

## LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND PEACE BUILDING IN AN ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICT-TORN NIGERIA: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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### Abstract

*One important tool that has kept Nigeria's fragile unity in place has been language. The role played by language in Nigeria's unity and insurance of peace can never be neglected despite the vast differences in the cultural and linguistic makeup of the country. Hence, language education has become a tool that should not be underemphasized in the search for national peace, which seems to have been neglected in the country in recent times. This paper examines the roles language education could play in the building of peace in Nigeria amidst the current and recurrent ethno-religious skirmishes in the country. Using theoretical and literature reviews as its methodology, the paper found that language education is a relevant tool that can build peace in multilingual and ethno-religious conflict-torn Nigeria. The paper reviewed the challenges that have faced the execution of language education policies and made relevant recommendations on how the country can benefit from the execution of modern language policies in the education sector to ensure lasting peace and unity.*

**Keywords:** Language, Ethno-religious conflicts, Language Education, Nigeria, Peace-building

### INTRODUCTION

One hundred and eight years after that amalgamation and with more than 300 ethnic groups and over 500 languages within its boundaries (The World Factbook, 2022), Nigeria is one of the world's melting pots of ethno-linguistic variance. Also, religion has played a major role in the challenges faced by Nigeria as a country. Most Nigerians are Muslims or Protestant Christians, with varying estimated figures about which religion is larger in population. However, there are a considerable number of believers of other religions. As noted by the United States Commission on International Religious

Freedom (USCIRF) (2016), a vast majority of the population of Northern Nigeria are Muslims, while the two major religions in the Southwest are mixed; the Southeast is largely Christian-dominated and the central region called the 'Middle Belt' is home to a lot of small ethnic groups that are predominantly Christians, with a significant Muslim population as well. This ethno-linguistic and ethno-religious diversity has been expected to strengthen the ties of unity in Nigeria, but it has failed to do so.

With the population of the country, which has been estimated to be two hundred and eleven million, four hundred thousand, seven hundred

and four (211,400,704) people (The World Bank, 2021), conflicts are bound to occur. These people belong to different religions, and even within religions, there are various sects - these are the laying stones for various ethno-religious conflicts. As much as people conflict over ethnic backgrounds, religion is also one of the biggest reasons why people go head-to-head in conflict in any society. Salawu (2010) notes that since her independence, Nigeria, as a multi-ethnic state, has been wrestling with the problem of ethnicity and ethno-religious conflicts. These conflicts and the resultant losses of lives and properties, coupled with the lack of a lasting solution, have birthed many ethnic militia groups, which emerged, as well as the deep segregation among the various indigenous groups, have further fueled religious prejudice, resulting in more vicious and gory clashes with a lot of disturbing outcomes. This is because these militia groups are sometimes at the forefront of these ethno-religious agendas.

However, a major human feature that has united groups of people across ethnic and religious divides has been language. Language has a bonding effect on people because it is a powerful tool for the spread of culture, beliefs, morals, and views from one generation to another, and it has helped to determine the overall status of any nation (Yusuf, 2012). Isayev (1977, p. 1992) submits that language in any indigenous people is their “most important asset (because) there is no such thing as a nation without a common linguistic basis”. The explanation points to the fact that for a ‘nation’ to exist, it must have the same language, which will be its tool of unification and purpose-achievement, and where that does not exist, such a set of people cannot be called a ‘nation’.

However, in countries where many nations exist, and different languages are spoken by the different nations or ethnic groups, it then becomes imperative for a language to be

assigned the all-important role of language of unity. This language must be able, acceptable, and recognized by all the nations in that nation-state or country. According to Yusuf (2012), such a language (or languages) is also assigned such a role or roles as the deployment for the organization of the country’s government and other matters. This phenomenon obtains in Nigeria, just as in other African countries, where multilingualism is common. Some African countries had no problem in the assignment of roles to the various languages within their borders; one of such countries is South Africa, where indigenous languages were given roles alongside the English language. But as Ogwudile (2019) notes, since its amalgamation and independence, language has been a huge problem in Nigeria due to the existence of many languages. This, Ogwudile (2019) and Yusuf (2012) submit, led to the adoption of the English language as the formal language in Nigeria.

Although the adoption of English by Nigeria has helped in intra-ethnic, intra-religious, inter-ethnic, and inter-religious communication across the country, it has failed to fully enhance the national unity of Nigeria as a country because it has not stemmed the tide of ethno-religious conflicts within the country’s borders. The country has witnessed different levels and repeat of ethno-religious conflicts since its independence, including in recent times. These conflicts have opened up the need to revisit the issue of how to ensure unity in Nigeria through the proper deployment of language education in the country.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of this paper is to examine the prospects and challenges that come with the proper implementation of language education policies in the country. The paper discussed the benefits that Nigeria would get if the country properly implements a well-documented language education policy and the effects it

would have on the ethno-religious conflicts in the country.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

### **History, Causes of Ethno-Religious Conflict in Nigeria and the Quest for Peace**

Ethno-religious conflict points to an occurrence in which the bond between members of one ethnic or religious group and another group(s) in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society is exemplified by the absence of warmth, reciprocal suspicion and fear, as well as a tendency towards violent altercations (Salawu, 2010). Historically, Nigerians appeared to be living in harmony before independence, as they were limited to inter-tribal and inter-linguistic trades within the country. The interactions between the ethnic groups were contractual as they only transacted and sold goods to one another. This spiraled into the quest for independence, where the various ethnic groups fought for the country's independence. Soon after independence, the quest for political power and religious and ethnic identity led to various forms of conflicts in the country, with the Civil War of 1967 to 1970 as the main foundation of the current ethno-religious animosities (Okpanachi, 2010).

As noted by Salawu (2010), before the current democratic dispensation, several ethno-religious conflicts have claimed many lives. Such crises, Mohammed (2004) claims, consist of the Maitatsine religious conflicts in Kano and Maiduguri in the 1980s, the Jimeta-Yola religious crisis of 1984, the Zango Kataf uprising in Kaduna State in 1992, the Kafanchan College of Education Muslim/Christian riots of 1981, the Kaduna Polytechnic Muslim/Christian upheaval of 1982, the Cross versus the Crescent religious crisis at the University of Ibadan between 1981 and 1985, the Bulumkutu Christian/Muslim riots of 1982, the Muslim/Christian religious clash during a Christian procession at Easter in

Ilorin, Kwara State in 1986, the 1999 Oro cultists and Hausa Muslims clash in Sagamu, the 1999, O'dua People's Congress and Hausa clashes in Lagos, the Tiv/Junkun ethnic mayhem of 2001 in Plateau State, the Deborah Yakubu lynching by Muslim students at the Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, and the most recent July 2023, clash between Muslim adherents and traditional worshippers over Isese Day in Ilorin, Kwara State. This thus means that for an extended period of time, most parts of Nigeria have developed into theatres of war characterized by an increasing number of tribal and religious clashes, and not even the coming of the democratic era could stop the occurrence of ethno-religious violence in the country.

Jega (2002) claims that ethno-religious conflicts are evils caused by many things, with a tendency to always stretch the bonds of unity to a breaking point. The most common cause of religious and ethnic violence could be traced to ethnic and religious intolerance. Salawu (2010) posits that many governmental actions and decisions before and after independence contributed to the sowing of seeds of ethno-religious discord in Nigeria. Ikejiani-Clark (2009) suggests that these conflicts over the years could be traced to the politicization of distrust, narrow-mindedness, violence, and the rancorous relationship between the chiefly Muslim north and the Christian south of the country. She further claims that ethno-religious segregation and inconsistency in the arrangements of the Nigerian State since the colonial era could also be blamed for the uprisings.

According to Canci and Odukoya (2016), the main causes of these conflicts have been those that have called to question the essence and continued existence of the nation-state and they comprise the control of the country's power, distribution of income, sense of national belonging and nationality and because of these,

such separations have made Nigeria to become delicate and unstable because many nations that make up Nigeria have little in common when it comes to convergent agreement, which would have reduced the forces that threaten to tear the country apart and helped to eschew the ethno-religious conflicts (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005).

Given the volatile nature of the Nigerian state, there have been several efforts made by concerned stakeholders towards the promotion of a peaceful coexistence among the many ethno-religious groups in Nigeria. All these have, nonetheless, failed to yield the desired results. According to a study by Bukar, Kwaja, and Verjee (2021), it was discovered that the understanding of peace by Nigerians varies from community to community. This is because some communities have been affected more by ethno-religious conflicts than others. This nuanced understanding of peace and its varying meaning to these people helped to discover which pointers of harmony are most valued and how peace could be improved in the country.

Research has shown that in Nigeria, peace goes beyond the absence of violence and insecurity; the lack of violence and insecurity is constantly more vital for women than men; the liberty to exercise religious rights and the capacity of people from diverse faiths to socialize are some significant pointers to peace in the country; service delivery by the government at all levels may be less central than reassuring simple individual and communal economic safety; the experiences of citizens with the police also affects their perceptions of peace, security and insecurity; and the support for vigilante groups towards combating ethno-religious conflicts is a contributory factor to keeping peace on some affected areas (Bukar, et al, 2021).

### **Language Education**

Language Education has been primarily defined by Hult (2010) as the method, technique, and practice of teaching a second or foreign

language other than the indigenous language. This explanation of Hult's (2010) is to be understood under the argument that the mother tongue is acquired by children without any formal teaching. This definition is based on the belief that language education is a formal teaching that involves another language apart from the learner's mother tongue. It also points to the process and practice of acquiring a second or foreign language in any educational setting (Giannikas, 2021). This field of study has been argued to be a part of the field of Applied Linguistics, but many scholars have also argued that it is an interdisciplinary field, which is separate from Applied Linguistics. There are four categories of study in language education: communicative competencies, proficiencies, cross-cultural experiences, and multiple literacies (Phillips, 2007).

Historically, language education is as old as human existence, but modern language education started in the 18th century when Latin was learnt in various European schools (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Scholars note that language education then focused on learning standard language rules and decoding abstract sentences while verbal practices were minimal, with learners being expected to commit grammatical rules to memory and to apply them in decoding written texts in the target language. However, improvements came in the field in the 19th and 20th centuries. This was a result of several innovations that came into language education from the early applied linguists who pioneered the field of study in these eras (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Such innovations at times steered towards several varying methods that were used as major improvements over the previous methods. Some of these applied linguists are Jean Manesca, Heinrich Gottfried Ollendorff (1803–1865), Henry Sweet (1845–1912), Otto Jespersen (1860–1943), Harold Palmer (1877–1949), and Richards and Rodgers (2001). These scholars looked into setting language instruction

principles and methods built on linguistic and psychological theories.

Today, language education has taken the form of a general school course, or it can occur in a specialized language school. Language education has grown in colleges and institutions; it has developed into a part of the education programme in countries around the world. Some countries have made language education a core subject to be learnt alongside main subjects like English, Maths, and Science (Fulton-Archer, Smith, Sauer, Small, & Abott, 2011). This has given birth to the main aim of language education in these times to be exposing the learner to various language situations and helping them to develop the ability to gain knowledge from every source possible while also sharing it with others as communication, because language is a means of communicating (Bidya, 2022).

### **Nigeria's Language Policy**

As Spolsky (2004) notes, a convenient primary step in determining a speech community's language policy is to make a distinction between the three components of the policy. These distinctions are: its language practices – the habitual pattern of selecting among the varieties that make up its linguistic repertoire; its language beliefs or ideology – the beliefs about language and language use; and any specific efforts to modify or influence that practice by any kind of language intervention, planning, or management. Spolsky (2004) maintains that, as in any other societal component, language policy at the family level may be examined with a mention to language philosophy and beliefs, language practices, and language management.

As with many multi-lingual countries, language issues in Nigeria are delicate ones, and the major solution that tends to alleviate the challenges that come with such multi-lingual countries is the creation and adoption of a

definite language policy. Countries like India, South Africa, Kenya, among others, have definitive language policies governing the assignment of roles to the various indigenous and foreign languages in their countries. However, Nigeria has no definitive language policy document to guide the assignment of roles to languages in the country. According to Anyadiegwu (2012), what the country has are policy statements regarding the use of languages in the country. This has affected the role played by the country's indigenous languages in national development. In effect, Nigeria failed to assign such roles as official, national language or languages, which are usually reserved for indigenous languages, to any of the country's indigenous languages.

For instance, in South Africa, the 1996 Constitution recognized 11 languages as the official or formal languages: Zulu, Xhosa, Afrikaans, Sepedi, English, Setswana, Sesotho, Xitsonga, Swati, Tshivenda, and Ndebele (Hazeltine, 2013). Further, in 2023, the South African Sign Language was identified as the twelfth formal or official language of South Africa by the National Assembly on May 3, 2023 (Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, 2023). These languages are also recognized as the country's national languages, with a special recognition and protection offered to the other unofficial languages by the country's constitution. In India, there is no national language, but the country recognizes 23 official languages, one of which is English. These indigenous official or formal languages are: Assamese, Bengali, Bodo, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kannada, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Malayalam, Marathi, Meitei (Manipuri), Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Santali, Sindhi, Tamil, Telugu, and Urdu (The Department of Official Language, 2019). In these countries, the policy is clear as stated in their documents.

However, the language policy statements of Nigeria could be found both in the

documentation of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999) as amended and the National Policy on Education (2004). These documents have made some provisions that could be termed Nigeria's language policy. Section 55 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria stipulates that "the affairs of the National Assembly shall be conducted in English, and in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba when adequate arrangements have been made thereof". Similarly, in the National Policy on Education (2013, p. 10), the government recognizes the place of language as a means of social relations and country-wide unity, and conserving cultural beliefs. For this goal, it requires that:

- a) Every child shall learn the language of his immediate environment, and in the interest of national unity, is required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages.
- b) For smooth interaction with our neighbours, it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French. Accordingly, French shall be the second official language in Nigeria, and it shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools.

Categorically for early childhood/pre-primary education, the policy requires that the government shall "ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community" (p. 10). However, in a pronouncement after the Executive Council meeting on November 30, 2022, the Federal Government of Nigeria announced that "a memo on the national policy was approved by the council. So, Nigeria now has a National Language Policy, and the details will be given later by the ministry. One of the highlights is that the government has agreed now that henceforth, instruction in primary schools, the first six years of learning will be in the mother tongue" (Sahara Reporters, 2022). This statement implies that apart from the three

major indigenous languages in Nigeria (Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba), pupils need to be taught in the language of their immediate environments, which could be Kanuri, Tiv, Idoma, Ogori, Ebira, Igala, and any of the other minority languages.

From the above, therefore, a summary of Nigeria's language policy reveals the following:

1. Use of English in matters of governance at the national and state levels and any of the three major local languages, with a condition that provisions are made for their use;
2. Use of the indigenous languages at the pre-primary and primary levels of education;
3. Use of the indigenous languages, the English language, and the French language at the primary level;
4. Use of English, French, and any one of the three major languages (provided it is not the child's mother tongue) at the junior secondary level;
5. Use of English and any indigenous language at the senior secondary level. (French and Arabic are language options); and
6. No specific prescriptions are made in the policy document for language education at the post-secondary level of education.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Sociolinguistic Theory**

Sociolinguistic Theory provides a comprehensive framework for examining the dynamic relationship between language and society. Central to this theory is the assumption that language choice, variation, and change are deeply embedded in social structures such as class, ethnicity, gender, and power relations (Holmes & Wilson, 2021). Sociolinguistics, therefore, seeks to explain why speakers use

language differently across contexts and how such differences index social meanings and identities.

Sociolinguistic Theory offers significant insights into language education, especially in multilingual and culturally diverse societies such as Nigeria. The theory emphasizes that language use is inherently shaped by social factors such as class, ethnicity, gender, and power relations (Holmes & Wilson, 2021). This understanding encourages educators to recognize learners' linguistic backgrounds as valuable resources rather than deficiencies. In classroom practice, awareness of language variation and multilingual repertoires enables teachers to adopt inclusive pedagogies that validate learners' home languages, thereby improving participation, comprehension, and self-esteem (Meyerhoff, 2020). By acknowledging linguistic diversity, educators create learning environments that promote equity, reduce linguistic discrimination, and enhance overall academic performance.

In the context of peacebuilding, Sociolinguistic Theory provides a framework for understanding how language can either foster social cohesion or exacerbate conflict. Linguistic attitudes and ideologies often influence group relations, shaping perceptions of superiority, marginalization, and identity boundaries (Olaoye, 2024). When certain languages or varieties are privileged over others, tensions may arise, particularly in ethnolinguistically diverse communities. Through sociolinguistic awareness, peacebuilding initiatives can promote respect for linguistic rights and encourage dialogue across cultural divides. Code-switching and multilingual communication, for example, can serve as tools for negotiation, conflict resolution, and social integration, as they allow individuals to bridge cultural gaps and express solidarity (Igboanusi, 2021).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study adopts a qualitative research design employing a documentary analysis approach. The qualitative paradigm was chosen as it allows for an in-depth examination of the complex relationships between language education, ethno-religious conflicts, and peacebuilding in Nigeria. This approach enables the researchers to explore nuanced perspectives, historical contexts, and policy implications that quantitative methods might overlook.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **The Role of Language in Building Peace in a Multi-ethnic/religious Country as Nigeria**

According to Aniga, Osimen, and Bateye (2017), language has a strong role in building peace, especially in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country like Nigeria. In their view, language use by individuals either contributes to the fanning of the embers of discord or quenching the thirst for blood by the various parties in the conflict that could have arisen as a result of religious or ethnic differences. Realistically, a language could be bad or good depending on how it is employed because it is a powerful contributor to any conflict. For instance, when a foremost language dislodges other tongues, then the minority groups tend to react and may want to seek redress. This means that no matter how small a language may be perceived, the speakers also put up resistance to any form of displacement by any other language that is deemed superior. Also, the influence of language in any conflict is so much that it decides the actions of the user. A listener or reader can be held spellbound and made to be attentive when the suitable words are used in their proper contexts. This is because language has the power to amuse, teach, unnerve, reach, satirize, rebuild, and even to destroy (Aniga et al., 2017).

Language is an emotional tool to individuals, especially when their ethnicity and religion are involved. A reader can smile when he has read something that interests him in any language he understands. That same person, who earlier smiled while reading a pleasant story, may start to cry when reading an account of genocide and the number of people who perished or died in the incident. Aniga et al. (2017) explain that language and conflict go together because language is a fundamental part of culture and thus a means of collaboration, intercommunication, and a useful tool for the governing of a country or state in both modern and ancient times. They note that if a group adopts a certain language, they have declared the specific identity they want for themselves. Thus, language becomes a spring for clashes due to the fact that during exchanges, two persons or groups usually disagree or clash. Language is also good or bad dependent on how it is used; its employment in different situations can stimulate conflict or the opposite, because culture governs whether or not language is appropriate. An individual could use a piece of language that may not be offensive in his culture to another person who would totally frown at it because such a language piece is an insult in the receiver's culture (Aniga et al., 2017).

Language can center on harmony and understanding where peace is created, while it can also cause strains, discrimination, fanaticism, and even lead to war. There is a huge connection between how one communicates and the clashes generated; as such, there is a resilient bond between the language used and the conflicts caused, and how they have deteriorated. Learning to use language more effectively is a crucial skill for reducing unnecessary conflict and managing conflict effectively (Ngwu & Adimelechi, 2021). All languages are prevalent with euphemisms, metaphors, and clichés. In some instances, the words used may appear to be

insignificant, but when one understands that language has the capacity to influence perception, the implications are substantial. Ngwu and Adimelechi (2021) highlight that the language used is influenced by our worldview and thought process. Also, studies have shown that it is not just cultural differences that can influence the language used by an individual; thought patterns in a language also foster the way a person who has imbibed the language uses it.

As Tiwari and Shivhare (2018) note, language is known to be as old as human society, whereas the concept of nation is of a fairly recent origin. They explain that language facilitates the development of any nation, which will come to a standstill without such a medium of communication and expression of culture. This is because Stalin and Lenin (1970) state that a national community is inconceivable without a common language. Isayey (1977) adds that language is a nation's most obvious and most important attribute. There is no such thing as a nation without a common linguistic basis. Thus, for peace to reign in a country, the engenderment of a common and commonly recognized language is pertinent. Language affects the psychological makeup of individuals and their perception of the concept of societal peace (Tiwarii & Shivhare, 2018). Thus, for citizens of a country to recognize and grow the peace of any country, they must share a common or commonly recognized language. The argument being proposed in this section could thus be summarized as follows: for Nigeria and Nigerians to grow in unity and peace, a commonly accepted and recognized language needs to be shared.

### **Language Education and Peace-Building: Prospects**

The role of language in education as a means of achieving not only peace but also sustainable development in a multiethnic and multi-

religious Nigeria is an interesting prospect. These prospects are discussed here.

Currently in Nigeria, the languages of education - used in language and other education – are English and the three major indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba), the orthographies of which have been developed, and the numerous minority languages of the learner’s environment, which have no orthography (as had been earlier explained in the November 20, 2022 Federal Executive Council of Nigeria pronouncement). As a result of this, the other languages, which have no developed writing systems, have been indirectly shut out of the opportunity to be used as mediums of instruction in schools. However, the authors of this paper do not believe that mother tongues in Nigeria are in any way inferior to English, which is the adopted lingua franca of Nigerians for communication. The authors here are in agreement with the thoughts of Egbokhare (2004) that something fast has to be done to maintain and modernize our indigenous languages, as announced in 2022 by the Federal Government, so that Nigerians can appreciate their own worldview and values.

Thus, the first prospect of language education and its contribution to peace building in Nigeria is the prompt development of an orthography system for the popular indigenous languages in the country. Once languages can be written, the development of teaching materials in those languages and the teaching of such languages in schools will become easier. This argument was born from the statement, made in 2004, of a former President of Nigeria (1979-1983), Alhaji Shehu Shagari, during the book launch of his biography, which was completely written in Hausa and titled *Tarihin Shehu Shagari*:

I wish to reiterate that a book in the Hausa language or in any other Nigerian language at this time is a significant landmark to remind all of our responsibility

to preserve our history. Let us resolve to henceforth encourage our people, especially the intelligentsia, to vigorously promote writing and reading in the vernacular rather than in English, which, with all its positive commendable qualities, is unfortunately eating deep into our own civilization (quoted in Aniga et al, 2017).

Secondly, for language education to contribute to peace building and sustainable development of Nigeria, the existing textbooks in the English language need to be translated into the three major indigenous languages to facilitate easier learning of modern contexts and thought facilitation. This is because each of the three major languages already has an established writing system, and translating the existing books in English to these languages will ensure that learners learn values that contribute to national peace and eschew ethno-religious conflicts. This was seen when a team of educators at the Bayero University Centre for Research in Nigerian Languages translated some science textbooks into Hausa in 2020 (Odogwu, 2020). To support this argument, Egbokhare (2004, p. 16) submits that:

There is, in fact, a close connection between the so-called falling standard of education in Nigeria today and the issue of mother tongue education. Perhaps, the problem of low school enrolment and retention in Northern Nigeria is also related to it. Were Hausa to be used as a medium of Instruction, we would most likely see a reversal of this trend.

Thirdly, language education can contribute to peace-building in Nigeria, irrespective of ethnic and religious differences, if the government properly monitors the execution of the language policy statements in the National Policy on Education. When learners learn properly in their indigenous languages, and they can converse in a few languages of other people, some level of unity will reside in the country, such that tolerance levels will increase, and mutual understanding resulting from mutual intelligibility will be fostered.

Fourthly, bearing in mind that the leaders of today - both ethnic, religious, and political – were once learners at a stage of their lives, it is pertinent to state that re-education of leaders in line with the educational needs of the country towards the inculcation of the essence of peaceful coexistence in ethnic and religious teachings needs to be emphasized. This could be achieved through a part of language education which involves the teaching of adults some parts of the language that they are new to. This aspect could be explored to enhance the building of peace in the country when various leaders at all levels are taught some relatively new words in as many languages as possible and their meanings to avoid ethnic and religious misunderstanding. This line of reasoning could be argued against with the submission that some monolingual countries of the world still experience different forms of violence and are hardly at peace with one another. Such countries as Somalia are monolingual; yet they have found peace hard to come by. But the point the authors are making here is that educating the leaders about the relationship between language and peace will yield a faster attempt at the creation of a definite language policy for the country. This will result in the proper planning of the country's indigenous languages and also engender their assignment as official languages in the country.

Given that studies in psychology have proven that humans think in the first language they acquire and that language is an emotional thing to the owners of the language, the authors of this paper advocate that a proper language education – in the indigenous languages – will help to inculcate the right and positive attitudes in learners from their early ages, which will instill the love of the country along with respect and tolerance for other ethno-religious groups in them. The authors believe that the proper planning of Nigeria's indigenous languages will make it easy for other ethnic groups within the country to learn and, therefore, better appreciate them; this further results in the building of peaceful coexistence within the country.

Furthermore, language education has the capacity to birth ethno-religious and cultural perceptions. Oxford, Olivero, Harrison, and Gregersen (2020) submit that there exist in language education many teaching methods that entrench cross-cultural peace education, positive psychology of peace, non-verbal peace language, and transformative language teaching for peace. The scholars explained that methods such as language immersion, which have been proven to provide positive results in the teaching of languages, cultural comparison, which has proven to result in cultural and linguistic appreciation, dialogue, debate, and conversation, which has been reported to aid cultural transmission, including language, are good ways to teach peace through language education. These teaching methods in language education can help to ensure that peace building is readily achieved in such a multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and multi-religious country like Nigeria.

Lastly, a proper execution of language education in Nigeria, which is currently lacking, will lead to a clear understanding of government policies and laws of the country. Currently in Nigeria, the absence of a definite

language policy document has resulted in the haphazard execution and monitoring of language education in the country. The country only possesses statements as contained in the National Policy on Education and the 1999 Constitution, which are not definitive enough to assign roles to languages and map out strategies for the implementation of the language elements in these documents. Thus, if language education is taken seriously in Nigeria, the official languages of the country will be increased as more indigenous languages will be recognized and used for official purposes, as is seen in India and South Africa, thus creating a sense of belonging for the languages as they will be taught and learnt in schools in the country.

### **Language Education and Peace Building: Challenges**

Having discussed the bright sides that Nigeria stands to gain if a proper language education system is put in place, it is essential to highlight the challenges that may hinder the proper execution of language education in the country, despite the lofty positives it has. However, the authors of this paper would not dwell too much on them, as the paper is aimed at selling the positive sides rather than the challenges.

The following are the challenges that may affect the prospects of employing language education as a tool for national peace building:

1. Absence of a definitive policy on language assignment and roles;
2. Absence of continuity in government policies;
3. Lack of political willpower on the part of the federal government;
4. Concerns for minority languages and ethnic groups;
5. Absence of proper funding for research into the role that could be played by language education in enhancing national peace;

6. Dearth of quality research into the prospects of language education and ethno-religious conflicts;
7. Absence of proper implementation of existing language policy statements.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria, as a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country, has had its fair share of ethno-religious conflicts that have at times threatened to tear the fabric of unity and called to attention the need to strengthen the ties that bind the many linguistic and religious affiliations in the country. Many ways have been postulated as needed to enhance lasting peace in Nigeria, but the prospects that language education could contribute to peace-building in Nigeria have been examined here.

It has been established that Nigeria has no definite policy document on language and language assignment despite its multilingual/multicultural state. This absence of a definitive policy document has led to half-hearted execution of the existing policy statements on language, which has not helped the course of language education in Nigeria. Thus, the authors of this paper conclude that if peace building is to be given a chance in Nigeria, a substantive policy on language and critical steps towards proper execution of language education efforts need to be taken seriously.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made to aid the course of language education and its contribution to lasting peace in Nigeria:

1. Creation and adoption of a definitive policy on language assignment and roles;
2. Political willpower on the part of the federal government to support the

course of proper language education of its citizens;

3. Adoption of more than three indigenous languages as official languages for Nigeria to tackle the concern of minority languages and ethnic groups;
4. Proper funding for research into the role that could be played by language education in enhancing national peace;
5. Investment in quality research into the prospects of language education and ethno-religious conflicts; and
6. Proper implementation and monitoring of existing language policy statements.

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