

POLITICAL IDEOLOGY AND NATIONAL ECONOMY IN INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The translation of the students' performance in their studies through indigenous languages into everyday activities could be seen as development, which would manifest in various forms in the society and the nation at larger. Indigenous language plays fundamental role on issues such as democracy, technology, metalanguage and linguistic globalization. This study recognizes that 64 years after independence that English (the ex- colonial masters' language) is still the language of education, governance, commerce, judiciary, etc. in Nigeria and as such has hindered equal participation of the entire citizenry in governance, access to information and full involvement in government policies and programs. This paper emphasized the need to promote the indigenous languages in Nigerian education system as an alternative to foreign languages for impacting quality education towards achieving sustainable national development. It seeks to answer the question on why indigenous languages are crucial component in national development. The paper therefore, recommends that, government, stakeholders, and individuals should put effort towards forestalling exclusion of a representative population, language endangerment and possible extinction of the indigenous languages; this can be achieved through vigorous and regular language preservation and maintenance programmes. A lost language is a lost identity and that amount to a lost race and generation.

Introduction

Language is the vehicle that carries human communication and expression. It is a conduit for transmission of people's culture, norms, ideas and belief. The repository of a people's identity and way of life is encapsulated in their language as well as transferred to other people and newer generations, via the means of language. This therefore posits that a lost language is a lost identity as well as a lost race and people. It is a key that is capable of bringing about the development of a people. The development can come in form of economic, political, educational development, technological development, social development etc. All of these developments are initiated, executed, conveyed and archived by means of language (Anthony, 2013).

Language is a distinctively human system of communication based on oral and written symbols. It is the vehicle through which people's culture is transmitted. It is an extremely important aspect of a community. It is an index of identity which serves as a repository of a people's culture, industry and exploits. It is language that differentiates the Homo sapiens from other animals. The most effective engine of a people's culture is their mother tongue.

Indigenous languages are treasures of our culture and self-identity. In other words, it is the indicator of history and self-identification (Charles, 2019). Indigenous language is an indispensable cultural legacy with which all forms of human interactions are carried out. According to Nwadike (2004), it is the key to the heart of the people. If we lose the key, we lose the people. If we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to wealth or affluence.

Through language, thoughts and beliefs are the principal ingredients of human culture that identify the people, arise from their daily communal and individual practices through language, therefore, there is need for the promotion of indigenous languages through education. Education is the lubricant of human capital development, which is at the centre of every other form of development, and it takes developed individuals to develop a nation. The socio-political, economic, religious and education patterns are influenced by the instrument of language, to communicate meaning, understanding and truth.

According to Obiora (2009:73) cited in Anthony (2013), to educate means to culture a child in order to adapt to his/her environment, even as his/her needs and aspirations are taken into consideration at every stage of the child's development. This statement captures the key term which is central to the meaning of education, hence by culturing a child means to expose s/he to easily survived at every stage of his/her development in the society. In line with the above, Okediadi (2009:218) contends that, education is a means of developing human abilities to enhance the quality of life. It is the major tool for the advancement of the individual and the society. The quality of life could be made better through education, as a result of its ability to take off the veil of ignorance from people and aids them to advance in the society.

Indigenous languages are indispensable cultural legacies without which all forms of human interactions can be carried out. Sustainable national development is the development of individuals in a nation. Individuals can develop educationally, socially, politically, economically, and culturally through interaction with government agencies that disseminate policies through various indigenous languages. Development indices such as internal cohesion, integration, unity, economic wellbeing and citizens' participation in governance are promoted through indigenous languages. This paper therefore discusses political ideology and national economy in indigenous language education for sustainable national development.

Sustainable National Development

Development is the bane of our present world. The concept of development is prickly and has attracted varied debates by scholars. However, there seem to be a consensus that runs in this varied opinion and this has to do with complete transformation of areas like language, economics, culture, social, political, scientific, technological, educational progresses of a system or a particular society in order to meet its present need. Development has to do with constant and consistent growth in this aspect of human life or social well-being. Topadro and Smith (2011) see development as the process of improving the quality of all human lives and capability by raising people's standard of living, self-esteem and freedom. Development implies the conscious promotion of the well-being and security of persons in such a way that is constantly able to optimize the realization of their individual potentials".

Sustainable national development can be regarded as a situation whereby people harness the resources at their disposal in order to have meaningful life. This development

ranges from growth in education (intellectual growth), politics, economy, science and technology. In educational process, indigenous language (Mother Tongue) is the main pillar through which man has to plan, instruct and evaluate programmes. The development of individuals in respect of their aspiration in the society means development of a nation. Individuals develop educationally, socially, economically, politically and culturally through their interaction with government agencies that disseminate ideas and policies through various media in the languages that the individual best understand. According to Aziza (1998) sustainable national development is a gradual and advanced improvement or growth through progressive changes in the socio-political life of the nation. Elugbe (2006) cited in Charles (2019) asserts that sustainable national development refers to the growth of the nation in terms of internal cohesion, integration, unity, economic wellbeing, mass participation in government, and educational growth.

Indigenous Languages in Nigerian Education System

The essence of language is that, it makes the people not to be confused in the course of communication and or interaction. The indigenous languages' ability to communicate meaning amongst the educated class along with the students of all levels will go a long way to become vital force in maintaining order and peace in the society. This is because left for indigenous languages of the people, every other language is partly or wholly a language of manipulation, exploitation and marginalization. In support of this, Okoye (2007:84) argues, 'the situation becomes more complex when languages spoken in the society are many, people tend to extort and manipulate the situation into ethnic consciousness.' In a situation like this, it is difficult for the people to come into term with any person or persons they are seeing from the above point of view. In the same light, Ezeani (2007:75) states: No foreign language can replace the mother language. And no system of education can afford to disregard it without serious detriment to the mental development of the child. Thought and language work together like soul and body, one is dependent on the other for its existence, they grow and decay together. The child thinks and dreams in the language through which he acquires the first-hand experience of life, which naturally should be the mother tongue.

The attainment of social stability through appreciating the indigenous languages in Nigerian schools lies on understanding of the languages in the education and communication channels. It is on this background, Okoye (2007:88) argues that, the language one speaks influences the choice of roommates, friend, boyfriends, girlfriends, as the case may be. In the hostel complexes one observes that students from same language group do not have much misunderstanding between them when they stay together." Therefore, for effective social stability to be achieved in the society, indigenous languages of the people should be given its rightful place, mostly when it begins in the schools. In support of this, Ubahakwe (2002:270) argues, "understanding of a people begins with understanding their language, since language is the greatest single carrier of a people's culture." It is only when the teachers or lecturers as the case may be effectively used the indigenous languages of the people in the course of teaching the students is s/he said to have communicated and informed the people. This is because, if the speaker fails to inform the people, he /she has succeeded in deforming them which goes back to create social instability in the society.

Eruchalu (2007:16) contends that, meaning enable language users to determine the specific meaning of the word the speaker or writer wants to convey.” The action and reaction in the use of language for communication of meaning, understanding and truth is easily observed in a common setting where indigenous languages are used to address the people. Hence it would enhance the peaceful coexistence of the students whose indigenous languages are used in the processes of their education.

The Importance of Indigenous Languages in Education for Sustainable National Development

Nigeria is the most multilingual nation in Africa with about 400 to 500 indigenous languages, which have various status - developed, developing, and underdeveloped. Language is intimately tied to man’s feelings and activity, it is bound up with nationality, religion, and the feelings of self. It is used for work, worship and play by everyone” Language provides a conduit, repository, and means of transmission, expression and communication of economic belief, socio political, educational and political trajectory of the people / society. This situates that, a successful transformation of the society can only be achieved through the use of the indigenous language of the people.

One of the important roles of indigenous languages would play in Nigerian education system is to foster social stability. Language helps to bring people of one language community together, thereby building confidence amongst the user, irrespective of where they come from. Indigenous languages if adopted in Nigerian schools would help to build peaceful co-existence of the people, because of its ability to communicate meaning, understanding and truth.

Okediadi, (2008:141) states, “Languages are means towards attaining human cooperation and co-existence.” The author further says that a common language is a powerful unifying factor in the modern nation states that would help to promote a feeling of single community across tribal and ethnic lines. The human relationship she is talking about in the above statement can be effectively actualized in the use of indigenous languages in the schools which in turn manifest in the society. **Onwudiwe (2006:152)** brings the above statement home and says, “In everyday interaction, human beings use language greatly for their existence and survival.”

Indigenous languages should be given prominent position in Nigerian Education System for national development to be achieved. Indigenous languages will play significance role in the education of Nigerian students, because it plays the same role languages play in the communities or societies where they are used. This is because it has the ability to expose the people to their cultures, ethics and environment. Nigeria has series of sound education policies that could not withstand the test of time, because of the poor foundation those policies were and are built upon. A look at some of these policies will bring the message of this study home for us to be in a position to appreciate the use of indigenous languages in Nigerian schools.

Education objectives in the Nigeria Constitution (2004) section 18, iv. according to Anagbogu, Anyamene and Anyachebelu (2009: 85) states, that, ‘The child is entitled to education that develops his/her abilities to the fullest potential.’ They go on to emphasis the importance of the child’s education by citing OAU Charter on education, which says, ‘state parties shall take appropriate measures to ensure that children who become mothers before completing their education shall have opportunity to continue with their education on the basis of their individual ability.’ Based on the above, **Ukeje (1986) cited in stresses** that, the rationale for

introducing the Universal Primary Education Scheme as contained in the plan is a pre-requisite for equalizing education opportunities across the country. However, good and sound the above policies are, they go in the faulty foundation of the foreign languages. Obidike (2006:208) makes it clear to us that the problems facing education system in Nigeria is not on policy making, and cites the National Policy of Education which states, 'Education in Nigeria is no more a private enterprise, but a huge Government Venture that has witnessed a progressive evolution of Government's complete and dynamic intervention and active participation.' Like what we have seen in case of Ukeje (1986) above, the language used in Nigeria to educate our children could be seen from the angle of 'forcing a round peg into a square hole.'

The students in Nigeria are facing this challenge on the processes to acquire the knowledge of the subjects they are exposed to in foreign languages. This language imposition has done more harm than good with regards to the quality of education in Nigeria. The time-consuming aspects of using foreign languages to teach the local people is counterproductive, hence delaying the rate of development that would have come from the practical application of the knowledge acquired in the course of education. The importance of education in human capital development cannot be over emphasis. Zuofa (2008:16) gives the above statement a nice anchor and says that education makes man and man makes the world. Apart from the creator who is the greatest determinant of what the world was, is and will become, it is education that determines the ability of man to use the things of this world to improve his lot in life.

It is important to make it clear here that so far as education is concerned, knowledge is superior to the medium for imparting it, and until we make the Nigerian Education System knowledge based we are kissing goodbye to the development it could offer. Nwankwor (2003:109) makes the above statement closer to us when the author says that educational development is holistic development aimed at elevation of man in the animal kingdom to the rational sphere. It is fore-sighted and progressive development that can better the lot of the human being mostly in Africa. But the question one needs to ask is, how could holistic development be achieved in Nigeria when she fails to put into consideration of what she stands to gain in the use of indigenous languages in her education? The use of foreign languages which is common place in Nigerian Education System is disservice and could be seen as washing of the outer part of a cup while the inside which the important part is left dirty. Indigenous languages in Nigeria are relegated to the background in pursuit of foreign languages which the knowledge they claim to offer is mere romanticism.

By the first October 2024 Nigerian Education System will be sixty-four years, if we begin to count from her independence. Who are we waiting to tell us that we are not making head way in the present-day system of education in Nigerian using foreign languages? At this juncture, we need to make the policy that will bring life back into our education system through indigenous languages? The first step towards educating the people should be through their language. Ubahakwe (2002:270) says, "understanding a people begins with understanding their language." It is only when the students understand the language used in teaching them that education can be imparted to them is said to be effective. In line with this Onumajuru (2012: 97) says, "All peoples have an inherent right to their languages. It is the means of giving expression to their own personality however primitive they may be." This is because 'no greater injustice can be committed against a people than to deprive them of their own language.' To deprive the people from using their language is to make them less human, because as a human

creation every language is created to serve the peoples' entire need of becoming human being in society. Also, in this line of thought, Ndianefoo (2011:183) makes it clear that, 'language and truth are inseparable natural union towards man's yearning for crisis-free society since the dawn of the history.' There is no other language that could make communication of meaning, understanding and truth easy in Nigerian education system than indigenous languages.

However, the education system that can affect national development in Nigeria has to be rooted in the use of indigenous languages at all levels of Nigerian schools. It is high time we continued to enslave ourselves by holding at high esteem the foreign languages. Our children are supposed to be exposed to their environment using their first language. The use of foreign languages to educate of our children as against the indigenous languages amounts to over tasking them. Hence, the rate of decline in the students' performance in Nigerian Education System could be traced back to the 'language confusion' they are exposed to. Ndianefoo (2011:171) makes the above statement clearer by saying that a people develop a language appropriate to their needs and environment which serve them as medium of communication, transmission of knowledge, culture, value, as well as for articulation of their world view.

The above statement shows that it is more reasonable to educate the people with their indigenous languages than confusing them in the course educating them with foreign languages. It is against this background that Onumajuru (2012: 97) stresses that language plays a great role in human society and education. Hence, it is the most effective medium of communication through which knowledge is acquired and handed down from one generation to the next. The author goes on in and argues: A child who is grounded in his mother tongue has unconsciously acquired both the universal and particular language structures, which dispose him to learn with greater ease, and simultaneously, any second language (or language 's') presented to them, (sic) since what he needs in the second language is extensive acquisition of its vocabulary.

The above statement is telling us that without language, no knowledge in the society will be passed down to the next generation in form of communication and education. The emphasis here centres on how effective communication and education would be if the peoples' indigenous languages are used in Nigerian schools, which in turn helps the students to learn other languages. Obiora (2009:72-3) argues that language is of great importance for achievement of functional education for national development, because it covers virtually all the societal environmental factors. She stresses further that the reason a child should be taught with his/her immediate environment language is to attain the set goal of functional education. The essence of language is for communication. Therefore, the students need to be taught in their indigenous languages, to be at home with what their teachers are teaching them. The use of indigenous languages would be advantageous to the students, which helps in the processes of bring out the best in them. Is anything lacking in the indigenous languages? Even if anything is lacking in the indigenous languages, how can outright relegation help to revive them? It is as a result of this relegation of indigenous languages to background mostly in the schools for education of our children that Ndianefoo (2011:181) argues, "The ideal language is the language that is perfect and adequate in communicating ideas, thoughts and objects in the clearest way devoid of ambiguity". No man lives in isolation and to live is to communicate, to inform and interact with one another and this is made possible through the instrumentality of language. It is only when the students are not suffered much to understand the terms used in

any course or subject they are exposed to, that they can perform creditably in their studies. It is in this regard that Ezeani (2007:75) argues, “No foreign language can replace the mother language and no system of education can afford to disregard it without serious detriment to the mental development of the child.” The indigenous languages of the people play vital roles in identifying them as well as acting as a catalyst for their education. Therefore, it is safer to educate the students using their mother tongues, than to expose them to so much mental stress through teaching them with foreign language. Seeing this ugly trend of foreign language imposition on the students,

Okoye (2007:84) says that the situation becomes problematic, when the languages spoken in the society are many. That is the more reason the use of indigenous languages becomes the effective and easy means of human interaction in the society. It is on this note that the study is advocating that indigenous languages which are easy to understand by the students at all levels would be effective for education of our children. Nwokoye and Eze (2013:223) also make their case in favour of indigenous languages when they use Igbo Language as example and say that ‘indigenous language is most powerful tool with which to think, create, aspire, desire, feel, express, and enlarge mental horizon, in order to fulfill that which man is capable of.’ Through adoption of indigenous languages in Nigerian Schools, the above-mentioned human activities would not be task some any longer. Hence, it will create a scenario whereby the people are the languages and the languages are the people, because at any point in time there will be no ambiguity in the use languages.

Hinderances to the Development of Indigenous Languages

The development of indigenous languages in Nigeria is facing a lot of challenges, among which are lack of knowledge of the exact number of indigenous languages in Nigeria, haphazard research, inadequate funding of research, inadequate facilities, the intangibility of language, the ideological argument against the number of indigenous languages as evidence of disunity, and epileptic utilities.

Many indigenous languages do not have orthographies and those that are available are not well developed for literary use. Many indigenous languages are becoming moribund and are on their way to extinction, as a result of lack of use. Causes of endangerment, according to Elugbe (2006), range from conquest, lack of relevance, political domination, trade and negative attitude of some elites to enforced multilingualism. The negative attitude of the speakers has struck the death knell of their indigenous languages. The first sure sign of self-colonization is when one does not know enough of one’s language (Solanke, 2006). According to Haruna (2006), there is serious desertification and deforestation in the linguistic landscape of northern region. There are cases of language death caused by what Yusuf (2006) calls suicide through over borrowing from prestigious languages, or murder through language policy. Something drastic has to be done to safeguard the endangered languages. Language documentation is the panacea to language death. It is incontrovertible that the loss or death of some indigenous languages is an irretrievable loss of the peoples’ collective wisdom, that is people’s cultures, traditional occupations, medicine, technology and terminologies. The richness of any nation, or any civilization, is a function of its language and culture.

Conclusion

Indigenous language is thus an indelible mark of a people's identity. The core values of our people must be the pivot for national reforms. Traditional values should be embedded in honesty, transparency, respect for institutions, constituted authorities and the sanctity of human person and life. These core values are reflected in the people's identity, cultures, traditions and systems, most times encapsulated in their languages. A child that grows up guided by the positive values of the society will possess a healthy and progressive mind in adulthood. Therefore, the teaching and learning of indigenous languages will afford the learner an understanding of the problems of the society, and indeed, Nigeria.

Language is an indispensable cultural legacy with which all forms of human interactions are carried out. It is capable of destroying or mending relationships. The creation of a new democratic culture depends on language for the articulation of democratic ideals. A given political thought is usually expressed by means of language. It determines the stability and success or otherwise of a given democratic experience. Political contests depend on the use of language, as in violent or abusive language. Indigenous language is a good language of persuasion. Songs are composed in abusive diction to denigrate people and their ideals. Campaign language is a social mask for hiding party's selfish motives. The umbrella as an emblem is a sign language. These symbols communicate deep meaning. The umbrella symbolically represents the provision of shade or shelter for protection against adverse weather conditions, poverty and material deprivation. Political speeches, slogans and emblems are expected to be goal-directed. If and when the business of the National Assembly is conducted in indigenous languages, sustainable national development will be accelerated.

For indigenous languages to be used for teaching and learning, these MTs need to be developed in terms of their orthographies, spelling and vocabulary, including syntax and translation through the use of lexicographic strategies and the linguistic indigenization policy of borrowing, coinage, semantic extension.

Recommendations

- i. Deliberate efforts should put for the empowerment of the indigenous languages to meet up with the technological drive of the 21st century and beyond.
- ii. Government, stakeholders, and individuals should put effort towards forestalling exclusion of a representative population, language endangerment and possible extinction of the indigenous languages; this can be achieved through vigorous and regular language preservation and maintenance programmes. A lost language is a lost identity and that amount to a lost race and generation.

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