

ISSUES IN EDUCATION POLICIES IN THE CONTEXT OF WEST AFRICA

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Abstract

This paper discusses the problems of education policies in West African schools. In any society, language is a means that facilitates the communication within the community for understanding each other. Presently, the education policies inherited from colonization constitute a great problem in West African teaching system. Education policies do not take into account the realities of the population in terms of initiating the national languages in the western education system. The aim of the paper is to point out the problems of education policies that influence the education system in West Africa. The approach to analysis is partly qualitative and partly quantitative. A questionnaire was used to gather information on the issues in education policies in West African teaching context. The main findings show that most of the western education policies do not consider native languages in the educational system of West Africa which downgrade the students' levels of learning.

Keywords: Issues; Education; Policies; West Africa

1. Introduction

The people of West Africa use mostly their languages in the informal context out of schools and offices. Most of the cases, they understand each other through the system of language borrowing from other languages. It helps to create a good relationship between every ethnic groups. Because of learning the colonial languages at schools officially, many people from West Africa did not give much importance to the learning of their own native languages. For this reason, we draw the attention of the people of West Africa to like their native languages more so that they can insert its teaching in western education system. The objective of this paper is to unveil the issues of western education policies that create the dysfunction of the education system in West Africa.

2. Literature Review

We explored a few research papers that help to grasp the issues in education policies in the formal context of West Africa. We observe that the French colonies have put the accent on a colonial education policy of assimilation that gives much importance to the learning of French language. Moreover, in the French and British colonial education system, the use of African native

languages was ignored. As consequence, the students use only English or French languages as the medium of instruction at schools. It shows that the education policies coming from colonization in West African education system are important in the present day situation. This demonstrates that the reality of African linguistic does not take into account in the programs of teaching curricula.

In his study, Bangbose (1983) points out that the discrimination of the use of indigenous languages in West Africa is a reality in the formal school. The Christian missionaries have introduced an education policy of initial literacy of the local languages that is less developed in the system of West African education. Westley (1992) argues that before the arrival of colonial powers and missionaries, the African education policy was considered in informal context. To work in the colony for clerical employment, the colonizers system was used a small number among educated Africans.

However, Francomacaro (1994) points out that language policy plays an important role in African countries. Indeed, culturally, politically and linguistically the choice of a national language is important for West African people unification. It appears that the language education policy in Nigeria is difficult to be applied due to the issue of multilingualism. For this reason, it is crucial to frame a good education policy in the West African teaching system. That is why, it is necessary for the decision makers to promote the learning of indigenous languages in West Africa. Nambiar (2011) states that an important factor to promote language shift is language policy. We notice that language policy is an outcome of language planning. A country's language policy is usually manifested in its choice of the national language, the official language and the media of education. One of the conditions for language shift to occur is the spreading language should have access to power and resources basically achieved through the educational process. It means that education policy of language is important for the language development.

Berry and Greenberg (1966) observe that a careful study of historical background must be conducted related to education policies of language established by the colonial powers. That is the reason why the action of the agency planning language development and standardization must be taken into account. This can contribute for the elaboration of a local language board that develops necessarily the use of local languages in the West African education context.

On one hand, from these research papers, we understand that some researches have been conducted to show how former colonial language education policies have impacted negatively the development of local languages in West Africa such as neglecting the formal use of West African languages, any respect to local languages and jobs were not granted to those who know native languages. On the other hand, some researchers found out that the language education policies of colonial system imposed in West Africa are important to be kept in the education system of West African region because it may not cause any problem for local languages education.

3. Methodology

In this study, 25 participants answered a questionnaire which comprised 4 statements to which the participants had to agree or disagree.

1. Colonial language education policies value the teaching of local languages in West Africa.
2. Presently, there are some challenges that West African people face in terms of using their native languages at schools.
3. It is necessary to change the older language education policies based on colonization by new African language education policies that recognize the teaching of West African languages.
4. Developing new language education policies that take into account the education of West African languages is crucial.

This study was largely based on qualitative as well as some quantitative analysis. We conducted interviews of some students in order to obtain accurate outcomes from the participants. Among the 25 participants, there were 15 males and 10 females ranging from 13 years to 21 years. All of them are citizens of West African region. The participants were secondary school and university students. The participants participated actively by responding all 4 statements to show their willingness to solve issues found in colonial education policies in the educational context of West Africa.

4. Discussion

In the context of West Africa, the problems of education policies need to be solved definitively. The colonial system dictates its policies that teaching of the colonial languages in West African countries is compulsory. In this case, it is the responsibility of the policy makers of West Africa to elaborate new language education policies that take into account the native languages in the educational context. The study of this topic contributes in bringing a great change within the education system of West Africa. In the present situation, many African elites think that it is necessary to change the existing language education policy of French colonizers by a new one that takes into consideration the African reality in the Education System of West Africa. Generally, most of the employments were given to those who read and write fluently in French or English in the context of West Africa. It indicates that the general education policies faced issues that destroy the education system of West Africa. For instance, most of West African countries have reviewed the colonial language education policies which is not implemented for the time being.

From our observations, we noted that 85% disagreed with the first statement that language education policies established by colonization had considered the local languages education in West Africa. Approximately 95 percent agreed with second and third statement that people face some challenges regarding the use of native languages in schools and changing the existing

colonial language education policies by African language education policies. 98% agreed with the fourth statement that new language education policies are important to be developed and need to take care of languages spoken by West African people in the western education context. These findings showed that most of participants agreed that it is crucial for West African countries to create their own language education policies that can be used in the West African education system.

From the first response we noted that many of the participants were surprised with the statement formulated by the researcher. They disagreed majorly to the first statement because they knew that the present language education policies inherited from the colonization is used as a weapon to fight against their local languages development. They did not hide their unhappiness for the forced ideas inculcated in their minds that their local languages were not good at all to be taught in formal context. Many people highly criticize the way local languages are treated presently in the colonial education system.

While answering the second and third statement, the researcher noted that the participants were happy and estimated that these two statements helped these students to understand clearly that there is need to change the colonial language education policies in the educational context of West Africa. This increases the participants' desire to learn their native languages at schools and help them to settle the challenges caused by language education policies imposed by colonization.

During the interviews, the participants agreed that it was time to include the teaching of their native languages so that all subjects can be taught in the West African languages. The answers of last statement showed that participants totally agreed with the development of new language education policies that allowed the people of West Africa to learn their native languages officially. In this context, people feel happy to develop their languages through the establishment of new language education policies that create an opportunity for the West African people to learn their local languages in formal context.

Based on the outcomes, we note that almost all the participants are aware that it is important to change the colonial language education policies within the education system in the context of West Africa. It appears that the participants are optimistic that in the formal context, the teaching of local languages in West Africa will probably be integrated in the western education curricula.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, West African communities in general have faced issues in terms of using their native languages officially. So the teaching of colonial languages were imposed by force through colonization. This situation has destroyed the development of African languages. The colonial language education policies neglected the use of West African languages in the western education system. The education system does not change so much because of the great influence of some International Organizations like International World Funds, World Bank etc. that dictate most of the cases their laws regarding the destiny of West African education system of the former

colonialists. To settle this situation, it is crucial for all the African decision makers to organize an International Summit in which good education policies of language will be developed in the African education system to promote the learning of West African native languages.

Many people from West Africa and beyond understand that it is the right time to bring their own contributions for promoting the learning of African native languages. The younger generation from West Africa must coordinate their efforts together to improve the shortcomings left by the colonization system to develop West African education in various domains.

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