocation of status among other languages (Olowoyeye, 2005).

Language policy and planning in the country are of prime importance, first because of the loyalties to different languages, and second, because of the implications for other multilingual contexts all over the world. Policy is needed, as is the case for many other multilingual contexts, for official, national, educational, inter-ethnic, and inter-national functions. Bamgbose observes that:

As most other African countries, language policy in Nigeria is rarely documented, but its effects can be seen in action in various domains, such as use as official language, medium of instruction in schools, language use in the media, and in the legislature (Bamgbose, 2001).

Consequently, the National Policy on Education (2004) stipulates in the following terms:

- (a) In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.
- (b) The medium of instruction in pre-primary schools should be the language of the immediate community in a multinational, school, English may be used as the medium of instruction but the language of the immediate community should be taught in the spoken form.
- (c) Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the

mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and at a later stage English.

(d) Apart from functional literacy and effective communication, numeracy should be included as aspects of the curricula on which emphasis should be placed. Where Arabic is the medium of instruction in religion and moral instructions, it will continue to be used.

Unfortunately, the implementation strategies and all resources needed to make these policy statements realizeable were not provided for, by the government. Therefore, all we have in Nigeria, just like the case of Cameroon are mere language policy statements that are not well-defined and till date there are no educational and language resources as to its implementation.

Some Problems of Implementing Language Policy for Education in Multilingual States with particular Reference to Cameroon and Nigeria

Nigeria is typical of those countries in Africa that are not only saddled with an official colonial language to which only a minority of the population have adequate access, but which only also possess many rival ethnic languages from which it is generally considered to be politically inexpedient to choose one as a national language for use throughout the country (Iwara, 2008:21).

Many problems exist about implementing language policy for education which was stated above according to the National Policy on Education, 2004 edition.

Some critiques exist to buttress the fact that the language policy for education in Nigeria, has some implementation problems. Some educators like (Awobuluyi 1992, Emananjo 1992, Taiwo 2002, Mowarin 2004 and Owolabi 2006 cited by Ogunyemi, 2009) came up with the following observation, representing some implementation problems:

- If the MT or the language of the immediate environment is considered a very important medium for achieving initial and permanent literacy and numeracy, why should it be used initially and not throughout the whole of primary education.
- How can just three of the many Nigerian languages serve the need of the educational process and become the media for preserving over 400 autonomous people's cultures.
- The said 3 Nigerian major languages (Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo) do not enjoy nationwide acceptability since other ethnic groups in the country have their own languages through which their culture is preserved.
- How can we effect a smooth transition and workability by using MT as a medium of instruction at the lower primary and English at a latter state.
- There is this phrase in the policy – “subject to availability of teachers”, this exposes the government's unseriousness and ill preparedness.
- The minority languages that are not given recognition in the policy are greatly endangered and some of them are already extinct.

Some of these factors pose a lot of problems concerning the successful implementation of language policy for education in Nigeria.

The language policy for education in Cameroon promotes bilingual education, this entails the use of two official languages of instruction in lecture halls wherein Anglophones and Francophones sit side by side in the same classroom. The lecturer employs the official language the masters better, for his lecture. On the part of the students, they take down notes and do tests and assignments in the language of their choice.

However, this language policy for education was plagued by a number of problems just as the case in Nigeria. These problems are:

§ That most of the lectures are delivered in French in view of the numerical advantage of Francophone professors, a situation that is deplored by the Anglophone minority who feel that they are cheated.

§ The two subsystems practice two different methods of evaluation, an equally disturbing situation for educational experts.

§ Students accord examination failure to the fact that the professor concerned lacks the linguistic competence of properly understand students' examination scripts in his second official language (LO2).

§ That the bilingual training classes designed to enable a better mastery of the students' LO2 (French and English) are not only poorly organized but equally lack the necessary infrastructure, facilities, and motivation on the part of the students to be really successful (Biola, 1999).

§ No support for the promotion of the two official languages. Work on lexical standardization of Cameroon English and Cameroon French is seriously lagging behind due to lack of institutional support.

§ The situation is suicidal for the indigenous languages, which are bound to continue dying progressively. This because indigenous continue to be completely absent from the school curriculum.

These and some other problems plagued the successful implementation of language policy for education in Cameroon like the cases in most African multilingual state.

Conclusion

The problem of language development, and actualizing the stated philosophy goals of education in all multilingual African countries, cannot be a reality without serious government intervention by actually supplying all the resources needed. Resources not only in terms of money and materials, but actually making realizable language policy statements with strict supervision and follow-up strategies to make things workable. Government must also provide competent teachers for our indigenous languages, so that both Nigerians and Cameroonians can grow up, feeling proud of their languages and cultures. In a nutshell, government must give them a place to stand in rider to move their world of language and development forward (Iwara, 2008:57).

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