Developing synergy towards growth Africa: Multilingual education as a panacea

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ABSTRACT

Africa is a potentially rich continent due to its considerably rich resources endowment. It is believed that if there is a synergy between these resources, that is if these resources are properly harnessed with a clear vision on the part of our leaders, there is the prospect of growth leading to the development of the continent. The basis of any meaningful development and the bedrock of a breakthrough whether in technology, industry, economy or communication in education. Therefore, language is also a good instrument of synergy toward growth. In African universities especially in Nigeria, dissemination of knowledge is done through bilingualism or multilingualism which is used to attain the broad goals of education. In a multilingual classroom, setting, students will commonly face difficulties in thinking in the largest language (English) because they are influenced by their native language and cultural patterns.

Keywords: Synergy, panacea, multilingualism, bilingualism, metropolitan.

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INTRODUCTION

The development of synergy is a component of capacity building in Africa. This theme is timely and topical as it cannot come at a better time than when Africa is in dear need of development. As we are all aware, it is imperative that we come together and harness all forms of knowledge and ideas, for growth and development in Africa.

Africa is a potentially rich continent. This is due to its considerably rich resource endowment. It is believed therefore that if there is a synergy between these resources that is if the resources are properly harnessed with a clear vision on the part of our leaders, there is the prospect of growth leading to the development of the continent. A well-articulated natural plan is imperative for purposeful growth in Africa. The basis of any meaningful development and the bedrock of a breakthrough whether in technology, industry, economy or communication is education. Therefore, education is a good instrument of synergy toward growth.

Education has always been the pivot for success in any human endeavour. The most efficient process for the development of any society lies in the improvement of its population which is its human capital development. This was corroborated by James Iroha in Tell Magazine (August 9, 2010), when he wrote: Oil will run out one day, but Nigeria's human knowledge base will be the one to move the country forward" (p.38). Development is possible and more appreciated with an educated population. Investments in education can be seen as prime mechanisms to enhance the human resources base. Education makes and enhances national development as it is a process by which people are trained to gain relevant knowledge to undertake those creative and productive functions that generate economic and social goods and services (Ofoeze, 1996). Kosemami (1995) opines that the economic strength of

Japan is the product of its education's ability to produce relevant manpower in terms of the needs of the economy. Education enables the populace to become well-informed, capable of critical thinking, and owning their destiny through active participation. An educated populace provides a more attractive investment climate.

Therefore, human resources should be harnessed in the development process of the continent of Africa. The availability of skilled manpower is for the development of any society. The quality of skilled manpower in terms of brainpower, scientific disposition, effective utilization and technical expertise determines how the other resources namely–goods natural resources and finance could be effectively utilized to stimulate growth and development (Ojo, 1977).

Education, therefore, has an important role to play in shaping human resources. An education system can deliver effectively if its language of pedagogy is appropriate. African universities (especially in Nigeria) are institutions where bilingualism or multilingualism is given a prime place. Dissemination of knowledge is done in two or more languages. That is, mother-tongue English and French. Teaching and learning is an interactive process and language are used to attain the broad goals of education. We have therefore chosen to discuss language as a sub-topic in this paper.

LANGUAGE AS AN INSTRUMENT FOR SYNERGY

Concept of language

Language can be defined as a "system of arbitrary vocal symbols by which a social group cooperates. This implies that language involves the use of vocal tracts to produce sounds and symbols which these in the language community have accepted to use for communication which will promote cooperation amongst them (Ogun, 2002). This assertion was supported by Henry Sweet (1945) when he viewed language as the expression of ideas by means of speech sounds combined into words, words are combined into sentences, this combination answering that of ideas into thought. From the above definitions, it can be observed that language is used by human beings to express their feelings, emotions, attitudes and thoughts in their society. Hudson (2001) supports this when he defines language as a mode of action and not an instrument of reflection. A language is a tool of interaction in a particular society. Language is used as a means of communicating ideas, feelings and emotions among individuals and groups of people.

Ogunsiji (2001) defines language as an exclusive human possession that is socially acquired and which serves as a means of communication, making use of conventional means. Akindele and Adegbite (2000) opines that language is a system of sounds or vocal symbols by which human beings communicate

experiences. To establish any social relationship, language is used. For instance, when language is used to greet, the function is phatic rather than informative. We can rightly say that language is the key to people's hearts and culture. Ogunsiji (2001) states that language is used:

- to keep records;
- for phatic communion i.e. as a social regulator;
- for ceremonial purposes;
- as an instrument of thoughts;
- to convey orders and information;
- to influence people;
- to transmit the cultural values of the society to the generation yet unborn;
- to enable self-expression and
- as an instrument of action.

Language is the centre of human life. It is one of the most important aspects of expressing our love or our hatred for people or things. It is vital to achieving many of our goals and our careers. It is a source of artistic satisfaction or simple pleasure (Cook, 2008). Hudson (2001) describes language as a means of establishing or reinforcing social relations, obtaining information and expressing emotions. Language is seen as an essential factor in every aspect of human development and endeavour. It is employed in every human activity be it in education, science, religion, commerce and trade, international relation (Anyanwu, 2006). From her point of view, she sees language as the life wire of every society.

The importance of language as described above cannot be overemphasized because human life in all ramifications would be possible, difficult and inconceivable without the use of language. This is why Akmajian (1987) states that language is a mirror of the mind in a deep and significant sense. It is a product of human intelligence, created anew in each individual by the operation that lies far beyond the reach of will or consciousness. Rubin (1968) opines that language is the fundamental tool of love serving, transmitting and continuously enriching the achievement of human culture. Adeniyi (1999) support this view when they see language as a means of transmitting the cultural values, beliefs and norms of a particular society from one generation to another through the process of teaching and learning. Language is seen as a systematic combination of sounds that have meaning for all people in a given cultural community. Language is seen as an instrument of political and economic empowerment. It is a chain that brings people together and reflects the culture and ethnic identity of groups of people within a society.

Anyanwu (2006) opined that many languages coexist in the world together to perform different roles and functions assigned to them distinctly. Within a bilingual or multilingual society, many languages exist therein to perform different roles at a particular point in time

There are many indigenous languages in Nigeria which

are used by the people of each ethnic group. These indigenous languages are used as a mother tongue by the people of the community while the English language is a unity language through which every member of the community can effectively communicate with each other. A speaker of any language community can have a repertoire of speech alternatives to use depending on the situation and the context of use. This is so because, in a given society, an individual is exposed to two or more languages that can be used successively. The use of language in a particular society depends on the speech community within these languages. Also, there exist different dialects. These dialects are sometimes understood by other people within the same ethnic group (Arohunmolase, 2002).

Different languages are spoken in different places, situations and events in a linguistically pluralistic society in Nigeria. Ogunsiji (2001) opines that the pluralistic nature of some African countries has compounded the problem of language policies and planning. He went further that the multilingual nature of Nigeria if properly adopted and utilized to its full advantage will bring about effective policies and planning in our educational system.

Language is of paramount importance in man's life. Its functions can be best understood by taking a look at its various uses in society.

1. For social interaction: Human language has developed and perfected as a means of maintaining interpersonal, intergroup, as well as international relations. Progress in personal and world affairs is dependent upon language. Language has developed elaborate vocabularies for respect, honour, persuasion, love, hatred, etc. for instance, a Yoruba speaker will normally use a plural form for an elder as a form of respect. There are also innumerable greeting patterns in African languages to suit appropriate occasions.

2. Language as means of learning: Language is the most vital element for all forms of learning. It is highly essential for learning of the highest order. It is important for thinking and for abstract reasoning all of which are the ingredient for learning. The process of imparting knowledge, the transfer of values, attitude and the acquisition of skills and competencies are essential through the instrumentality of language (Nwosu, 2004).

3. Language is used as a vehicle of communication: A language is a tool of communication. It is man's basic tool without which it would be difficult for men and women to live together, think, act and share ideas. Language makes it possible for human beings to engage in social conversation to transfer ideas, thoughts, and feelings through writing books and mass media and to develop social linguistic units of communities (Adeniyi, 1999).

4. Language as a vehicle for the **storage of information and learning artifacts:** Adedoja (2004) describes language as the chief means of producing and storage of information and knowledge. To her, virtually all knowledge and information in—various fields of man endeavour. Science, arts and technology, medicine and agriculture can be found recorded and stored in books, journals, newspapers, tapes, films, microfilms and computers.

5. Language as excavating tools: language is the process of unraveling and excavating the mystery of knowledge and information stored up in books, in libraries and museums, or even buried in the ground. It is the means of retrieving knowledge that is stored up, and also that of understanding, interpreting and appreciating such knowledge and information through the use of linguistic and graphic symbols (Babajide, 2001).

6. Language as a building tool: Language is the organ with which man builds varied skills, values and competencies necessary for survival. Man uses language to establish interpersonal relations, to build better human understanding, friendship and cooperation. Man has succeeded in strengthening language as the most powerful organ of communication by building and improving communication systems and artifacts such as modern mass communication media including telephones, radio and television, satellite communication and computer information (Falola, 2009).

7. Language as a means of cooperation: Language, especially those spoken across many communities, provides the means for the cooperation between communities and homogeneity found in them. Complex human relationships are based on language which regulates, modifies and changes human behaviour in the society since Africa is well known for its ethnic and family loyalty (Nwosu, 2004).

8. Language and economic activities: In trade and commerce, we largely depend on our traditional style of haggling over prices until a reasonable compromise is reached. This is made possible by language. Also, we have traditional names for plants, animals and other things around us (Adedoja, 2004).

9. Language and religion: Africans are extremely religious. They worship various things from stones and rivers to thunder and trees. These religious sentiments are expressed in words and phrases that have evolved over the years in different languages. African languages are very rich in evocative words which strike horror, give or terror in the nation. The belief in the power of words gave birth to incantations that traditional herbalists, magicians and juju men have guarded jealously. Some traditional secret societies have developed special language and pass-words which battle the economy. People avoid such words even in everyday speech (Nwosu, 2004).

10. Language and politics: All political system aims to maintain a reasonable social order through languages. Africans are taught their roles and responsibilities clearly defined in the unwritten constitution, based on countries of usage and convention. The deeds of the society are all entrenched in the language. Any deviation by an individual

or a group of people is frowned at and sometimes punished by sanctions or even death (Ogunsiji, 2001).

11. Language as a polishing tool: Language helps to bring about personal refinement and polish. Skillful use of the language portrays the user as wellbred, refined and cultured, and makes behaviours in terms of communication generally well accepted and received by people serving as the audience. The careful selection of words in speech and writing, the use of the right word in the right place, and the employment of appropriate pitch, intonation and pronunciation in oral communication have a powerful effect on people and their reactions to events and situations being addressed (Adedoja, 2004).

Bilingualism is viable and capable of leading the learners to the goals of socio-cultural, socio-political and technological development:

i. It gives a large number of people access to education and personal development so that the rural population can learn about agriculture.
ii. It promotes an interactive and independent society.
iii. There will be effective and meaningful communication between the teacher and learners and outside the school environment
iv. The development of nature judgment is enhanced in the students.

Bilingualism

Lambert (1973) defined bilingualism as the existence of two languages in the repertoire of an individual or a speech community. He further explained that Bilingual interference is considered a consequence of language in contact which deals with the direct or indirect influence of one language on the other.

His findings were corroborated by Akindele and Adegbite (2000) that each of the two languages has its own distinct phonological, lexical, grammatical and discourse rules as many factors are responsible for bilingualism.

Grosjean (1982) states that bilingualism and multilingualism occur as a result of the movement of people, nationalism, feudalism, inter-ethnic marriage, the plurality of linguistic groups within a region, urbanization and education. This indicates that bilingualism and multilingualism can occur from several sources, education, colonialism, conquest, trade, annexation and social advantage.

Akindele (2007) supports this assertion when he says bilingualism can result from a federation or an amalgamation of diverse groups or nationalities such as Nigeria and Cameroon. Some parents may adequately acquire bilingualism in their homes to mark their children be bilingual. The reasons for these are numerous ranging from preparing them to go to school, to making the

children relevant in the society to which they belong and enabling the child to communicate effectively with other members of the society. Also, to make their children fluent in the language of the world, e.g. English and French. Most children and even adults tend to become bilingual or even multilingual, considering such factors as, individual, societal, planned, or unplanned.

Many African countries including Nigeria, Ghana and Benin are bilingual or multilingual in English and French as their local or native tongues. In Nigeria, English and indigenous languages are used as media of instruction, inter-tribal communication and social interaction either together as code-switching or alternatively. Bilingualism indicates that not only one language is in question, but there are two or more languages in use in the same speech community, but they vary in terms of position, social interaction and the ethnic background of the speaker and even the context of the use of such language. The language a bilingual or multilingual person speaks depends largely on his language repertoire, situation, contextual use of the language and his attitude toward the language. Language as described by Grosjean (1982) is a symbol of ethnic identity and it is accompanied by attitudes and values attached by its users and also by persons who do not know the language (Lawani, 2005). As far as language learning and acquisition is concerned, especially in Nigeria where there is pronounced linguistic multiplicity or polarity of languages, people tend to be more favourably and positively disposed to using a language that has:

1. Considerable national and or international coverage of users.
2. Metropolitan or cosmopolitan status.
3. Considerable numerical strength and some measures of economic and political power and
4. Sufficient reliable codified form.

On the other hand, if a language does not possess the aforementioned instrumental and integrative forces, people's attitudes towards it are bound to be negative. Grosjean (1982) further goes on to say that people's attitudes can be changed from negative to positive if only the government can give official recognition to such language(s). Nigeria, like many other bilingual communities or societies where the English Language is given a dominant role as a result of government policy and educational planning, has been widely accepted by its citizenry because of the functions, roles, and importance of the language over the other indigenous languages. Therefore, the government policy attitudes have determined which language is to be used in what situation, place and event. The federal government of Nigeria recognizes the multilingual and multi-ethnicity nature of the country, it then adopts the bilingual system of education whereby the English language and indigenous language (the language of the immediate

environment) are used in the first three years of primary education in Nigeria. Also, a child is encouraged to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages - Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba at the Secondary School level. The English language is used as the medium of instruction at the tertiary level of education. Therefore, English seems to have been given a prime place in Nigeria's educational system because it is used as a unifying language in such a country with a different ethnolinguistic background.

Choice of language among bilingual speakers

In their daily activities, bilingual speakers always change the variety of language to be used because they have a different repertoire of speech alternatives which change according to the context of use and the situations of the interlocutors. Bilingual speakers can make use of different patterns of a language, they can also choose between two languages as the situation demands. Bilingual speakers can also choose between two languages according to the situation like their monolingual counterparts. Radetzky (2003) says when two people speak with one another, there is always more going on than just the conveyed messages. This implies that there is more to people's interaction than just passing across messages among themselves. The language used by participants is always influenced by some factors which show the relationship between the participants. The factors to consider to convey a message to the participants are:

- Participants: how well do they know each other
- Social setting
- Who is talking: status/social roles
- Purpose of conversation
- Topic

Radetzky (2003) further explains that it is not uncommon to see that languages other than English are spoken with friends and family. Therefore, when bilingual or even trilingual families interact socially outside their homes they will communicate in English. Akindele and Adegbite (2000) support this assertion when they observe that an individual speaker or society whose repertoire is made up of two or more codes experiences the phenomenon of code choices. They equally say that the speaker varies the language or dialect he uses - a particular communication according to the topic, audience/ participants, setting/situation, purpose and function. Mohammed (2006) reports that in a study carried out by Pearson and McGee (1993) on language choice among Hispanic junior high School Students in Miami, Spanish is mostly used when talking to or addressed by the parents. However, with siblings and friends, Spanish is hardly used. Rubin (1968) cited in Lawani (2005) observes that in Paraguay, Guarani, the indigenous language was hardly used and was rejected for Spanish because their indigenous language (Guarani) has no international recognition or value, has no orthography, is not productive and those people who are using the language are considered inferior, less intelligent, less cultured and ill-mannered. The attitude towards Guarani changed positively as soon as it was discovered that Guarani has been given a prime place in Paraguay since it was recognized officially as a national language in Paraguay. Radetzky (2003) considers the pattern of language use in Paraguay in 1997 as given in Table 1.

Table 1 reveals that Guarani is the language of the home and it is used in all informal settings. It is also used at the primary level of their education in telling stories while Spanish is the official language which means it is the language of instruction at the university level, language for sermons and other official assignments.

Table 1. Language use in Paraguay.

Domain	Addresses	Setting	Topic	Languages
Family	Parent	Home	Planning a party	Guarani
Friendship	Friend	Café	Humorous anecdote	Guarani
Religion	Priest	Church	Choosing the Sunday liturgy	Guarani
Education	Teacher	Primary	Telling a story	Guarani
Education	Lecturer	University	Solving mathematics problems	Spanish
Administration	Official	Office	Getting an important license	Spanish

Source: Radetzky (2003) in Lawani (2005).

Eze (2006) reveals that the imposition of the English language on the children produces adverse effects as it brings confusion on the side of the child who has acquired and uses his indigenous language effectively in his everyday activities.

The factors responsible for language choice in a bilingual community are numerous. In the educational system of Nigeria today, three major Nigerian indigenous languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba function effectively both as media of instruction and course of study. These

factors or impediments according to Grosjean (1982) are:

(i) Participants: The language proficiency of the speaker and the interlocutor.
(ii) Age: The ages of the speaker and the interlocutors play a vital role in their communication,
(iii) Degree of Intimacy: The level of intimacy among the speakers or discussants is very important,
(iv) Socio-Economic Status: The socio-economic status or the social strata of the speakers is highly important in language choice.
(v) Attitude: The attitude people show toward certain things at times leads to the success or failure of that particular thing. The speakers' attitude toward a language plays a vital role in language choice. For instance, children who are of a minority group and whose language(s) is/are stigmatized may decide not to use their native language with their parents, and relations so as not to be differentiated from the children of the majority group.
(vi) Content of Discourse: Fishman (1967) opines that some topics are better handled in one language than another, because the bilingual speaker has learned to deal with a topic in a particular language or the other language lacks specialized terms for a particular topic or because it would be considered inappropriate to discuss such a topic in that language due to cultural traits of the language. The bilingual individual may also change languages during a discussion to exclude someone (who is not literate in the language) or to include monolingual. However, the choice of language is largely due to the context of use and the situation the speakers find themselves or their-selves attitude to the languages.
(vii) Situation: This plays a major role in the choice of language among bilingual persons. The location of the interlocutor dictates the language usage. The formality or informality of the situation plays a role in language choice. Adekunle (1997) reports that people hardly use the English language in the informal setting but the indigenous languages in Nigeria.

Multilingualism in African educational system

Multilingualism is the act of using, or promoting the use of multiple languages, either by an individual speaker or by a community of speakers. Multilingual speakers in a given society outnumbered monolingual speakers in the world's population. Multilingualism is a social phenomenon governed by the need for globalization and cultural openness. A multilingual person can communicate in more than one language, be it actively (that is, through speaking, speaking, or singing) or passively (through listening, reading, or perceiving). More specifically, the terms bilingual and trilingual are used to describe situations in which two or three languages are involved. A multilingual person is therefore referred to as a polyglot.

Komorowoka (2011) sees multilingual speakers as individuals who have acquired and maintained at least one language during childhood called the first language. The first language can also be referred to as the mother tongue which one acquires without formal education. Children acquire two languages in this way which are called simultaneous bilinguals and in most cases, one language usually dominates over the other. Also, there is the possibility that a child may become naturally trilingual by having a mother and father with separate languages being brought up in a third language environment (Burck, 2007). An example of this could be found in Nigerian society. For instance, a Yoruba man married to an Igbo woman having a child who is being brought up in Hausa State(s) which is a separate language from the language of the father and mother is likely to speak the Hausa language in addition to his parents' languages. This makes the child trilingual or multilingual.

In linguistics, first language acquisition is closely related to the concept of a "native speaker". According to Araromi (2005), a native speaker of a given language has in some respects a level of skill that a second language learner can hardly reliably accomplish. Consequently, it is slightly problematic as many non-native speakers of a particular language not only successfully engage in their non-native language societies, but in fact, may become culturally and linguistically important contributors to their non-native language. Bhatia (2004) opines that people who have a multi-language background will observe that their native language would influence their second language learning. However, in the second language class, students are commonly faced with the difficulties of thinking in the target language because they are influenced by their native language and culture patterns.

With a multilingual situation in Nigeria, the educational system has evolved over the years and today a cornerstone of the Nigerian educational system is the bilingual policy which allows each child to learn his Mother Tongue or language of the immediate environment which could be Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Tiv, Urhobo, etc and English language to the best of his abilities. This enables the child to be proficient in English which is the language of commerce, technology and administration, and their mother tongue or language of the immediate Environment (NPE, 2004). As a result of Nigeria's bilingual education policy, more Nigerian residents have become literate in multiple languages (Akindele and Adegbite, 2000). Besides providing opportunities for students to be bilinguals, those who have the interest and the ability are also encouraged to learn a third language such as Arabic, French, etc. which are foreign languages (Adebule, 2011). Over the years, since independence in 1960, the English language has become the working language across all public services and most private sectors. However, in the social domain, verbal interactions within the family tend to be more

through the Mother's Tongue (MT). The statistics show that the majority of the population including young students are more likely to communicate with their family members using one of the Nigerian indigenous languages (Mother Tongues). However, the use of the English language has also been on the rise and more Nigerians are becoming comfortable in using both English and their mother tongue, switching from one to the other as they see appropriate. For example, in a school setting, students could be doing Mathematics, Sciences, Social Studies, etc in the English language and switch to their mother tongue during mother tongue lessons.

Factors such as political annexation, marital relation, economic transaction, cultural association, educational acquisition and religious affiliation bring about multilingualism. All these factors underpin the socio-political landscape of Nigeria today even though the combination of political, annexation and economic transaction or contact with the English people. The advent of the English colonialists in the 18th century brought about "linguistic imperialism", a situation by which according to Allwrights and Hank (2009) as cited in Falola (2009) "the minds and lives of the speakers of a language are dominated by another language, to the point where they believe that they can and should use only the foreign language when it comes to transaction dealings with the advanced aspects of life such as education, philosophy, literature government and the administration of justice.

Problems of multilingualism, multiculturalism and multilingual education in Africa

Multilingualism is the capacity of speaking two or more languages and thinking appropriately in them, elaborating and generating knowledge, then being able to share and transmit to others whether by speaking or writing (Amouzouvi, 2016). According to him, multilingualism in that fact that features and portrays all African countries where diverse ethnic groups exist, each with its language, dialect of communication and exchanging, socially and culturally. Multilingualism brings with its problems for individuals and groups of individuals especially those who are members of a linguistic minority. Unlike members of the majority group, they have to acquire proficiency in at least two or more languages before they can function as full members of the national community in which they live. The biggest problem they have to face is education. The problems of children from linguistic minorities who have learnt to read and write in an entirely different language are considerably great. Sometimes, they shift codes from these native languages to English or French as the case may be.

The cultural identity of an individual is bound up with their native language which is entangled in the self-development of the learners (Bunyi, 2001). In the opinion of Parlenko (2000), some students may resent the learning of a second or first language if they feel it is forced on them. But learners can identify with their teachers who are native speakers of the language. Thus, showing that both the teachers and the learners respect and value the language which can promote effective learning and uses of the language at all times. The attempted replacement of one language with another entails an effort to obliterate the whole culture and it can seriously impair the educational progress of the child who has to learn a new language before he can understand what the teacher is saying, let alone read and write.

The fact that language can act as a focus of discomfort for minorities wanting more powers, independence or annexation by a neighboring state can contribute to a problem for the government of that particular nation. Unfavoured minority language may act as a catalyst for discontent. This may lead the minority group to campaign for political independence through which the linguistic minorities will be converted into a linguistic majority. Some governments have responded to this sort of pressure by granting partial independence, as in the establishment of autonomous Albania-speaking areas of Yugoslavia and the Hungarian regions of Yugoslavia and Romania.

Another problem that the government may be presented with in a multilingual nation is that of selection of the national language. Many languages tend to compete for this status. An attempt to choose a particular language for this purpose may cause some resentment among the speakers of the other languages. For instance, in Nigeria, the Hausa will not want Yoruba or Igbo to be the national language while Yoruba or Igbo will not accept the Hausa to be the national language. Therefore, the government resorts to language planning to solve the problem posed by multilingualism.

CONCLUSION

A close analysis of the problems of Africa in terms of economic, social and political development will show that every conceivable aspect of the people's lives needs some adjustment or further development. In any dynamic society, all areas of human activities are undergoing tremendous changes, consequently, new ways of doing things and new problems emerge as old ones are resolved, new skills, new tools and new knowledge open new vistas and again create new problems and challenges, therefore, our educational system should be made dynamic and subject to constant changes as need for changes come.

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