

THE ROLE OF MULTILINGUALISM IN REVAMPING NIGERIA'S ECONOMY: FOREIGN LANGUAGE'S PERSPECTIVE.

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Abstract

The economic power of languages is a major determinant in the modern world due to its peculiar relevance in bringing people of diverse linguistic backgrounds together for the economic, cultural, and social development of human societies, the world over. The linguistic dichotomy at national and international levels would become very cumbersome as human societies are more or less pluralistic in nature. Multilingual nations are plagued with so many challenges such as language barriers which make communication difficult and thereby affect the socio-economic activities of the country. In the case of Nigeria, the advent of colonialism gave rise to the use of a foreign language (English Language) as the national or official language which opened the opportunity for the social, cultural, and economic advancement of the people for the overall benefit of the country. This paper has explored the numerous advantages offered by the multilingual nature of Nigeria with respect to foreign languages as Nigerians are competing fervently in the global labour markets in many countries around the world as well as trading with other countries across the globe. With the advancement in ICT, so many Nigerians are working and earning their money in hard currencies in the comfort of their homes. The monies accrued from those living in the diaspora are remitted back home and reinvested into Nigeria's economy as many are setting up industries and allowing the money to circulate within the national boundary.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Languages, Globalization, Economy.

Introduction

Language is one of the greatest human attributes that distinguishes man from other animals. It is through language that we make meaning out of human existence and a medium upon which culture is communicated and transcends from one generation to the next. As human society is pluralistic or multilingual in nature, the world is blessed with many languages. Like many countries of the world, Nigeria is made up of ethnic

conglomerates with distinctive languages and dialects, that is, a multilingual culture which is the mother tongue of the various aboriginal people on one hand, and the official language (English language) which came into existence as a result of colonialism. This takes us to the concept of multilingualism. Multilingualism is the use of two, three, or more languages alternately by members of a speech community, depending on the circumstance and role (Akujobi, 2019; Edim,

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2022). Appel and Muiyeken (1987) cited in (Edim, 2022) are of the view that there are two different types of multilingualism and they are: individual and societal multilingualism. According to them, societal multilingualism occurs when two or more languages are spoken in a given society. They define individual multilingualism as having the ability to use and comprehend two or more languages (Edim, 2022). According to Akujobi (2019:110), "individual multilingualism" refers to the ability to communicate in more than one language. He further stressed that this ability can be demonstrated by celebrities or by members of the general public, such as children from immigrant families who speak their native tongue at home, the national language at school, and at least one additional foreign language (Akujobi, 2019). In the same vein, Edim (2022) posited that a multilingual

as when languages share different functions in society as in the case of the Swiss Canton of Gränobünden, where German, Romansh, and Italian are official languages with theoretically equal status, Romansh and Italian are frequently overruled by German due to the general bilingualism of the minorities." Additionally, he describes "institutional multilingualism as a situation where institutions or organizations offer their services in multiple languages, such as the United Nations (UN) and European Union, while "political multilingualism" is defined as when areas are divided into more or less monolingual language zones, as is the case with Flemish, French, and German in Belgium (EU)."

It is pertinent to note that Nigeria is made up of over 250 ethnic groups with different languages ranging from Igbo, Yoruba, Tiv, Fulfude, Igala, etc. However, some challenges go with language barriers in a pluralist or multilingual society. It becomes a serious challenge when people living in a country that is made up of different ethnic

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human is someone fluent in two or more languages.

Individual multilingualism should be distinguished from "multi-competence," which focuses more on the connections between different languages. It has been demonstrated that individual multilingualism works as a connected system rather than each language functioning as a distinct system in which the components of the individual languages together, make up a single "integrated competence" through interaction and influence (Cook, 2008). Therefore, individual multilingualism highlights a person's capacity to speak or communicate in more than two languages, regardless of the method of learning and level of proficiency. On the other hand, Wandruzka (1981) cited in Akujobi (2019: 111) defines "Social Multilingualism:

groupings do not understand or speak languages other than their native tongues; it disrupts economic activities when people from the other sides cannot communicate easily due to linguistic differences. However, multilingualism becomes a blessing when properly harnessed because efficient communication has the propensity

for economic progress and development. Having said that colonialism introduced the English language into the annals of Nigeria's cultural and political history and thereby opened Nigeria up to competing with other global communities in terms of trading and exchange of technical know-how on one hand, and on the other hand, imposing the English Language on the natives as the national language also provided ample opportunities for the people to break the language barriers for effective communication for the socio-economic development of Nigeria. In the same vein, Nigeria incorporated foreign languages in its academic curriculum at the tertiary level with the view to competing among the comity of nations in the global market and workforce. Some universities in Nigeria are offering foreign languages like French, German, Spanish, Russian, etc. In a multilingual society in general and Nigeria in particular, workers can compete for jobs in their home country and elsewhere in the world because they speak not only their indigenous languages but English, French, and what have you. For instance, many American workers miss out on global business opportunities because they are competing against an increasingly skilled global workforce that is both multilingual and also fluent in English (Gandára and Acevedo, 2016).

It is pertinent to note the world has become a global village due to advancements in technology, therefore, in this era of globalization, when all international boundaries have been broken by economic activities; language proficiency becomes a major determinant of economic

breakthroughs through the global workforce. Further, multinational organizations and companies are investing huge resources into human capacity development in the area of language acquisition in English (Gandára and Acevedo, 2016).

No wonder Willie Brandt, the former Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany emphasized the economic power of language by saying "If I'm selling to you, I speak your language, but if I'm buying, then you have to speak German" (Akujobi, 2019). This assertion of his accentuates the power of language in individual and corporate transactions.

It is imperative to note that multilingual workers expand the boundaries of their prospective workplace, from local to global due to the transition of market forces from agricultural to the industrial mode of production, and to what is now the era of the information age, there are great opportunities for those who can analyze, collaborate, and communicate with people all over the world while providing services in the local language of the client (Gandára and Acevedo, 2016).

The concept of multilingualism cannot be overemphasized. However, Nigeria as a country has been bedeviled with myriads of economic challenges ranging from unemployment, lack of industrialization, and inflation. In light of the foregoing, this paper set out to examine the role of multilingualism in revamping Nigeria's economy: a foreign language's perspective.

Theoretical Framework

This paper will rely on the theory of globalization as an analytical prism upon which the role of multilingualism will help in revamping Nigeria's economy. The theory of globalization sees the world as a mechanism for increasing integration, with a focus on the realm of economic transactions. This theory has given its attention and stress to cultural components and their global communication is one of the most significant characteristics of the globalization stance. Globalization theorists contend that the major contemporary components for development interpretation rather than the economic, financial, and political relations are the cultural ties between states (Reyes, 2001; Held, 2004). The ability of technology to connect individuals all over the world to a greater extent is one of the most significant variables in this cross-cultural communication (Reyes, 2001). The followings are the major tenets that underpin the theory of globalization:

1. The acknowledgment that global communications systems are becoming more and more important and that as a result, all nations are interacting much more frequently and easily, both at the governmental level and among citizens;
2. To recognize that while the main communications systems operate among the more developed nations, these mechanisms are also spreading in their use to less developed nations, and by implication will improve the likelihood that marginalized people in developing countries can communicate and interact utilizing

modern technologies in a global setting.

3. The social, economic, and cultural norms of countries are likely to have undergone structural and significant changes as a result of the modern communications system. Local and small businesses are increasingly able to take use of the latest technological advancements in communications from an economic standpoint. This circumstance is developing a brand-new atmosphere for conducting business, utilizing useful resources, and tools, selling goods, and utilizing the "virtual monetary system." From a cultural standpoint, the new communication goods, at least in terms of commercial transactions under the existing circumstances, are uniting patterns of communication throughout the world;
4. These new communication trends are having an impact on the idea of minorities inside specific nations. The influential corporate and political elites in each nation participate in this global connection even though these minorities are not fully integrated into the new communication platforms. In emerging countries, the political and business elite still have the final say;
5. Cultural factors will determine the types of economic and social structures in each nation. The main cultural elements within the conditions of each nation have an impact on these social conditions.

This theory aptly captured the extent to which foreign languages such as English, French, German, Chinese, and Russian to mention a few will go a long way in revamping the already depressed Nigerian economy. Given the high rate of graduate unemployment across the country, a good number of Nigeria graduates are migrating to different parts of the world in the quest for greener pastures, and this mass exodus is made possible due to their good understanding of the English language to compete with the rest of the world in the labour market. In the same vein, some Nigerians with good levels of French, German, Chinese, etc. are also migrating to countries where their language skills will be utilized in return for monetary gains. However, the mass exodus is a result of the economic downturn in the country (which could be referred to as a brain drain) notwithstanding, there is more to the fact that the remittance on the part of those living abroad cannot be swept under the carpet. The monies entering Nigeria, from its citizens domiciled across the globe are circulating in the nation's economy as most of them are investing in our local industries.

In the same vein, the majority of Nigerians with vast knowledge of other world major languages are working with various embassies in Nigeria, thereby eking out their living. Furthermore, multilingualism affords Nigerians the opportunity to facilitate international trade with global communities like China, the UK, Italy, Russia, the US, etc. It is also due to the economic power of languages that enable the Nigeria state to have direct foreign investments, the bulk of people that made up the employees in Nigeria are economically engaged in the workplace

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by multinational companies like Shell BP, Chevron, Exxon Mobil, Total, Schlumberger, Julius Berger, to mention but a few.

Finally, opening up opportunities for foreign industries to establish and invest in Nigeria will go a long way in reducing unemployment to the barest minimum as that will expedite economic development as the vast majority of the reserved army of unemployed would be meaningfully integrated into the workforce. It is also pertinent to point out that if the economy of Nigeria is resuscitated and repositioned, people from other neighboring francophone West Africa in particular, and the world at large will begin to migrate to Nigeria in search of greener pasture and thereby provide cheap labour for both the multinational and local industries. It is also germane at this juncture to point out that using the English Language as our Lingua franca has made communication between Igbo, Ibira, Birom, Jukum, Yoruba, and Hausa among others possible and by implication makes the exchange of goods and services less cumbersome for the overall growth the economy.

Foreign Languages and Economic Progress

There is no gainsaying the fact that oil production is the major source of Nigerian revenue (Appah, 2022). Be that as it may, Nigerians engage in trading and other business activities within the country as well as exporting and importing goods and services to/ from the outside world (Iwuoha and Awoke, 2019). "Facilitation of both local and international trade is made possible due to the existence of English as a language of

national communication (Obiegbo, 2015; Joda, Musa, and Idris, 2019). In the same vein, a good number of Nigerians have acquired other world languages that enable them to engage in foreign trades by importing finished goods from Italy, Japan, Germany, China, and America among others” (Moyejoh, 2022). It is important to note that at the national level, the English language has bridged a huge communication gap which has become of economic importance as someone from the southern part of Nigeria could move up north to meaningfully contribute to the economic development of that region (Obiegbo, 2015). It facilitates the trading of agricultural products from the north to the southern parts. The Igbo people of Nigeria who are experts in trading and commerce are going to the hinterlands in the north to buy perishable and other agricultural products while the northerners are also coming to the south to buy manufactured goods. If not for the economic power of language especially the English language, it would have been difficult for the northern farmers to produce in commercial quantities due to their inability to market their products to other parts of the country. Therefore, apart from oil exportation, trading is the lifeblood of the Nigerian economy.

At the global level, Nigerians are not left out in international trade as most of them thrived in exporting raw materials like cocoa, tobacco, palm oil, timber, cotton, camwood, and natural minerals to advanced or developed countries. In the same vein, a good number of businessmen in Nigeria are trading with the outside world via the importation of manufactured goods like cars, spare parts, textile products, etc. Foreign languages have

played a prominent role in the economic development of the country (Mishina and Iskandar (2019). For instance, the use of English Language as our official language enabled multinational industries like Julius Berger, MTN, Airtel, CCGC, Arab Contractor, AGIP, and Shell BP, to mention but a few who set up their industries to meet with the local demands and in turn, provide huge employment opportunities for the Nigerian citizens. Furthermore, some Nigerian entrepreneurs like INNOSON GROUP, IBETO GROUP, and DANGOTE GROUP, among other bourgeoisie are setting up their manufacturing industries by employing expatriates to handle their technical equipment and thereby facilitate the technological transfer.

Information and Communication Technology and Economic Progress

With the advancement in science and technology, the world has become a global village which was made possible by the help of languages (Reyes, 2001). Multilingualism at the global level can be narrowed to the world’s major languages like English Language, French, German, Spanish, etc., and therefore, it opened up the doors of communication from all the nooks and crannies of the world through the improvement of the information and communication technologies (Akujobi, 2019). Nigeria has immensely benefitted from the economic impact of globalization as Nigerians both individual and government can transact businesses within the comfort of their home. For example, with the help of modern communication gadgets, a lot of Nigerians are engaging in genuine economic

activities through online trading, working for international companies and organizations from the comfort of their homes through the help of internet, forex trading, crypto businesses, and what have you.

They earn money in hard currencies and reinvest the monies into the Nigerian economy and allow the money to circulate through the exchange market. Some of them inject the money into the local economy by establishing any business of their choice and some prefer to set up small and medium-scale businesses in the country. Additionally, some Nigerians through the help of ICT have accessed the global markets by advertising their local products to the wider global community as well as writing and publishing books on Amazon and other platforms for affiliate marketing. This has gone a long way in lifting people out of unemployment and poverty (Ukwuoma, 2019). The money they are making through the help of ICT has gone a long way in repositioning the economy of the country as they reinvest their monies in the local currency (Ukwuoma, 2019).

Conclusion and Recommendation

The economy of Nigeria has been plagued by numerous challenges but with the help of modern technology which compressed the world into one global village,

multilingualism has played a crucial role in making communication easier for people to interact. It is imperative to note that the world would have been a boring place to be without the help of globally accepted languages that integrate the world into a global community. At the local level, if not for the English Language, communication among Nigerians of various ethnic extractions would be a herculean task if not impossible. With the help of English as an official language in the country, it becomes a medium upon which people from divergent ethnic backgrounds come together to advance their economic interests for the overall development of the country. While at the global level, it enables Nigerians to transact business with people across the world. The Nigerian economy has benefitted from the impact of foreign languages as it has helped in boosting the country's economy through the exchange of goods and services.

The Nigerian state through its policies and programmes must incorporate other world languages as compulsory subjects/courses from basic education to the tertiary level. It is also very necessary to incentivize the learning of the major foreign languages by providing scholarship opportunities for students to travel abroad for a better language training course.

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