

IGBO LANGUAGE EDUCATION FOR JOB CREATION AND SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Unemployment is among worst diseases that are wrecking havoc in Nigeria today especially in the Igbo speaking states. The need to create jobs for Nigerians can no longer be over emphasized as every Nigerian today feels the pinch of youth unemployment, which has led to high level of social vices all over the nation as can be seen in the rate and level of armed robbery, kidnappings, examination malpractices and campus secret cults among other crimes. This need entails that since the white-collar jobs are no longer there or are dead, alternative means of job creations should be sought to meaningfully engage the youths especially those that are privileged to have access to formal Igbo language education. Igbo language studies readily fills this much needed gap if properly undertaken by the individual and aided by the government in power. In this paper, efforts are made to discuss and x-ray the potentials that can be tapped after the study of Igbo language to create jobs and make one a self-employed and self reliant person who will contribute meaningfully to national development and also be self sufficient and possibly, become and employer of labour.

Introduction

Language has been described as the major gate-way for communications among human beings. Nigeria is a country made up of people with different languages and cultures. The plurality in the languages in Nigeria made the colonial masters not to

know the one to adopt or use on entering Nigeria, hence the choice of English language as the Lingual-franca of Nigeria. With time, Nigerians realized the importance of language as a mark of identity and a unifying factor that has the power to unite the diverse groups in the country. This gave birth to the choice of the three major languages; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as the major languages of Nigeria to be studied in our schools for better transmission to the citizen. Since its inclusion and acceptance as one of Nigerians indigenous languages, Igbo language has come very far in its quest to receive the much needed acclamation and acceptance in Nigeria and the Igbo nation in particular. Much of the efforts made by Igbo scholars of Igbo extraction received little or no impart in making the Igbo people themselves see any thing good in their language, hence Igbo language education has continued to suffer to the detriment of attaining the objective of the Federal Government of Nigeria. In this paper, effort is made to reappraise the functionality of Igbo education in Nigerian especially in the Igbo nation to, ascertain how functional it has fared and how relevant it has been to the self reliance of Igbo as well as its ability to attain the objectives of the federal government with regard to indigenous language education in Nigeria.

The Rise of Igbo Language in the Nigerian School System

Prior to 1977, when the National Policy in Education(NPE) first came into being in Nigeria, Igbo language did not

enjoy any federal status as it was only used in the Igbo speaking states alone, though the Igbo man had wielded strong impact in the economic, social, religious and political life of Nigeria since independence in 1960. The acceptance of the three major languages; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as Nigerian's indigenous languages raised the status of Igbo language from a sectional to a national language, there by giving it a status that is recognized in the whole world. The policy was enshrined in the 1979 national policy of education. The policy later was revised in 1981 and stated clearly in the 2004 edition, section 1:8 that, each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba.

With this national status, Igbo language is now made mandatory to be studied in all parts of Nigeria as a core course to be taken and passed in WASCE and other qualifying examinations.

One completely feels bad when one seeing the way, manner and level of implementing these indigenous language policy in Nigerian especially in Igbo land, and among the Igbo people whose language and culture has been highly elevated to the national status, thereby giving it the chance to develop in the comity of world languages.

The Problems Negatively Affecting Igbo Language Education in Nigeria

Igbo language education had experienced great difficulty in its quest to function in Nigeria and Igboland in particular. Despite its acceptance in the national policy on education, the language is yet to receive the acceptance it deserves from Igbo people and the Nigerian nation. Many scholars have sincerely put in their best to make Igbo language achieve its goals and objectives to the best interest of the Igbo nation, and Nigeria in general. The Wikipedia free encyclopedia reported it clearly that *The Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) was founded in 1949 by Frederick Chidozie Ogbalu for the promotion of the Igbo language and culture and has since created a standard dialect for Igbo.* But it is very heart breaking that 61 years after the SPILC was founded, majority of the Igbo people themselves are yet to see the importance of this their cultural heritage now fully transformed into national heritage in the scheme of things in Igbo states and Nigeria in general, hence they play down on the policy. Akponye (2009), has alerted that the Igbo language is among the languages pegged by the United Nations Organization to be among the languages that might go into extinction in the next 25 years. He reported thus, that recently, the United Nations Organizations observed the international mother tongue Day, whereby emphasis as laid on the preservation of mother tongue or cultural language the world over. Before then, the UNO conducted researches on the languages being spoken in the world with

view to determining their longevity. The results were posted in the internet. Igbo along with some other Nigerian languages was found in the group that would become extinct within “the next twenty-five years” because according to the report, it was fast ‘losing vibrancy and dynamism.

Akponye (2009) sadly observed the general attitude of the Igbo people in their public outings when he stated that “No one should be alarmed to observe that in Igbo land, many occasions in cultural Settings are presented and conducted in English language. Take wedding and academic lectures as example. Is it not anachronistic? Let it be drummed into the minds of the Igbo both in this country and in diaspora that language still remains the number one cultural element through which people are identified, respected and preserved. People who lose their language are lost for ever.

The Igbo language education have suffered great neglect in the hands of the individual Igbo people of Nigerian and the entire nation. The governments of Nigerian at the three tiers of governance has not in any serious and sincere way shown any serious concern or sincerity to pursue the goals of indigenous national Languages in the country with regards to implementing the policy. One expects that the government and the governed should see it as a duty and do their best to its success as the only thing that can guarantee the stability of our national unity through our own language. On the other hand, the Igbo people themselves and the people of

Nigeria are yet to imbibe the study of Igbo language as a course that should be taken serious in the national interest for development.

As it stands today, it seems that majority of Nigerians and even the Igbo people have not actually sincerely accepted the indigenous languages as a necessary course to pilot, especially in the school system and in the private homes. Uwachue (2010), in a paper titled "Igbo are not appreciated by Nigeria" lamented the poor recognition of Igbo people in Nigeria. He observed that *despite the contributions of the Igbos to national unity, there is the feelings that, as a people, Igbos are deliberately being sidelined.* How can other tribes (nations) recognize the Igbo nation when the Igbo people themselves are toying with their cultural identity. Igbo people themselves need to encourage themselves to speak this language in the homes, offices, markets and in social functions. It is sad to observe that children shy away from speaking Igbo language at homes or in the schools. In the primary and secondary schools in Igbo states, students are forbidden to speak Igbo language, their mother tongue, and those who violate the rule are severally punished. This negates section 4c of the National Policy on Education (2004) which states that, government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage, English

Akponye (2009) was saddened by this ugly situation when he noted that,

these are the disheartening developments threatening the Igbo language. The Igbo people-south East Nigeria, who are the natural owners of the Igbo language- no longer speak it freely and expressly as the English language. English is used to teach even toddlers in kindergartens. Nursery and primary school pupils in Igbo land are punished by their teachers for speaking their mother tongue (Igbo) in class. In Igbo land, many parents punish their children when they speak Igbo in the home. Students who offer Igbo as their course of study in our society in our tertiary institutions are regarded as dunces who can not do well in other courses.

Buttressing the above position, Odiaka (2010), so disturbed with the bad condition of the Igbo language that he asked:"

Have you noticed how the Igbo Language is fast deteriorating in our schools, markets, public places, business sectors, and even in the homes, as if no one speaks the language anymore? This is indeed sad, knowing fully well that a people's language is their major identity

Even Igbo born students in Igbo land shy away from studying Igbo language in the schools as there is nothing to motivate them like other students in French, Hausa, medicine, law and engineering studies. Those that graduated in Igbo language are not employed by the government as a means of inducing others to study the language. Those studying them are bullied and tagged 'dull-brained dons' hence everyone sees Igbo language education as a child's play and nobody's business, and

as something not to be reckoned with. What a shame to the Igbo nation! It is on record that up till today, there is no known monitory agency charged with the implementation of the Igbo language Education in all the seven Igbo speaking states. Similarly, no body has taken the pain to take the gospel of the Preservation of Igbo language to the rural people especially in the local government areas. One will like to commend the good works done on Igbo language by the Igbo people in Diaspora in America who once in a while, show the world that Igbo race still exists. Recently as published in the internet of Uwandigbo (2010), a call was made in far away America that all the Igbo people residing in America should be counted in the census planned in America in May, 2010. An excerpt from the publication reads, that many Igbo organizations throughout the United States have already started partnering with the Census Bureau to ensure that ndiigbo are properly counted. On Sunday February 7, 2010, Igbo Organization of New England (IONE), a 2010 Census Partner, will be distributing promotional materials (shirts and calendars) as part of the campaign to energize ndiigbo to participate in the 2010 census.

It is encouraging that the Igbo people out there in America and England still remember that they are from the Igbo race, despite living in the developed countries. But back here in Igbo land and Nigeria, majority of 'Ndiigbo', do not show any regard to the study of Igbo language and do not encourage the youths to study Igbo language.

Anyanele (2000) lamented the governments' poor attitude to the course of Nigerian language education, and Igbo language in particular. He opined that, the government tends to be flexible in its policy; hence people see it as a 'do-if you want' affair ".....each child should be encouraged' by the word "encouraged" One who is not keen to implement the policy or who feels that the policy does not suit him will decide not to "encourage" the child, thereby making a mess of the policy.

Another major problem that has made the course of Nigerian languages especially the Igbo language to derail is the gross shortage of resource materials both human and material. Anyanele (2000) lamented that many states in the federation do not command sufficient manpower and material resources for the implementation of the policy since its inception. In the Igbo speaking states for instance, many schools both at the primary and secondary levels do not have or engage qualified Igbo language teachers to teach the subject. The above applies to the gross dearth of instructional materials such as books written in indigenous languages, instructional materials produced in the indigenous languages are also lacking in the school system.

The above is the present ugly position of Igbo language education in Nigeria and in Igbo speaking states in particular. Something needs to be done and urgently too to remedy this ugly situation and make Igbo language stand side by side with English language and French in Nigeria. This will give Igbo

language education the elevated position it ought to occupy in the nation.

Job Creation Programme

The word Job is defined by the Encarta Dictionaries as occupation, work, trade, profession, career, employment, contract, and businesses. Job can be seen as any thing that someone undertakes that yields revenue to that person or individual. It is also a thing that someone engages in from which the person is paid. Example, civil service is a job as the person is paid for rendering the one type of service or the other. On the other hand, creation is defined by the Encarta Dictionaries (2009), as making something; the bringing of something into existence, something created by somebody; a product of human imagination or invention. From the above definitions, Job creation may be defined as the ability to create work in order to produce something for revenue or for a living. It may also be explained as the ability of someone to initiate and carry out projects that keep him busy with a view to yielding revenue. Job creation is the outcome of unemployment defined by Ubinz (2010), as the failure of the state to create enough jobs for all who want them or to find ways to share all the available jobs amongst the entire labour force has come to be defined as the 'unemployment problem

By the above explanations, individuals, groups or government can embark on job creation for the employment of a person or group of people. Wikipedia, (2010), buttressed the above assertion on Job creation programme by saying that

job creation programs are programs or projects undertaken by a government of a nation in order to assist unemployed members of the population in seeking employment. They are especially common during time of high unemployment.

The Wikipedia (2010) further opined that Canada has many job creation programs at both the federal and provincial levels. At the federal level they are part of Human Resources Development, Canada (HRDC). One hopes that Nigerian government will emulate this laudable example.

Anything project undertaken by a person or group of people to raise revenue that does not constitute illegal project can be used as a job creation. Mutume (2010) observed that "African leaders are expressing a renewed sense of urgency to tackle youth unemployment on the continent and are beginning to develop and implement plans to create jobs'. Mutume (2010) also quoted Kenyan President; Mwai Kibaki as saying, *In Africa, the problem of youth unemployment is more complex than in some other parts of the world*. Mutume commented that President Kibaki sadly noted that "it is critical for African countries to come up with specific plans that target youths. Most employment policies fail to take into account the particular needs of young people or the fact that creating employment for women often poses a problem'. Mutume (2010) further sadly noted that, this lack of job opportunities contributes to many social problems. Without alternatives, many young women and girls are forced into sex work.

Studies show that young jobless people living on the street are more likely than their employed counterparts to abuse illicit substances or join armed groups.

The recent upsurge in armed robbery, kidnapping, examination malpractices and other social vices are direct result of lack of jobs for the youths. Janneh (2010), commenting on job creation noted that: *It is clear that to rise out of poverty, the people of our continent need jobs and education.* Education still remains the major variable that can create jobs in all sectors of the society. Igbo language education has that potential. Igbo language as a job creator in Nigeria

1. Changing the Mind Set of Nigerians

From the analysis made on the problems of Igbo language education in Nigeria, it seems as if no good things will ever come out of the study of Igbo language. But on a closer look at the present Nigerian society, one will see that Igbo language education has a lot of potentials for creation of Jobs for thousands of unemployed people in Nigeria and Africa. Even non Igbo indigenes can be employed by their studying Igbo language well as Language is a veritable tool for human communication, entertainment and transactions and also an empowering agent.

The first step in making the study of Igbo language a job creator for national development is the changing of the way we Nigerians and Igbo people in particular think. The saying, *Onye kwe, chi ya ekwe.*

(Where there is will, their is a way) The way we think determines the way we act, the way we act determines what we get as output, our output determines our attitude to life. The bible says that 'every thing is possible to he who believes. Nigerians and indeed, Igbo people should begin to place emphasis on the value system we got from our fathers. Indigenous language is our heritage which we all need to value, and when we value it, we become interested in it, and then we will see the big potentials it has for our well beings. Odinaka (2010) advised all Igbo people with regard to valuing our language and identity when he opined:

You do not need to be in Igbo land to speak Igbo; wherever you are outside your home, it is even better to speak Igbo. It is your identity at home and abroad, an identity God has given you just as he has given to others. I see no reason why an Igbo person will prefer a foreign language as a means of communication even at home. I believe the years of ignorance of gentile psycho-manipulations are over, and we truly need to start looking at ourselves the way we were made in the Garden of Eden -- naked but not ashamed. You need to jump on this right now!

Supporting the above statement, Nwazue (2010), opined that, if you are an Igbo, it is important that you learn to speak, read, and write Igbo because the language of a people is their most important heritage on which the survival of their culture and their continued existence on earth as a people largely depend

The above assertions sum up the importance of re-orientating our minds to our value our national identity. We have no other means of being identified as a people, as Maduabum (2010), rightly observed that without being told, the Igbo language makes a clear distinction between Onyeigbo/Ndiigbo and the rest. It is indeed a shame that many Igbo persons no longer see Igbo language as very valuable, unique, and worth speaking in public places. Speaking Igbo in the public will not reduce you to a primitive person and, if you are called “Jew man” for speaking Igbo, then it is a credit because you are indeed a Jew -- not a Gentile.

The ability to study Igbo language and speak it well will create the much needed jobs that will yield the much needed revenue and make one self-employed which will contribute to national development.

2. The Nigerian Film Industry

The Nigerian film industry, the Nollywood, has come a great way and has come of age. The Nollywood employs more than twenty million Nigerians today who act as actors, actresses, producers, distributors, promoters, marketers, musicians etc. A closer look at the film industry will reveal that it is dominated by Igbo people. So, a good Igbo language education will earn one a job in the Nigerian film Industry as an actor, producer, film writer, or film translator, distributor etc.

3. Film, Drama, Radio/TV Script Writing

The Encarta Dictionaries (2009) defines script writer as “a writer of scripts for broadcasts or movies”. A good study of Igbo language will earn one the ability of writing scripts in Igbo language and sell them for broadcasts or for movie productions. The revenue film writers and drama writers make is very huge enough to keep one for a life time. Speaking on the potentials of Igbo language in the film industry, Ahah (2010), asked: ‘Is Igbo language not good again for the film industry?’ The greater percentages of Nigerian Nollywood stars are Igbo; *needless mentioning their names, we all know them*. By this, Ahah meant that a person well educated in Igbo language can be a film star, a film translator, a film writer and also a film producer in Igbo language. Anyanele and Ehiem (2010), buttressing the above assertion noted that Most Indian films we enjoy are acted in Indian language but translated and subtitled in English language. This can as well apply in Igbo language”.

4. Translators and Interpreters

All over the world, the need to communicate with people from the other languages has always arisen, and most times, the means of such communication is hampered by language barrier. Then arises the need for a translator or interpreter who will bridge this communication gap. In the same vein, many scripts written in different languages need to be translated into the language that other people will understand. Acting of movies also demand

that the scripts be translated into the language that the producer wants, depending on the producer's targeted audience. A good Igbo language education will create jobs for such a person in the translation industry. In the courts, welfare, government press, churches, political campaigns etc, interpreters are always needed to ensure that all language groups are covered.

5. Music Industry

The music industry is another industry that will never decay as long as human beings are on earth. A good study of Igbo language can earn one a job in the music industry. One can not easily forget the footprints left in the sands of time of Igbo great singers and musicians such as: show-promoter, Areascaler, Osadebe, Oliver de Coque, Mike Ejeagha, Celestine Ugwu etc. These were not only great men in Igbo land, but also rich men who created jobs by themselves and for others by making use the power of Igbo language in the entertainment industry and well known the world over.

6. Teaching Igbo language (online)

A good study of Igbo language can also create job for some one in the teaching field either in the government sector or as a private practitioner even online. Many Igbo people in diaspora are looking out to see who to engage to teach their children or wards through the internet. A good knowledge in Igbo coupled with ICT will earn one great revenue through this medium.

7. Writing Igbo Novels, Drama, Poems and Igbo Test books

JAMB, WAEC and NECO as well as the Ministry of Education are always looking out for good new novels, drama and poems to be used in their systems. A person well grounded in Igbo language studies can easily create a good job by writing these books and selling them to these bodies and publishing houses to use. One of the major problems of the Igbo language is the dearth of textbooks written in Igbo language. A person who graduated in Igbo language education, especially from the tertiary levels can engage in textbook writing which can be sold to the government or publishers. This can keep body and soul together for life.

From the above, one can see that Igbo language education has the potentials to create many jobs for Nigerians if well planned and undertaken by the native speakers and non speakers of the Igbo language.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the potentials of job creation in the study of Igbo language. The paper looked at the rise of Igbo language in the education system of Nigeria, the problems confronting the study of Igbo language in Nigeria and in the Igbo speaking states in particular. The paper examined the concept of job creation, and the jobs that one can undertake after undertaking a study in Igbo language education. The paper made recommendations that will help the individual and the government to make Igbo language education a job-creator that

will contribute meaningfully to self employment and national development. All hands should be on deck to make Igbo language studies a job creator in Nigeria. It needs to begin with you and me, and now too! *Igbo ga-adinu o!*

Recommendations

Having seen the potentials open to learners and speakers of the Igbo language in the Igbo language education, the following recommendations are proffered to enhance the attainment of the above set goals.

1. Intensification of the Study of Igbo Language in Schools.

The need now arises that government should consider the training of more Igbo teachers to be posted to all schools in Igbo land to boost the policy on Igbo language education. Government should look into the programme of the development of language teachers, a situation where many of the schools in Igbo land have no qualified Igbo language teachers does not augur well for the national programme of Igbo language. Anyanele (2009), opined that “The mistake of hand-picking any one who can speak a Igbo language to go in and teach that language is a mistake that has caused this nation a lot and needs to be stopped”

2. Tackling Igbo Language Teachers’ Problem

Igbo language teachers’ welfare should be looked into by the government at all the levels of governance. Serious efforts

should be made to motivate the Igbo language teachers as they are the ones to carry the gospel to the masses. A situation where many of these teachers are owed their salaries for months is not helping the course. The government should regularly organize and send Igbo teachers for in-service trainings and sponsor them to higher levels. The current move by Education Trust Fund (ETF) to develop teachers in the tertiary schools is a well come idea, but more emphasis should be given to indigenous language teachers. It should be extended to the Primary and Secondary schools to carter for Igbo Language studies.

Igbo Students Themselves

Igbo students themselves should change their mind-set towards Igbo language. They should see it as any other language in the world like English and French. Having seen the potentials in Igbo language education, students of Igbo land should be free to pursue courses in Igbo language up to the tertiary levels. They should work hard on the subject and do their best to reap one or more of the potentials discussed above.

The Igbo Parents and Igbo Society

Parents and the entire citizens of Igbo land need to start seeing the good things in Igbo language. Parents should encourage their children, wards and other children to study Igbo language in schools up to the tertiary levels. Parents should start early to educate their children that Igbo language is as good as any other language such as English and French and

can also take one to the same height that other languages can take one to any field of human endeavour. Days are gone when one is laughed at for studying Igbo language or when one is idle after studying Igbo language. Igbo language has come of age and has come to stay.

The Role of Media

Anyanele and Ehiem (2010), commenting on the role of the media in promoting Igbo language noted, that the mass media including the print media especially in the Igbo states, should also come in here to help, through their media, they can use jingles made in Nigerian languages especially Igbo language to tell the people of Igbo nation and Nigeria the importance of Nigerian languages to our course as a nation.

Through the media, the mind set of the people may be changed, restructured or redirected. The feat made in AIDS education and political awareness can be translated to Igbo language.

Role of G.S.M Operators in Nigeria to promote the study of Igbo language

The G.S.M operators in Nigeria, especially in the Igbo states can help Igbo language by sponsoring indigent Igbo students to study Igbo language; they can also give scholarships, and other incentives to motivate people to study Igbo to help themselves and the nation. The G.S.M can also help in providing instructional materials for the study of Igbo language in schools such as ICT gadgets, computers, Nigerian language keyboards, televisions, videos, and discs.

Igbo People Living Abroad

Since Igbo people living abroad are active in the use of Igbo language in their area of domicile, and as they are supporting the study and sustenance of Igbo language, one suggests that they do something to help the teeming youths create jobs from the Igbo language. They should liaise with the governments and other serious Igbo organizations like The Society for the Promotion of Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) and help sponsor "Igbo language survival crusade". They should help form and sponsor "Igbo Language survival clubs" in all primary, secondary and tertiary schools in all Igbo land and abroad. They should float "Igbo language Scholarship scheme" for Igbo youths willing to study Igbo language, here in Nigeria and abroad. They should make the Igbo nation feel their impact and contributions to the course of the survival of Igbo language and Igbo nation. They may also institute awards in all the tertiary schools offering Igbo language to motivate Igbo students in the higher schools.

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