
Portuguese Language for Education and Economic Development in Africa

Aria John Saleh

ABSTRACT

The thrust of this study is to examine the nexus between Portuguese Language for Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa. The study attempts to identify the number of Portuguese speaking countries in Africa. The study also identifies the language family of the Portuguese language as well as the percentage of Portuguese speakers in each region. Consequently, Africa must operate first in African languages. However, rooms must also be made for learning major world languages as foreign languages are intended to facilitate communication with the outside world but not for communication within. Hence, the Portuguese government should liaise with respective countries globally for the purpose of inculcating the language in their language curriculum at the tertiary level of education.

Keywords: Portuguese language, language family, Africa.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a quintessential source of symbolic capital, exchangeable into economic and political capital (Bourdieu 1991), and part of the anatomy of power that shapes interstate relations in the modern world (Sanches, 2014). Multilingualism has always been an issue in relation to education and economic development in Black Africa since the 1960s, when most of the countries were liberating themselves politically from their European colonizers (Mufwene, 2017). Multilingualism has to do with speaking of “much’ or “many” languages by individuals (Saleh and Akoshi, 2018).

Dadzie (2004) opines that people who are competent in more than two languages at various levels of competence are described as

Aria John Saleh, Ph.D is a Lecturer in the Department of English, School of Languages, Nasarawa State College of Education, P. M. B. 05, Akwanga, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. E-mail: salehwunka@gmail.com



multilingual. However, it has not been easy to promote a single indigenous language as the national and official language out of the multitude of languages spoken in most of them (Mufwene, 2017). Nigeria is a good example of multilingual nation, where English, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages are widely spoken across every sphere of life - education, media, judiciary, politics, administration, business and so on. Nations are described as being multilingual if more than two languages are spoken (Dadzie 2004). Not only are these Nigerian languages used across spheres of life; they also have standard orthographies (Saleh and Akoshi, 2018).

Consequently, Community of Portuguese Language Speaking Countries (CPLP) will be examined in context of education and economic development. The CPLP is a multilateral forum founded in 1996 and initially composed of eight full members – Angola, Brazil, Cape Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, Portugal, Sao Tome and Principe, and Timor-Leste – reaching four continents for a total terrestrial area of 11 million km² (Sanches, 2014). These eight states share a common language as a result of the Portuguese colonization process. Categorically, the majority of the CPLP member States are Africans. Africa appears to have lost pride in the wide range of its own linguistic and cultural heritages, which are primarily oral (Mufwene, 2017). Five of its member States are part of the Atlantic Basin and that makes Portuguese one of the most spoken languages within this geographic area (Sanches, 2014). It has not been easy to promote one single indigenous language as the national and official language out of the multitude of languages spoken in most of them (Mufwene, 2017). It is alleged that the Portuguese language gained entry into Africa through the Atlantic Basin during the colonization era.

Portuguese is the sixth most spoken language in the world with about 260 million speakers worldwide (<https://www.educations.com/study-guides/europe/study-in-portugal/language-culture-13683>, 2019). Hence, the thrust of this study is to examine the nexus between Portuguese Language for Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa.

Portuguese Language and Education in Africa

Portugal is a signatory to the Bologna Process. The Bologna Process was first signed in 1999 as a Europe-wide strategy to harmonize the



architecture of European higher education and promote educational mobility and modernization. The aim was to widen access to higher education across Europe and allows for educational exchanges between countries while guaranteeing universal standards across European higher education institutions. (<https://www.educations.com/study-guides/europe/study-in-portugal/language-culture-13683>, 2019). An Online platform, www.listenandlearn.com (2015) states the following points about the Portuguese language.

- (i) Most of the Portuguese words are derived from the Arabic language.
- (ii) The language is 7th widest spoken international language in the world.
- (iii) The Portuguese language was officially declared in 1920.
- (iv) Three new letters k, y and w which did not exist in the language were added in January, 2009 as a result of the recent influx of English loanwords.
- (v) There are over 5 million native Portuguese speakers in Africa.
- (vi) Each verb tense in Portuguese comes with six different endings as Portuguese verbs are conjugated for person and number.
- (vii) Portuguese is mutually intelligible with Galician, a language spoken by around 3 million people in the Northwestern part of Spain. Galician is similar to Portuguese language, so much so that speakers of both languages understand each other without any stress.
- (viii) The Brazilian Portuguese is different from other varieties of Portuguese because other colonies gained their independence recently while Brazil had her independence since 1822 and its variety of Portuguese has evolved to be quite different from that of Portugal.
- (ix) Brazil and Portugal had different conventions until 1990. This is because the geographical difference between Brazil and European Portuguese developed different writing systems after Brazil declared its independence from Portugal in 1822. In order to better organize and unify the language, the two countries signed an *Orthographic Agreement* in 1990 to establish a single orthography for both countries.



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- (x) Only 5% of Portuguese speakers live in Portugal
 - (xi) It is the second largest growing European language in the world after English.
 - (xii) Its longest word has 29 letters-‘anticonstitucionalissimamente’ against English’s ‘antidisestablishmentarianism’ with 28 letters.
 - (xiii) Each verb tense has six different endings. For example, the English verb “to write” has two conjugations in the present tense- i/you/ we/they write, he/she/it writes while the equivalence in Portuguese would be *eu escrevo, tu escreves, ele/ela/voce escreve, nos escrevemos, vos escreseis, elas/eles/voce^s escrevem*.
 - (xiv) Portuguese has two verbs “to be”. While English’s “to be” is universal, Portuguese’s “ser’ means permanent, e. g. marriage and “estar” stands for temporary conditions such as mood or weather.

In Africa, students have been taught in languages that are foreign to them, that make their learning experiences much more challenging than necessary (Mufwene, 2017), but in Portugal, the language of instruction at universities is mostly Portuguese at the Bachelor’s level (<https://www.educations.com/study-guides/europe/study-in-portugal/language-culture-13683>). According to Mufwene (2017), the vast majority of the emergent nation-States have chosen the European official languages as the media of education. Moreover, African language policies have created a vicious circle in which the European languages have now spread widely; they are learned more as subjects than as tools of communication.

In Cape Verde, it is only recently that efforts have been undertaken to dispense primary education in Creole, while Portuguese is kept for post-primary education (Mufwene, 2017). However, language policies still favor the European colonial master’s language, rating metropolitan Portuguese (culture) as superior to their local indigenized varieties (Mufwene, 2017). The fact school systems have favored Portuguese over indigenous languages has imposed a barrier difficult to overcome especially for those living in rural areas or in the peripheries of the urban centers (Mufwene, 2017).

Language projection is not only a cause but also an outcome of the CPLP’s increase in attractiveness, with economic resources also carrying effects on its projection (Sanches, 2014). Apart from a strong



emphasis on a common linguistic and cultural policy, the CPLP sets wide objectives for greater diplomatic coordination as a means of enhancing its presence around the world and for cooperation in all policy areas including education, health, science and technology, and defense (Sanches, 2014). In Venezuela, Portuguese was introduced in the official education system as an option in 2010. The spread of this language is connected with an increase of economic and political power (De Swaan 1993).

In a nutshell, the Portuguese language is spoken as official language in six African countries. A website (www.colonialvoyage.com) confirms that the Portuguese language was introduced in Africa when the Europeans explored the African coast in the 1460s when the first fort was built in Arguin, Mauritania (www.languageonthemove.com).

Language Family of the Portuguese Language

Portuguese had become the language of commerce in large areas bordered by the Indic and Pacific oceans, as well as the language of communication among slaves across the Atlantic Santos (2014). In 1495, Portugal and Spain had divided the whole world between the two through signing Tratado de Tordesilhas, and Africa, India and the Far East were in the Portuguese half Santos (2014). During the nineteenth century, after losing Brazil, Portugal redirected its politics to Africa. According to Santos (2014), language historians such as Teyssier (1984), Mattos e Silva (1988), Castro (2006) and Cardeira (2006), there were several innovations in the Lisbon dialect at this time which made Portuguese from Portugal differ more markedly from the Portuguese spoken in Africa and Oceania. An online medium (www.mustgo.com) identifies the Portuguese language under the Romance language, a branch of the Indo-European language family. The prediction is the possibility of Portuguese speakers in South Africa because South Africa shares boundary with Mozambique and Angola; not far from Angola, two Portuguese speaking countries in Southern Africa.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Portuguese language is one of the international languages spoken in the world. The language is spoken in ten countries. Africa alone has six



countries speaking the language. Portugal, the mother country of the language is in Europe while Brazil, the largest speakers of the language is located in South America. According to Mufweni (2017), it is high time Black Africa invested more in its indigenous languages; it is high time they were used throughout the formal education system, from elementary school to higher education, in all sectors of public administration, and in all sectors of the formal economies. Africa must operate first in African languages, though rooms must also be made for learning major world languages as foreign languages intended to facilitate communication with the outside world but not for communication within.

- Since Portuguese is an international language, the Portuguese government should liaise with respective countries globally to include the language in their language curriculum at the tertiary level of education.
- There is need for the training and production of more teachers in the language globally who would in turn train would-be teachers in the language.
- The Portuguese government should consider sponsoring students from different countries of the world to study the language in Portugal.

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