

PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES AND E-LEARNING TOWARDS NATION

BUILDING IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The languages spoken in Nigeria do not only play significant roles in the socio-political life of the country, but also help in no small measure to unify or integrate the country that is so much diverse in all spheres of life. In realizing these multiplicities of roles, the languages play in the country, the Government instituted and enacted a policy called language policy to control and plan the use, teaching and learning of the various languages that we have in the country. The academic industry has found e-learning very useful in problem solving. The teaching and learning of indigenous languages are not left out in this global trend as it will not only advance the literacy progression of mankind but also brings about various ethnic groups together as a state. The indigenous languages, no doubt, have their own brigade of problems, amongst which are codification and standardization problems. However, the Government policy on the use, teaching and learning of these languages is bedeviled with a lot of problems which range from inadequate materials and personnel to handle the teaching of the recommended ones in the policy to socio – political problems initiated and propagated by the various groups in the country. It is thus recommended that the Government of the Federation should revisit the policy on languages in the country, rework it to accommodate the socio/politico-cultural differences and realities of the nation in order that the country may tap and enjoy the intent benefits of the multiplicity of languages and cultures that the nation is endowed with.

Keywords: Indigenous language; E-learning; Problems; Prospect; Nation Building

INTRODUCTION

The most important aspect of cultural heritage of any ethnic group is her indigenous language. Indeed, people preserve their culture by promoting their language(s). In Nigeria, there are various ethnic groups, each having its own

peculiar language and dialects being spoken in different communities (Akinkurolere and Adewumi, 2013). The numerically and politically major ethnic groups are the composite Hausa-Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the southwest, and the Igbo of the southeast'. While, Ayeomoni

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(2012) insists there are over 400 languages in Nigeria, which are from various ethnic groups. Meanwhile, the Yoruba ethnic group makes up about 30% of the population of Nigeria, making them the second biggest ethnic group, among the three major groups, while other ethnic groups have minority status. Yoruba language is the tonal language vastly spoken in the South Western region of Nigeria and few other countries of the world. The Igbo language is one of the major languages spoken in Nigeria with a population of 20 million speakers (Udoye, 2018). Most definitions of the name 'Igbo' often collectively referred to the land, language and the ethnic people of Nigeria who occupy the South Eastern part of Nigeria. Five states make up the Igbo speaking states namely: Enugu, Abia, Imo, Anambra, Ebonyi and some parts of Rivers and Delta states (Udoye, 2018). As noted by Are (2015) that preserving languages from dying is important because languages contain the culture, history and identity of a people.

Language plays a vital role in social interaction and it is an all-important agent in the transmission of cultural and social values among people. Indigenous language is shaped by the same political, social, and cultural forces which produce the world's varied civilizations and cultures. The forces lead to the issue of "Language Planning" in Nigeria which can be described as a set of deliberate activities systematically designed to develop the language resources of a community in order to enhance the utilization of such resources for

development (Ayeomoni, 2012). Various activities may take place while planning indigenous language: these may involve "rank" planning which either widens or narrows the function of a language or dialect and the rights of those who use it, it could also involve dialects and the rights of those who use it, it could also involve "corpus" planning, which seeks to develop or improve the structure of a language or dialect. Language is inseparable from human being; every human activity is actualized through language. Language is an indispensable tool for communication, transmission of culture and socialization. The language is also a medium of instruction in government owned primary schools in some state in Nigeria. The use of indigenous language for effective teaching and learning cannot be overemphasized. According to (Ezeani 2001 cited in Udoye, 2019) opines that the use of indigenous language in teaching science subjects will help students to understand and perform well in science subjects. Similarly, Mkandawire (2017) observes that Zambian school children participate actively in class when Cinyanja; an indigenous language spoken in town and cities is used by teachers than when the English language is used in teaching. Many efforts have been made by Igbo scholars to ensure that the language is standardized in order to compete with other languages of the world.

Mother Tongue Teaching

The country is believed to have over 400 distinct indigenous languages while Adegbite (2010) says there are 500 of such languages. As each of the

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languages is by definition a mother tongue, in theory, the indigenous languages are qualified to be taught as school subjects under the NPE policy on language education in Primary and Junior Secondary Schools. However, because most of them have sizeable numbers of speakers, it would not appear practicable to teach them as school subjects. The former National Language Center, now transformed into the current Language Development Center (LDC) and placed under the Nigerian Educational Research Council (NERDC), in 1976 suggested that, in addition to the three major languages, viz: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, only nine of the remaining 397 or so indigenous languages in the country should be allowed to feature in the country's formal school system. They are: Edo, Fulfulde, Ibibio, Idoma, Igala, Ijaw, Kanuri, Nupe and Tiv. Technically, very sound as that suggestion may actually be, it overlooks or completely ignores the degree of loyalty, some of the so-called minority groups have towards their respective indigenous languages, as a result of which they appear ready to go to any length to ensure that such languages are formally taught to their children in school. One of such groups is formed by the Urhobos of Delta State, for whose language commercially printed Primers and Readers which have existed for about ten years now were established (Ayeomoni, 2012). Some other groups that would appear to fall under this category are the Ebira of Kogi state, the Gwari of Niger, Kebbi, and Kaduna States, and the Jukun and Kutep of Taraba State. The loyalty that members of these

groups have towards their separate languages, particularly in the case of the Jukun and Kutep, is so strong that it appears somewhat unlikely that they would be prepared to give up such languages altogether and adopt another indigenous language of wider communication instead.

Accordingly, one would expect that, with time, the number of indigenous languages featuring in the nation's schools would rise beyond the twelve suggested by the former National Language Center. The three major indigenous languages that have always been taught in the schools in Nigeria since the second half of the nineteenth century do not belong to this small group. The three languages are not only fully taught and examined as mother tongues in Primary and Secondary Schools, they, have for the past twenty-eight years now, also being taught and examined as Single Honors subjects at first- and higher-degree levels, particularly in the case of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. Efik, Ibibio has also long featured as a school subject (Ayeomoni, 2012). It is, together with the three major languages, in the very small class of four indigenous languages examined for several decades now by the West African Examination Council (WAEC) and perhaps National Examination Council (NECO) and may by now, have started being examined at Certificate and first-degree levels as well. Edo, Urhobo and Kanuri are currently taught for some years in Primary School, and are also taught at Certificate level and as part of first degree programme, all in an attempt to increase the number of people

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that could be employed and deployed to teach the three languages in Primary and Secondary Schools. The University of Maiduguri has a vision on its programme for teaching Fulfulde at preparatory level for teaching of the language in Primary School and Delta state University has commenced degree programme in Urhobo with a vision to train teachers to teach the language at both Primary and Secondary school levels. Similarly, some of the languages spoken in River state are taught at the University of Port-Harcourt. Besides, some indigenous languages are taught at some State-owned Colleges of Education which do not include the languages that are regularly taught in the nation's schools. The reason for this is two-fold. First, only a few languages have enough materials to sustain teaching as they really ought to be taught at any educational level. Only Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba can be said to satisfy the set criterion; Efik, Ibibio would seem to satisfy that same criterion for being taught in Primary school and secondary School levels, but not up to the degree level. The remaining indigenous languages have a very long way to go in this regard, particularly for those of them that are yet to be reduced to writing. Secondly, only the three major indigenous languages can actually boast of enough teachers at all levels, While Efik, Ibibio may have teachers fully trained to teach that language at Primary and Secondary school levels, it would not appear to have enough people who could teach it at the tertiary level (Ayeomoni, 2012).

Literature review

Indonesia is believed to have approximately 550 languages, making it one of the most linguistically diverse countries (Arka 2013). With Indonesian as the language of wider communication among the diverse linguistic and ethnic groups, it has become the means for upward social and economic mobility. As is expected, many minority languages have become threatened and eroded by such predator languages like Indonesian and other dominant regional languages (Arka 2013). In reaction, the minority language speakers felt the need for the maintenance and intergenerational transfer of their native languages. According to Borgia and Dowdy (2016) reveals that the effort of a family towards the maintenance and transfer of the Seneca language, an endangered language of the Seneca Nation of Indians with an estimated number of about 150 speakers. The effort involved the establishment of a home-based language nest. Here, the "linguistic and cultural knowledge of fluent grandparents" were transmitted to grandchildren (Borgia and Dowdy 2016). In addition, the language nest provided daycare services to the children. The use of language nest is reported to have been adopted in New Zealand for the Maori language (Borgia and Dowdy 2016). Language use in the nest is said to be informal and conversational. It provided the children with ways of greeting and interpersonal interaction. To consolidate what the children learnt, parents were encouraged to use the heritage language at home with the children (Borgia and Dowdy 2016).

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As Usman (2014) rightly claims, “identity is important for the social and psychological wellbeing of the individual and group. Identity gives the individual a social sense of who he is even within a plural context”. In like manner, Amunike (2016) questions why parents avoid interacting with their children in their heritage language, when they themselves were raised by their parents in the language. She gives an interesting report concerning a well-placed US based Igbo family who also lived in other countries where the children attended different language schools in those countries. At home, according to Amunike (2016), the parents maintained the family language policy of interacting with the children in their Igbo dialect. With this, the children understand the language, though not with the same proficiency as English. In summary, available literature has shown that there is need for the maintenance and intergenerational transfer of the heritage language in a society where the heritage language is not spoken. It is equally observed that the home must be the critical focus of native language learning.

Indigenous Language death

Indigenous Language death is a situation where “a language ceases to be used by a community.” (Crystal, 2006). It can be thought of also as a process that affects speech communities where the level of linguistic competence that speakers possess of a given language idiom is decreased. The indigenous language’s death could occur through any of the following processes:

- Gradual language death
- Bottom-to-top language death
- Radical language death or,
- Linguicide (also known as sudden language death or death by genocide.)

The most common process leading to indigenous language death is one in which a community of speakers of one language becomes bilingual in another language (especially English language), and gradually shift their allegiance to the second language until they cease to use their original or inheritance language. This is the situation with the Igbo and Yoruba language. Meanwhile, a language is often declared to be dead even before the last native speaker of the language has died. This is the process of gradual death of a language, that which is affecting most African languages that have the English language as a second language. As language is known to be an index of culture and a mark of people’s identity; it is a core aspect of every culture. Without language, there is no heart-to-heart connection between species of any kind. The death of an indigenous language amounts to the death of a people’s identity and culture, as such people do not fold their hands and watch their identity get eroded. According to Thesaurus, Wikipedia (2015) it is a language that originated in a special place and was not brought to that place from elsewhere.

Problem of indigenous language in the Country

Experience and research have proved that some hitherto underdeveloped societies achieved greatness and shot to limelight through their

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insistence on the use of their language in all their affairs, including education at all levels, politics, trade and commerce, science and technology (Eme, 2016). This is a way of saying that any nation or society that ignores the salient role of its indigenous language in its overall development can hardly achieve greatness. It is a disaster for any speech community to lose its language, as such a loss signifies the loss of all by which the community stands for. Usman (2014) vividly captures this when he says,

“Every language is special in its unique way... and endows this uniqueness on the social landscape where it flourishes. When the speakers of a language... abandon their language in favour of a more populous, prestigious, or economically viable one, they give up their birthright, since their language embodies their distinctive, self-defining civilization and symbolizes their exclusive contributions to human knowledge and development. When a language dies, an irreplaceable intellectual and social wealth of the people also dies, and the larger society’s pool of educational, social and cultural values is diminished. The death of any language is a tragedy”.

Folorunso (2016) avers that, “Many Nigerian indigenous languages are faced with a lot of challenges and their continuous existence is being endangered and threatening. It is a known fact that in most of the educated elites’ homes, children are not encouraged to speak their mother tongues but English.” According to UNESCO (2012), “A language is endangered when its speakers cease to use it, use it in fewer and fewer domains, use fewer of its registers and speaking styles, and/or stop passing it on to the next generation.” Following from the foregoing, it is clear that many factors are put together in determining whether a language is endangered or not. However, the fact remains that a language may become endangered and later go into extinction when its speakers die off or abandon their language and switch to another. For Okolo (2015),

“A language dies when its speakers neglect it and do not care to pass it across to the upcoming generation. In the report shown in The Nation, November, 2013, research was carried out in Imo and Lagos States to test the Igbo competency level of three age groups, aged 1-5, 6-11 and adults which shows that a grim picture awaits the language; 70% of children between 6-11 years and 90% of children aged 5 years and below were unable to speak the Igbo language. ...

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50% of the Igbo parents in Imo State and 80% in Lagos State spoke mostly English or a mixture of English and Igbo to their children”.

It does not seem many users of indigenous language have this knowledge of language growth and language endangerment. Many take our knowledge and use of language for granted that we hardly realize a great treasure it is. This could explain why many do not feel it is worthwhile doing anything to ensure the maintenance of their language through transmitting it to the younger generation to ensure its growth and development.

E-learning

Mobbs (2007) defined e-learning as follows:

- The use of the electronic technology to deliver, support and enhance teaching and learning.
- The use of new multimedia technologies and the internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration.
- Learning in a way that uses Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Wikipedia (2014) defined that it is as the use of modern technologies such as computers, digital technology, networked digital devices (e.g the internet) and associated software and course ware which is an inclusive term that describes

educational technology that electronically or technologically supports learning and teaching. It is a process of using computer equipment to teach, research and learn, it is also a means of carrying out educational purposes through the application of modern technologies that facilitate easy access to teaching and learning in the education sector.

Challenges of E-learning in indigenous language

The numerous advantages of e-learning in the teaching and learning of indigenous languages notwithstanding faced with numerous challenges in developing countries like Nigeria. Some of the challenges of e-learning are material resources, personal, capita (financial resources) and power resources etc. The synergy of efforts earlier discussed and recommended are to be succinctly directed towards the following strategies:

(i) Government should embark on mass training of teachers who are well grounded professionally to teach in the aspects of indigenous languages at all levels of schools- primary and post primary. This should be complimented with mass production and supply of instructional materials that will aid their teaching in all ramifications, including the tertiary instructions.

(ii) Adoption of major and major-minority indigenous languages as media of instruction in the primary schools is yet to be implemented. Up till now, the present writer found that primary schools in some states in Nigeria do not have a

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workable syllabus for Yoruba in their primary schools. This should be reversed.

(iii) The teaching and usage of major Nigerian indigenous languages should be more encouraged in the local community gatherings, media and at government functionaries leaving English language to do the official documentation for inter-regional reference. In this regard, efforts should be made to train more experts in the area of translation.

(iv) Government should promote and coordinate the overall management and design of research needs by conducting and encouraging research projects that will cover all the relevant needs geared towards the pro-motion of indigenous languages. A viable, none tribal oriented National Language Commission is necessary here.

(v) The number of indigenous languages in Nigeria that are yet to be committed to writing runs up to several hundred today. Governments and Institutions should team up to evolve standard orthographies for these unwritten local languages to enable them accessible, researchable and teachable for them to be able to participate meaningfully in the tasks of nation building. The scope of the vocabularies of these local languages should also be expanded to cater for their use in science and technology.

Nation Building in promoting language

The language characteristics that are prevalent in all the countries south of the Sub-Sahara African is that each of these countries is composed of many ethnic groups with a

resultant effect of cluster of resident languages. According to UNESCO, quoted by Roy-Campbell (2006), Africa harbours about 2000 languages which is 30% of the world languages. It is however noted that just only 18% is spoken in Europe and the Americas. Apart from those languages whose speakers fall within the language border lines and whose speakers inevitably have to acquire more than one particular language for survival, the three principal languages in Nigeria are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. But the phenomenon is not as simple as that. There are majority-minority indigenous languages² and minor -minority indigenous languages. For the non- major and minority indigenous languages, Iwara (2008) gives a rough index of their number as 396. According to him, the major minority languages are given as about 12 in number – Fulfulde (or Fulani) Kanuri, Tiv, Nupe, Jukun, Ebira, Edo, Ibibio, Idoma, Ijaw, Efik and Urhobo. The population of the speakers of each of them is put as ranging between 2 to 8 million people. As a matter of fact, these groups of people do not only enjoy officialdom at their state levels, they also have a relatively standard orthography and a vast body of literature. The minor languages, on the other hand, number about 385 and have up to 2 million speakers. However, a few of them have just around half of a million.

By the current varying estimates therefore, the figure of native languages spoken in Nigeria ranges between 250 to 400. The record which supports 400 languages is about the most

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acceptable going by the UNESCO estimates as given in Ouane and Glanz (2010)'s account. Out of this number, however, it is assumed that of all the countries in Africa, Nigeria stands out as a country where three of the continent's four major language phyla are most represented (Iwara, 2008). Nation building is not the same as national development rather it aims at establishing social and political harmony which are necessary for national development. Nation building is a process that moves a state or country towards development. The only exception is the Khoisan family of languages which are 'spoken by the people inhabiting the South-west corner of Africa, in and around Namibia'. Besides, there is a large scale of endogenous bilingualism which means that some communities find that they need a second indigenous language for communication and interaction with the linguistically dominant group in their immediate local environments.

Some of the Factor affecting indigenous Languages in Nigeria

There were series of certain factors that affect indigenous languages in the country. Some of these factors include among others:

1. Level of Education of the citizen

Education can trigger off either positive or negative attitudes toward any indigenous language(s) in any part of the world if care is not taken. Indigenous language is an indispensable medium for the education and trimming of skilled manpower among the citizen. Based on the above declaration, because English language

is the language of education, government, trade, communication etc in Nigeria, many indigenous languages has made people to develop favourable attitude toward English language. A lot of citizen has abandoned the use of indigenous language from primary school to higher institution because the language of instruction as English language. By so doing, their love for indigenous language dies gradually up till now.

2. Government Policy on indigenous Language

It is observed that when the government of a country formulates a language policy which recognizes one language as the official language (i.e English language) of that nation, the given language will ultimately attract favourable attitudes from the people since it services as a means of carrying out official functions anytime, and at anywhere. This kind of policy favour one language against the other. This is the cause of English language use in Nigeria. It dominates the indigenous language which includes the Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa language and among others as well.

3. Globalization

Globalization is a powerful thrust in the current world politics, and it is an important factor in determining whether or not an indigenous language thrives. Globalization indirectly discourages diversity and encourages homogenization. Invariably, it suggests speaking the same kind of language, which English is that language. And since American dominated globalization (she) has become the major

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economic technological and cultural thrust of worldwide modernization and westernization, efforts to safeguard threatened languages (and therefore; contextually weaker language) must oppose the very strongest processes and powers. Despite the above factors that cause people to have positive attitude toward a foreign language and negative attitude toward their indigenous language,

Possible Solution for saving Indigenous Language

Some of the possible solution for saving indigenous language and its purpose lies with the speakers and hearers of the language. According to some schools of thought, "if parents do not speak their indigenous language to their children from birth, their children will not be able to speak it to their own off spring, consequently, the language might go into extinction". Indigenous language will surely die unless we do something about it or proffer solution. The future generation will not forgive us if we allow indigenous language to die. This are some of the proffer possible solution of Indigenous language:

1. Indigenous language and culture need to be love
2. Indigenous language among the people need to be interested and well appreciated.
3. There is need for indigenous language to organized moonlight plays and stories written in their language from time to

time and should be introduced at early stage.

4. Encourage the younger generation to learn their indigenous language from early stage.
5. Provide scholarships for students and teachers of indigenous language in primary and secondary schools.
6. Indigenous language should be allowed in media: radio, television and newspapers programme.
7. Indigenous language personalities could be invited to deliver lectures on important subjects using indigenous language as a means of communication.
8. Bill should be pass by National Assembly to encourage the use of indigenous language in the Country.
9. Encourage the use of indigenous language in many social, political and cultural gathering.
10. People should come to a round table discussion on the future of the indigenous language.

Conclusion

Language is very important to mankind as a means of communication and interaction. We make use of language almost at all times even when we think, talk, sing or dream. Indigenous language should not be allowed to die since it is very important to human being. E-learning which is an offshoot of the everchanging word of technology is education based on modern methods of communication, inclusive of

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computer and its networks search engines, e-libraries, websites, teleconferencing etc. If other languages in the past can die, we should not allow indigenous language to die, it should be passed on to next generation. The purpose of the present study is not to predict the prospect of indigenous language as a nation building in the country. The essence and potentialities of indigenous language to any society, economy and political well-being cannot be over-emphasized as discussed in this paper. However, developing nation like Nigeria has not given indigenous language development any rightful place of recognition. As a result, the neglect has continued to stare the nation on the face and unabatedly weigh hard on the process of development. The study therefore highlighted the language situations in the country (i.e Nigeria) which made this to become an authoritative especially within the context of the contemporary status of the English language and the indigenous languages. It found that the English language occupied a place of pride in all the Nigerian socio-economic and educational lives of the country. It was therefore concluded that developments would continue to escape the African nations, and indeed Nigeria, unless multicultural and multilingual forms of education are accorded accelerated promotion. Regional and state governments in developing nations therefore, should begin to initiate programmes that are capable of harnessing the status and involvement of mother tongues.

Recommendation

1. The government should embark on a massive computer training programme nationwide for teachers and learners alike at all levels of education institutions.
2. The government should support and sponsor programmes that are related to e-learning.
3. The cost for procuring e-learning gadgets should be shouldered by the government.
4. Awareness about the technological innovations in teaching and learning should be created by the government through our various mass media.
5. Teachers at all levels of education should be encouraged and motivated to develop and use multimedia, courseware and software relevant to teaching and learning.

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Conference on Nigerian Linguistics.
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