

English Language as Instrument for Promoting Harmony Among Students of Higher Institutions in Ogun State

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Abstract

The study examines English language as instrument for promoting harmony among students of higher institutions in Ogun State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population comprises of all students of higher institutions in Ogun State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select five (5) higher institutions in Ogun State in which twenty (20) students were chosen from the selected higher institutions to make a total of one hundred (100) in Ogun State as sample for study. Two research questions were used and answered in this study. Questionnaire was used as instrument for this study. The instrument was given to experts for construct and content validation. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha. Data was analyzed using simple percentage statistical tool. The study revealed that, English Language as lingua franca in Nigeria act as a veritable instrument of integrating the nation and her people, unifying the ethnic groups thereby creating a sense of belonging, oneness and brotherhood which are quite vital for achieving harmonious living and social stability among students in higher institutions in Ogun state. It is therefore recommended that English should continue to be the language of instruction and communication in academic institutions as it has been able to effectively and smoothly promote harmonious and peaceful co-existence among students of diverse ethnics and background by neutralizing the language barrier and ethno-linguistic hostility.

Background to the Study

The existence, survival and prosperity of human are only possible with effective communication. Communication which has to do with the acts of speaking, listening to others, writing for and to oneself and the others (public or private) is the basis upon which humankind is naturally created and made to survive with. Through the process of communication (writing, speaking and listening), humans are able to establish and live a meaningful and fulfilled life. Communication becomes the basic instrument through which all objectives of life are achieved and where such fails to be effective, it results in misunderstanding, conflicts, failures and many other negative consequences. Communication among human is thus carried in several ways, especially through oral communications, written as well as the symbolic actions through gestures as noted by (Muslim, Tiamiyu, Olaleye and Popoola, 2006).

Communication is only possible through language and symbols in a symbiotic relation. Communication through language is a basic and an indispensable character of man throughout the history and existence of man on earth. Language is the basic tool and machinery for every communication and through which the passage of ideas, feelings, thought and emotions are made not only possible but more convenient. Halliday in Adediran (2022) asserted that language, words and sentences do not stand in isolation and that language is used to achieve many interacting, communicating and social functions that involve referential, connective, poetic, interpersonal, emotive and textual functions. Ogundepe, Alabi, and Okedigba, (2009) have defined language as the means with which members of social groups and societies exchange ideas, information and such other related things. It is thus a medium through which self-expression, interactions as well as sending and receipt of ideas and information among members of social grouping. It is the main means used in and transmitting education, i.e., it is the primary and principal medium used by human to establish communication among them. For Denga in Olanranwaju (2010) language is involved in higher mental thinking, reasoning and problems solving and that verbal language quickens the thinking process and thus effective communication and understanding. Language has a strong binding force of unity among linguistic groups hence language is a powerful instrument of communication and a source of unity that could be utilized for maximum effect.

Nigeria's language situation is a complex one, as the number of languages spoken in the country cannot be given with any exactitude. Yusuf (2006) claims that "the diversity in ethnic groups in Nigeria has given rise to multiplicity of languages, thus making the country multilingual". Bamisaye (2006), also lends credence to this claim when he asserts that "Nigeria has not got an accurate census of her languages" and that the "statistics about Nigerian languages varies among scholars". However, there is ample evidence to lend credibility to an estimation of about 400 indigenous languages in the country. Thus, Bamigbose (2001) asserts that; it is estimated that there are about 400 different languages in Nigeria. Three of those languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) are often referred to as the major languages of the country; but very few persons speak more than one of these languages. However, the Ethnologue of world languages (2017) puts the number of

languages in Nigeria at 527. Of these 527, 520 are living and seven (7) are extinct. Of the living languages, 510 are indigenous and 10 are non-indigenous or foreign. Furthermore, 20 are institutional, 78 are developing, 350 are vigorous, 28 are in trouble and 44 are dying. Summarizing the language situation in Nigeria according to Oladosu (2007), affirms that “linguistics diversity is one of the better-known attributes of Nigeria, a fact recognized by the composers of the original national anthem who agreed that tribes and tongue differences exist in Nigeria”.

Given this complex language situation, Nigeria then faces a complex ethnic grouping scenario with very perplexing linguistic problems. Olanrewaju (2010) observes that the implication of such perplexing linguistic situation is the lack of “a common, easy and effective communication among the various linguistic groups”. Obviously, a situation like this leads to a cultural, social, political, religious conflicts, insecurity and insensitivity. A situation such as this can still be overcome if one of the three or all the three major Nigerian languages – Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba, is/are adopted as national language(s). Doing this will to a large extent, solve the problems of national identity, ethnic cohesion, security and social stability. But the linguistic situation where none of the indigenous languages is dominant within the sociological entity called Nigeria, makes it imperative for an individual to still learn and use the linguistic knowledge of another language to be able to communicate and relate harmoniously with other people from different ethnic groups. The English Language naturally therefore assumes this position within the Nigeria nation-state.

English Language in Nigeria plays the role of mediation. It started as a contact language between the earliest European traders and their Nigerian middlemen along the coasts. Later the 'pidgin' otherwise broken English developed. Pidgin is a mixture of English and the indigenous languages from various ethnic groups who could not interact and communicate among themselves because of multiplicity of languages. English now became important socially, politically, culturally and otherwise. English language unlike any of the indigenous languages, because of its neutrality, does not engender ethnic hostility. Rather it ensures peaceful co-existence among Nigerians. It is more so now that it has developed the Nigerian texture which is an 'in group' feeling that makes all users of English in different parts of the world develop a variety for internal communication. There is an 'in-group' feeling among users of English in Nigeria which engenders oneness, unity and loyalty. Thus, introduction of English Language generally afforded Nigerians irrespective of their ethno-linguistic groups, ease of communication, socialization, mutual understanding and cooperation necessary for national integration, social stability and development of any nation-state and vital for self-realization and fulfillment of her citizens. With such a fundamental demand that falls squarely on the shoulder of language, the English Language becomes the veritable and imperative language capable of doing justice, socio-linguistically, to the national needs of the Nigerian nation-state, albeit ensuring national integration and social stability. Linguistically, the introduction of English Language into the multilingual Nigerian society afforded the various ethnicity groups ease of communication and interaction. The use of English Language enabled them to understand themselves (Oladosu, 2007).

English therefore, has gained general acceptance and prominence among Nigerians irrespective of their background and is in fact the bridge builder between and among the diverse peoples. And despite constitutional provisions for the use of indigenous languages, especially the Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo, none of the three has been able to achieve the prominence, acceptability and adaptability as the English language have done. Some public and private educational institutions even ban or discourage the use of indigenous or other languages than English in order to maintain the standard and ensure excelling in English among their students (Oladosu, 2007). Adoption of English as both official and national language has eased the tension of hostility and distrust among various ethnic groups of Nigeria and thus allow for effective and smooth communication, understanding as well as harmonious relationship. English Language in Nigeria becomes the unavoidable linguistic imperative for effective communication, interaction, association, exchange of ideas, share of views and values, pursuit of collective dreams, enhancing of national integration and social stability (Ojukwu and Ojukwu, 2005).

Prior to the adoption of English as Nigeria's official and national language in the 1914 amalgamation after independence, series of national debate were held as to the suitability of English language in conducting national affairs; a foreign language in a foreign land. Opponents of English favour either the simultaneous use of the three indigenous "major" languages or the adoption of one as using the three at the same time was considered unmanageable and it was difficult to choose which of the three to stand as a national language. In the presence of this linguistic national difficulty, the proponents of English as the Lingua Franca argued that it is the only language that can be accepted by the generality of the Nigerian populace in a highly tensed and multi-lingual and religious environment. They argued that there was nothing wrong with using English as a Lingua Franca more so as such use also has its international advantages. In fact, on a lighter note, Chinua Achebe opines that if the white man was not afraid and ashamed to colonize Africa, why should Nigerians be afraid to colonize English language? The debate ended with the inclusion of the English language in 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as Nigeria's official language. Ever since then, English has retained its place as the lingua franca of Nigeria and is being used in the education, courts, government, media, etc.

In Nigeria, one major problem warring against it from inception as a nation-state is the lack of national identity. What exists is ethnic identity. Members of each ethnic group would rather be loyal and committed to the development of their ethnic group than to the nation called "Nigeria". This strong tie to the ethnic group or nationality is not unconnected with the ethnic language. Therefore, the use of English Language in Nigeria by a Nigerian in such a way that is "able to carry his peculiar experience. Achebe in Bamgbose (2001) is about the best way of providing national integration for the citizen. No other single indigenous language can give this type of national integration, feeling, pride and sense of belonging to the multi-ethnic people of diverse languages in Nigeria (Olanrewaju, 2010). Olanrewaju equally observes that: It is the Nigerian texture in the English Language in Nigeria that provides the "in-group" variety for internal

communication and gives the individuals the sense of oneness, unity and loyalty. The in group element reflects a common national background, a common national culture and a common attitude to life. Given its neutral status, the English Language, unlike any of the Nigerian indigenous linguistic system, does not engender any ethnic hostility. It rather promotes harmonious co-existence amidst Nigeria's ethnic and linguistic diversity. Through the use of English Language, the different ethnic groups in Nigeria are carried along thereby fostering within the people a sense of belonging, which will inevitably lead to the attainment of not only national development and growth but also national integration and social stability.

In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, where diversify of cultures and languages abound, this diversity in cultures and languages has various repercussions for national development, national cohesion and national consciousness (Adediran, 2022). This therefore imperatively necessitates a second language which will link up or bridge the communication gap in a heterogeneous society. In Nigeria, such a role falls on English Language to become a mediator. Thus, English language as an official language has silenced the national language debate at least for a while. English language played a major and conspicuous role in the fight for Nigerian independence. English was the instrument for the peaceful agitation for independence that was bloodless. No wonder it is said that Nigeria got her independence on the platter of gold. Credit must go to use of English. Almost all the national dailies and political gazettes appear in English. Without the use of English, activities in various government houses and offices would definitely crumble or end in chaos. The emergence of English language in Nigeria and its acceptance as the official language has undoubtedly positively affected every sphere of the country.

With regards to the well over 397 languages spoken across the length and breadth of Nigeria, English has inevitably become and remained the popular and accommodating language and means of communication among diverse Nigerians without any feeling of superiority/inferiority complex and has become a lingua franca with which all Nigerians communicate in education, business, politics, economy, inter-denominational/religious gatherings and services, etc. At every developmental level in Nigerian socio-political, economic, religious, literary, scientific, technological life and pursuit of national identity, ethnicity cohesion, security and social stability, English is chiefly utilized. The consequence of all these is the sense of unity and belonging that is accorded to the Nigerian state by all, irrespective of whatever differences that might exist among them and by extension, the Nigerian national security, interest and values are further guaranteed and promoted.

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of this research work is to examine English language as instrument for promoting harmony among students of higher institutions in Ogun State. Specific objectives are to:

- i. Examine how English language serve as instrument for promoting harmony among students in higher institutions in Ogun State

- ii. Examine the Essence of English Language for National Integration and Social Stability

Research Questions

- i. How does English language serve as instrument for promoting harmony among students in higher institutions in Ogun State?
- ii. What is the Essence of English Language for National Integration and Social Stability?

Methodology

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. Population comprises of all students of higher institutions in Ogun State. Simple random sampling technique was used to select five (5) higher institutions in Ogun State in which twenty (20) students were chosen from the selected higher institutions to make a total of one hundred (100) in Ogun State as sample for study. Two research questions were used and answered in this study. Questionnaire was used as instrument for this study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection. The questionnaire contained items on the main title of study. A self-developed questionnaire was used as instrument for data collection.

The questionnaire contained items on the main title of study. To ensure the validity of the instrument; the researcher gave the draft of the questionnaire to the experts to restructure the instrument in line with the research questions. To determine the reliability of the instrument, a pilot test was conducted and the scores were tabulated and the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient formula was applied and a correlation coefficient of 0.72 was obtained. On the basis of the corrections done on the questionnaire items, and the test-retest reliability coefficient computed, the instrument was judged adequate, valid and reliable for the purpose of gathering relevant data for the study. The instrument was given to experts in primary education for construct and content validation. Data collected were analyzed using simple percentage statistical tool.

Presentation of Data Analysis and Results

Research Question one: How does English language serve as instrument for promoting harmony among students of higher institutions in Ogun State?

Table 1.

S/N	ITEMS	YES		NO		TOTAL	
		Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %
1.	English Language enabled them to understand themselves and live in unity	74.00	74.00	26.00	26.00	100.00	100.00
2.	English language serves as universal medium for communicating technological information	46.00	46.00	54.00	54.00	100.00	100.00
3.	English Language is the instrument by which Nigerian democratic processes develop and are maintained social harmony	60.00	60.00	40.00	40.00	100.00	100.00
TOTAL		180.00	60.00	120.00	40.00	300.00	100.00

Source: Fieldwork 2023

The study shows that that majority of the respondents 74.00% chose 'Yes' for item 1 while the remaining 26.00% opted for 'No'. For item 2, majority of the respondents 46.00% chose 'Yes' while the remaining 54.00% selected 'No'. 60 of the respondents 60.00% selected 'Yes' for item 3 while the remaining 40.00% chose 'No'. Since, the cumulative values of YES (60.00%) is higher that NO (40.00%) responses.

Research Question Two: What is the Essence of English Language for National Integration and Social Stability?

Table 2.

S/N	ITEMS	YES		NO		TOTAL	
		Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %	Freq (N)	Percent %
1.	English Language which is the medium of instruction in Nigeria post-primary and post-secondary education system	90.00	90.00	10.00	10.00	100.00	100.00
2.	English Language promotes harmonious co-existence amidst Nigeria's ethnic and linguistic diversity	58.00	56.00	42.00	42.00	100.00	100.00
3.	English Language as a veritable tool of mass mobilization an social reengineering	82.00	82.00	18.00	18.00	100.00	100.00
TOTAL		230.00	76.70	70.00	23.30	300.00	100.00

Source: Field work, 2023

The study shows that that majority of the respondents 90.00% chose 'Yes' for item 1 while the remaining 10.00% chose 'No'. For item 2, majority of the respondents 58.00% selected 'Yes' while the remaining 42.00% selected 'No'. Majority of the respondents 82.00% opted for 'Yes' for item 3 while the remaining 18.00% chose 'No'. Therefore, since the cumulative value of Yes (76.7%) is greater than No (23.3%) value.

Discussion of Findings

Table 1 indicates the English language as instrument for promoting harmony among students of higher institutions in Ogun State. The findings revealed that English language serve as instrument for promoting harmony among students of higher institutions in Ogun State. The findings are in support of Oladosu, (2007), that introduction of English Language generally afforded Nigerians irrespective of their ethno-linguistic groups, ease of communication, socialization, mutual understanding and cooperation necessary for national integration, social stability and development of any nation-state and vital for self-realization and fulfillment of her citizens. With such a fundamental demand that falls squarely on the shoulder of language, the English Language becomes the veritable and imperative language capable of doing justice, socio-linguistically, to the national needs of the Nigerian nation-state, albeit ensuring national integration and social stability. Linguistically, the introduction of English Language into the multilingual Nigerian society afforded the various ethnicity groups ease of communication and interaction. The use of English Language enabled them to understand themselves.

The findings further report the essence of English Language for National Integration and social stability. The results revealed that English Language is an Essence in National Integration and Social Stability in Nigeria. The above findings are in agreement with the opinion of Ugoji (2010) says that English Language serves as the veritable tool through which information-social, political, religious and economic are being transmitted to the people in Nigeria. Ugoji rightly notes that considering the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria, especially in the area of language, the only way through which the various multiethnic and linguistic groups could be reached is through the use of the English Language. For Social Stability to be achieved in Nigeria human resource development is indispensable and the English Language is imperative in ensuring such development. Tudaro in Ugoji (2010) states all the contributory factors to economic development, human resources stand out as a major force because people are the real wealth of any nation and because the basic objective of economic development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long health and creative lives.

Conclusions

Language being an interwoven and an integral part of human; it's essential for interaction, communication, social existence and harmony. This paper has been able to exclusively reveal the effectiveness of English Language in achieving the much-needed national identity. English Language assumed prestigious status in a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic Nigerian situation. The elevated position of English Language becomes necessary given the inability of the various ethnic-languages to assume a national language status or

the nation's lingua franca. So, given its neutrality, it therefore behooves the English Language in Nigeria to act as a veritable instrument of integrating the nation and her people, unifying the ethnic groups thereby creating a sense of belonging, oneness and brotherhood which are quite vital for achieving harmonious living and social stability that will inevitably lead to socio-economic and political development, collective and individual fulfillment and creativity. The paper equally identified that, the onus of linking Nigeria to the rest of the international community lies with proficiency in English Language as a veritable instrument of achieving international integration as well as sustaining national integration, and social stability.

Recommendations

With the dominant role played by English in various spheres of lives of Nigerians, this paper recommends that:

1. English should continue to be the language of instruction and communication in academic institutions as it has been able to effectively and smoothly promote harmonious and peaceful co-existence among students of diverse ethnics and background by neutralizing the language barrier and ethno-linguistic hostility.
2. The various stakeholders in the Nigerian nation-state should appreciate and continue to employ English Language as a vital instrument for achieving national cohesion, peaceful co-existence and harmonious living among the diverse ethnic groups.
3. The use of English language should be greatly enhanced through educational, political and other means up till time when Nigeria may wish to or be able to adopt national language or replace it.
4. The use of common and most effective media such as the mass should be optimal in order to effectively sustain and improve the Nigerians proficiency in English Language.
5. Mass literacy programme or project in English language should be greatly enhanced among Nigerians with special attention to publications e.g. newspapers in foreign languages – English and French.
6. More so, Nigerians proficiency in English language can be improved through films, movies and social media platforms.

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