

6.**MODERN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION, A PANACEA
FOR ACCELERATING INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IN NIGERIA.****Kayode Omotade, Ph.D**

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Abstract

Contemporary issues in relation to global politics and modernisation have necessitated that urgent attention be accorded to Second Language Acquisition, (SLA). Globalization, military and economic strengths of the world's great powers like the United States of America, Russia, Germany, Italy among others, particularly since the 19th century, have made many developing nations on the African continent to espouse foreign policies and relations with the developed countries within the international context.

From the foregoing, it is deducible that many developing countries, especially Nigeria, have encountered several setbacks in their dealings with some of the developed countries of the world significantly, the non-English speaking ones as a result of language barrier. The cause of this, is not farfetched. From available literature, it has been discovered that second language acquisition has not been properly implemented and instituted within the confines of Indigenous Education System in Nigeria.

Thus, this paper seeks to interrogate Modern Language Acquisition, its challenges in the Nigerian Education System, remedies as well as the significance of Modern Language Acquisition in providing solutions to the several issues within the frontiers of the Nigerian Indigenous Education System.

In order to achieve a veritable solution, this study employs a review of related academic literature on language, linguistics, language teaching and learning, as well as second language acquisition. The Language Acquisition Theory forms the theoretical basis for the research. In conclusion, it becomes obvious that the relevance of learning foreign languages in the Indigenous Education cannot be over emphasised for the plethora of benefits this can afford developing nations, particularly, Nigeria.

Key Words: Language, Acquisition, Modern Language, Second Language, Indigenous Education.

INTRODUCTION.

Modern linguists have been agitating for indigenous language in the curriculum since 1970s (Hawkins, 1974; Tavakoli & Jones, 2018). Nevertheless, that modern linguists espoused the move for language in the curriculum in the 1970s, approaches towards readdressing the school language curriculum emanated not from them. As Hawkins substantiated:

the first call came in 1959, when the Central Advisory Council for Education (England),..., considered the effect of the demise of Latin in the 1950s, as a requirement for entry to university and to professions such as law and medicine...p25.

Issues of language in education in Nigeria has been a critical one. The multi-ethnic and multicultural nature of Nigeria have given birth to different linguistic relations among the varying many ethnic languages of the country (Bamgbose, 1971). Apart from the different dialects that abound in the country, three major regional languages are allowed to assume important status particularly in the respective regions to serve as the main orbits that the various ethnic groups in the three regions (North, East and West), revolve round as the unifying mother languages to other ethnic dialects. These three languages are: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba respectively. Amidst the divergent available languages is the English language. The English language sailed into the country through the coming of the colonial masters, Britain.

As virtually all aspects were under the control of the colonial masters in the country, English language came in as the language of colonisation and its status become very pronounced. With the encounter of early elites in the country with the English language and the perceived significances of the language in civilization, it has become the mother tongue of some Nigerians today or close to being a mother tongue to some. Over the years since Nigeria gained her independence, the importance of English language cannot be underestimated because in the contemporary world, the ability of one to be able to speak and function effectively in the English language gives one the first hand opportunities to assess urbanization and development in relation to information technology that is of the English source.

As the world is gradually becoming a global village, and countries of non-English speaking such as Russia, France, Germany, China, Spain, among others are making various technologies and thereby showcasing various influences on the global economy, the need for Nigeria to tap from these available economies to enhance internal growth and development in Nigeria becomes pertinent. On that note, since it would be somehow impossible to dabble into a culture without the proper understanding of the language that is used in portraying such culture,

the need to intensify modern language acquisition in the indigenous education in Nigeria becomes highly necessary.

On that note, this paper seeks to recommend compulsory second language acquisition in the tertiary institutions of learning. But before going deeper, a look into what second language acquisition is in general is considered.

Research Methodology.

Qualitative Research Methodology is deployed in this paper so as for the target aim be met. From the scholarship of Fawole et al (2006), qualitative research:

involves collection of narrative data in a natural setting in order to gain insights into phenomena of interest. This type of research studies variables over an extensive period of time in order to find out the way things are, how and why they came to be that, and what it all means. P6

Observation, one of the data collection processes as identified by the scholars is used to pry into the Nigerian society, political and economic growth, in relation to globalization and technical know how. In doing this, the indigenous education system of the country becomes the focal spot. In relation to this setting, second language acquisition is observed with its impacts on the theme of the paper. Also, copious literature that abound in the related field of inquiry are assessed in relation to shaping the paper frontiers.

Theoretical Framework.

This study adopts an eclectic theoretical approach which revolves around two distinct theories, namely: the theory of language and the theory of learning. The former gives a precise definition of language, in terms of what language is, the perceptions about language and ultimately, the usage of language (Ellis, 1997). In relation to what language is, many scholars have at one time or the other captured what can be taken as likely definitions of language (see Lyons, 1981; Hudson, 2001; Owu-Ewie, 2006; Sapir, 1921; Bloch & Trager, 1942; Chomsky, 1957; Peng, 2005; Written, 2007; Goldstein, 2008; Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2018). Typically, having investigated into what language is by considering the affirmations of scholars in the field of language and linguistics, Omotade & Oluwafemi (2018) submit thus:

[...] arising from the different views of various scholars, one can draw a conclusion, or infer that language cannot be isolated from man as it has been the major means of communication in human society... communication further makes it glaring to observe that language goes beyond verbal communication to include sign interaction, otherwise known as sign language.

Also, other coverages of this theory of language, that is, how language is perceived and the function of language become relevant to this paper. This, the

level of perception and recognition that is given to a particular language anchors on the linguistic place and relevance of the language (Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2018).

The other captured theory for this paper is the theory of learning (Ellis, 1997). As for this theory, the major concentration is on the psychological and social aspects of acquiring a particular language. Thus, cognitive as well as psychological materials are required with the social perspectives, contexts plus natures that facilitate language acquisition (Tavakoli & Jones, 2018).

In a nutshell, the content of the paper will revolve round cognitive perspective (Chomsky, 1959). From the view of this approach, language is considered to be unique as well as innate within the confines of human mind (Tavakoli & Jones, 2018). Thus, it is upheld that "language acquisition device", which is believed to be within learner's brain is responsible for the acquisition of language (Chomsky, 1959).

Literature Review

Many inquiries have been made into the area of second many acquisitions, known as (SLA). Some researchers (Chen, 2018), see it as language 2 (L2) acquisition. The work of Chen (2018) titled: *A Data-Driven Critical Review of Second Language Acquisition in the Past 30 Years" studies and provides a comprehensive and Data-Driven analysis of knowledge base L2 acquisition and teaching in the past 30 years*. Typologically, with the aid of the usage of knowledge domain, visualization techniques, a review of L2 acquisition at the disciplinary level is provided. Chen (2018), thus identifies pivotal research areas as well as the ongoing research perspectives in L2 acquisition.

Also, notable in the inquiries into L2 acquisition is the work of Corder (1967) titled: *The Significance of Learners' Errors*. From this particular scholar, a systematic breakdown of Learners' errors as presented by the scholar forms empirical basis on the modalities of how language is acquired. Significant again is the way Selinker (1972) sees *interlanguage* as a leaner language system with its own right and complete set of rules which is different from the languages that learners already know (Chen, 2018).

Empirical clarification in the discourse on second language acquisition is provided by work of Ellis (1997) titled: *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. The background upon which the discourse in relation to the way SLA or L2 as an academic area emanated, grew and extended till the present-day study in the area is succinctly provided by the part one of the book (see Ellis, 1997). From the scholarship of Ellis, the philosophical interrogation, "what is second language acquisition (SLA)?," was placed. The question is not just raised but, lucid explanation is offered through the presentation of copious case studies. The empirical framework by which the area of SLA is studied is further reasoned out by Ellis. According to Ellis (1997), it is averred that:

[...] the systematic study of how people acquire a second language...is a fairly recent phenomenon, belonging to the second half of the twentieth century. Its emergence at this time is perhaps no accident. This has been a time of the global village and the world wide web, when communication between people has expanded way beyond their local speech communities. As never before, people have had to learn a second language, not just as a pleasing pastime, but often as a means of obtaining an education or securing employment. At such a time, there is an obvious need to discover more about how second languages are learned.

As captured by the scholar above, contemporary global issues have necessitated that people should be bilingual at least, in the international realm. Limiting oneself to the local speech communities will not only restrict one globally, but also have disastrous effects on the communities. The communities will not be open to development. Not only that, advancements in relation to globalization and technical know-how in the second languages (L2) can easily elude a restricted linguistic society.

Thus, Ellis makes it overt that acquiring L2 should not be seen as fruitless exercise as apart from socio- political and economic development, a bilingual, at the global realm can be informed about the current trends of things in the L2 or even secure means of sustenance. In view of this, "second" is conceptualized to mean whatever language that a person studies order than the mother tongue. Sequel to this, as Ellis argues, it can refer to the learning of a third or fourth language. Significantly, maybe a language is learned so as to reside in the speech community of such a language or it is done within the four walls of classrooms, the concept of L2 acquisition remains significant.

From a universal view, second language acquisition is said to be the way which individuals acquire a language which is different from their mother tongue or the language of their speech community, within or without the four walls of the classroom (Ellis, 1997).

The Nigerian Indigenous Education; the Place of Language in Education Policy

Nigeria is a democratic pluralist society. The multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria results into many ethnic languages representing different ethnic groups in the country. Each Nigerian child grows up to acquire the ethnic language within his or her reach naturally as a mother tongue. He functions in the ethnic language effectively regardless of grammatical structure or other grammatical rules that are to be observed when constructing utterances.

The origin of the various ethnic languages can be traced to the different formation of the ethnic groupings into individual nations. The scramble for and partition of Africa in relation to the Berlin conference among the European

powers subsequently brought Nigeria under the British colonization. With the advent of the British colonization, the various nations are made to come together to make a nations state (Nigeria) in the course of the 1914 amalgamation by Lord Fredrick Lugard, the then British colonial master. Language barrier sets in. Thus, the colonial master introduced English, the language of colonization, to contend with the very many ones already in existence in the country. English language, being the language of authority then, assumed pivotal roles particularly with the emergence of education in Nigeria. People were made to acquire English (L2), in addition with their ethnic languages.

As Nigeria attained independence in 1960, various efforts sprang up to address language issues in the country particularly, language in education (see NPE, 1977 & 1981). This action gave birth to the language policy and planning in Nigeria (Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2018), especially, language in education policy (Oyetade, 2003, Olagbaju, 2014). Researchers have extensively espoused the field of language policy in Nigeria. Notable among these the works of (Bamgbose, 1994; Oyetade, 2003; Danladi, 2013; Olagbaju, 2014; Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2018). According to Omotade and Oluwafemi (2018), it is worthily noted that matters revolving on language policy and planning are frequent globally. Thus, such issues embarked upon to iron out matters bordering on language use within linguistic communities are settled by either the government or language policy scholars (Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2018:39).

The place of English in education in Nigerian Indigenous Education cannot be overemphasized (Danladi, 2013). The use of English has become pervasive in Nigerian education system. But to address excessiveness in relation to language use in the Nigerian context, different places and statuses are given English and the three basic regional languages in Nigeria namely; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages respectively. Thus, as Omotade and Oluwafemi (2018) argue in relation to Danladi, the transition from English monopoly to bilingualism in accordance with the indigenous demands for language change in education policy that could be the form in line with mother tongues was highlighted (Omotade & Oluwafemi, 2018).

From available literature, there is general believe that Nigeria does not have specific book that encompasses the general formation of policies guiding language use as a whole. But the National Policy on Education (NPE) that was published in (1977) and later revised in (1981) specifies some certain stipulations on language use in the education sector. Although the (NPE) deals with educational sector particularly, from the pre-primary to the post- secondary (tertiary) levels. From the stipulations of the (NPE), indigenous languages are considered to be pivotal in order to Foster national unity as well as resounding education. The place of the indigenous languages are substantiated by the NPE (1977) thus: in addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the peoples' cultures, the government considers it 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 (see Section 1, paragraph 8).

As researches have shown, two related positions stand broadly behind the NPE. These positions are political and educational positions. In relation to this, Tondo (2011) avers that: there is a political ideology of national unity that can be attained through each citizen learning his language and also one of the three major languages. On the other hand, there is an educational ideology, that the enhancement of educational process and the preservation of culture of the individual Nigerian which can be effected through each Nigerian learning of his mother tongue and one of the major languages.

As a matter of fact, the government of Nigeria ensures that early childhood education should be carried out majorly through the mother tongue as medium of instruction, that is, in the pre-primary education. In that case, the language that should be used in introducing learning to children at schools in the pre-primary cadre should be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community. Thus, at a later stage, secondary and post-secondary, the English language is used as medium of instruction, in a situation whereby there is no Nigerian language that serve as a unifying language for cultural, literary and scientific interpretation and communication.

While all said deal with language policy and planning in indigenous education, the place of second language acquisition (SLA) is yet to be well pronounced in the Nigerian indigenous education system. Although people secure admission to study languages such as French, Russian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Arabic, among others, the effectiveness of this is not yet vividly felt on the national development. This is as a result of the fact that these set of populaces acquire language majorly for linguistics consciousness so as to pursue a career for professionalism in such language for several individual vision. But piloting national interest of individual bilingualism (for each citizen) and state multilingualism (for Nigeria as a country) in foreign languages is not at all in operation.

Individual bilingualism and State Multilingualism

In this paper, individual bilingualism and state multilingualism are conceptual terms. This paper uses individual bilingualism in relation to international languages. Here, the international languages are the languages used in intercultural and international communication. The world is seen as a world of technology nowadays. Technology advancement is attributed to some countries. Although the United States of America (USA), England and some other English-speaking countries are technologically developed and acknowledged with different discoveries, there are some other non-English countries such as Russia, France, Germany, Portugal, Spain, China, among others.

At the international level, majority of the Nigerian populace are monolingual, that is, they speak English language only. Within the country, the only language of technology used in the education system is English language. Educated Nigerians can mostly, and in a general sense, only access information that are divulged in English language only. Most of our technologists can only relate their researches to information disseminated in English. This is because they have limited access to other civilised world, particularly, the non-English speaking ones. Thus, the discoveries in those languages that are not hitherto, disseminated in English elude them most of the time. Restricting development of Nigeria to English technology and advancement is not enough in accelerating growth and development in Nigeria.

On this note, individual bilingualism at the international level for Nigerians will be of great help for the country. Thus, every Nigerian should possess oratory and literacy skills of at least one other language of technology advancement plus the English language. This is to be done at individual level (Individual Bilingualism). When this happens, Nigeria will be a country in which global civilization can be expressed in different international languages, making the country to be multilingual (State Multilingualism) at international level.

The Role of Educational Institutions

The educational institutions are the avenues of teaching and learning. Knowledge and skills are acquired in these institutions. The educational institutions are the schools (primary to tertiary institutions) and the government ministries of education (state and federal ministries of education). The main institutions that are involved in this paper are the tertiary institutions. The tertiary institutions deal with mature students. On that note, this paper advocate that the Nigerian tertiary institutions should incorporate compulsory second language acquisition into their school curriculum. Not only that, the National Universities' Commission (NUC) will be of great help. NUC should see to this as a major yardstick in accrediting tertiary institutions.

From the discovery of this research, second language acquisition is to some extents instituted at the Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State, Nigeria. In this university as this research discovers, foreign languages such as French and German are taught not as degree awarding programmes but as means of training students to attain some level of proficiency in the languages while the stay in school for the period of their studies. Although the approach used by the institution is not outrightly the one espoused by this paper, the effort at registering another international language into the minds of their students is highly commendable.

Compulsory second language acquisition at the tertiary levels can be achieved. Tertiary institutions should have Colleges of Second Language Acquisition (CSLA). These colleges will be in charge of regulations of the programme. When students are admitted to the tertiary institutions to study in the

higher institutions, they must be made to realise that apart from their respective courses which they will study and be awarded with a degree after their studies in the higher institutions, individual student must choose one of the foreign languages from the varying ones accredited to be taught in the institution, and show proficiency in it before graduating. Thus, as a student graduates with a degree in his/her chosen course, he/ she also become a language specialist. This language can later be used as an eye opener by the graduates to research and privy into the culture, technology and civilization of the people of such speech community and hitherto, make use of assets of the language to enhance domestic development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

The paper showcased second language acquisition in the school curriculum. The languages concerned are modern languages of technology such as French, Russian, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Chinese, among others. These languages are to be incorporated into the indigenous education system of Nigeria, particularly the tertiary institutions as second languages in relation to English as international languages. Apart from bagging a degree of universities, every graduate will be proud of proficiency skills in the chosen language and automatically, become bilingual at international level. While this occurs, Nigeria will as time progresses, attain multilingualism at international level (state multilingualism). As such, the indigenous education system in Nigeria will be developed and this will on the long run serve as panacea for national growth and development.

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