

IMPERATIVE FOR LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL EDUCATION IN OGBA AND IKWERRE TRADITIONS FOR NATIONAL SECURITY

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Abstract

In recent times, the issue of security has dominated national and international discourse. This stems from the fact that no society can make any meaningful progress in the face of growing insecurity. This paper highlights the imperatives of revitalising Linguistic and cultural education in Ogba and Ikwerre traditions for national security. The paper appreciates the role of language as a weapon of war and peace. It also explores the role culture plays in fostering cohesion whether at the local or national level. The paper holds that with a proper linguistic and cultural education in Ogba and Ikwerre, those issues that support insecurity can be addressed. To this end, words like: mkwem I disagree, iwe anger, obuojor hot temper, ariri grievance, oomeggira retaliation, are capable of leading to insecurity. However, other words like: imeruoke limit, can help to build bridges of unity. In the same vein, cultural activities like marriage, festivals, funerals go a long way to foster security. This study adopts Robert Marton's theory of crime and deviance as the lens of the work. The research employs the phenomenological approach in the discussion. The paper observes that insecurity is a major challenge in Nigeria. It concludes that the revitalisation of linguistic and cultural education at the local level will help to redirect the energy of the youths who are mostly involved in issues of insecurity.

Keywords: Revitalizing, Linguistic, Cultural, Education and security.

Introduction

Security in Nigeria whether at the local, state or national levels, is at its lowest ebb. Some critiques argue that, the security architectures in the country have failed owing to the daily records of security challenges in different parts of the country from east to west, north to south no part of Nigeria is conducive that citizens can sleep with their two eyes closed. In the north, if it is not boko haram attack it will be arm bandits or Fulani herdsmen. In the south kidnaping and armed robbery have kept people on their toes. While some contend that security in Nigeria is no man's business, others argue that it is everybody's concern.

Without over stating the obvious, national security encapsulates the total control of a nation's air, sea and land territories. It entails a total control of the human and material resources of a nation. It further includes the degree of freedom and peace which citizens of any nation enjoy. It further extends to the total state control of both the tangible and intangible assets of the state.

Without mincing words, the challenge of insecurity in Nigeria is like a flying bullet, no one knows the next victim. Before now, the security challenge in Nigeria was the religious disagreement between Muslims and Christians. Unfortunately, the situation has so deteriorated that Muslims are now killing fellow Muslims and Christians doing the same to themselves. Within people of the same ethnic group, region, religious persuasion, sect or denomination, there is heightened fear of insecurity.

According to Otite&Ogionwo (2006) In most societies, language and culture go a long way in promoting national cohesion and by extension national security. Indeed, language serves as both a unifying or dividing force in human existence. Language can be used to unite a people just in same way, it can be employed to divide a people. Culture like language, is central to the sustenance of national security. This is most prevalence in situations where stereotyping, labelling, name calling, are the order of the day.

This study adopts Robert Marton's theory of crime and deviance as the theoretical lens of the research. The research employs the phenomenological approach in the discussion. The paper observes that insecurity is a major challenge in Nigeria. It concludes that the revitalisation of linguistic and cultural education at the local level will help to redirect the energy of the youths who are mostly involved in issues of insecurity.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is premised on the crime and deviancetheory of Robert Marton's1938, as cited by Hara Lambos and Horborn (2013). According to

Marton, deviance results from the culture and structure of society itself. In his view, this is based on what he calls “value consensus”. To this end, all members of any given society, share the same value. However, since members of the society are placed at different social levels, they do not have the same opportunities in realising the shared values. Unfortunately, where this is the obvious situation, it invariably results in deviance.

Drawing inference from the American situation, he asserts that members of American society share the major values of American culture. They share the goals of success which is measured on the power of wealth and material possession. The American dreams promised equal opportunities to all citizens of achieving success. According to Marton, in America like other parts of the world, there are institutionalised means of meeting culturally defined goals. In the United States, these are: educational qualification, talents, hard work, drive, determination and ambition. Marton asserts that in any given society where an equal emphasis is placed on the relationship between cultural goals, and institutionalised means and ways of achieving them, anarchy and lawlessness results. In a situation where anything goes, anomie becomes the order of the day and deviancy a major challenge.

Linguistic and cultural education

Language is central to human existence. According to scholars, language is made up of words, sounds, symbols and gestures intended to convey information from one source to another. According to research Fronkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007), the study of the biological and natural function of language is called; neurolinguistics. In the view of these scholars of linguistics, children reveal mastery of the phonological, syntactic and semantic systems and their appropriate communicative uses quite early in their childhood. In corroboration, David Crystal, (2000) asserts that “because languages express identity, because languages are repositories of history, because languages contribute to the sum of human knowledge, and because languages are interesting in themselves”. This is an indicative that language is an essential part of a people’s culture and must be preserved by way of revitalization while culture itself is preserved.

Viewed from a similar perspective, Hintton (2013) holds that Family engagement practices where culture and language are integrally linked provide the strongest connections between children, their parents and members of their cultural group. Unfortunately, the cultural strengths and societal heritage recognized as an important aspect of early childhood programs in most part of the world are barely recognised. Cultural strengths which include personal and cultural beliefs, values and cultural knowledge of a people, its spirituality,

creativity, and technologies exact a considerable influence and reflect in early childhood programs in Ogba and Ikwerre traditions. This will invariably enable children to continue to maintain what their families and communities hold dear as their cultural patrimony. Relating language to culture, Akindele and Adegbite (2005) remark that “language is connected to culture in three different ways, these are: i) it is an aspect of culture. (ii) it is an instrument of thought and (iii) it expresses culture.

In an effort to define culture, Okafor and Emeka (2012) quoting Iwe (1982) avows that “culture may be defined as the fabric of ideas, beliefs, skills, tools, aesthetic objects, method of thinking, of eating and of talking, as well as customs and institution...it includes the way individual make a living, the music he plays, celebration and festivals, mode of transportation, and communication, the house he live in and the way he eat.

Without over stating the obvious, culture is the emblem which a people carry along with them. It is their symbol of identity. To this end, Oburunwoke (2020) noted that the people of *Ohiafia* was reckons in the past as a headhunting society. Wokoma (2019) submitted that *Kalabari* people, organise themselves in war canoe houses. Oguzor (2011) tracing the relationship between the *Ekpeye*, Ogba, Onitsha and ancient Benin kingdom, contended that they live in cluster of compounds to demonstrate their common ancestry.

Instrument of peace and war.

In Ogba and Ikwerre socio religious life, language and culture have been applied as instrument to promote peace at one time and at another, fan the embers of war. In Ogba, words like *nkwem* meaning I disagree, *iwe* anger, *eggriga* trouble, *obuojor* meaning bad intentions, (are terminologies which escalate disagreement and lead to insecurity. On the other hand, words like (imeruoke) meaning maintaining a limit, *udo* meaning peace, *kordira* let it be, *mgbaghira* meaning forgiveness, support, peace building and security.

Premised on the above, it is apparent that language is an ambivalent weapon, that can be used either sides. When applied in hate speeches, it promotes insecurity. For instance, *kimerasaenye Ekpeye* gains insinuating that someone behaves like an *Ekpeye* person. *idu* that the individual is a betrayal. *enyeerema* that the individual can only go along when in need, *enyeklagbari* that the individual is behaving like a *Kalabari* man who is always extravagant. Or when an Ogba persons tells you that you act like an Ikwerre person he is insinuating that you are a land grabber.

Name calling, stereotyping and labelling within Ogba communities and between Ogba communities and their neighbours also increase the risk of insecurity in the region. Obodoegbulam, (2019) noted that following the effect

of the Ogba Abo war in their history, when the Ogba is performing a ritual of purification, they pray that the pollution should go to the Abo monarch. All diseases and pollution, are directed towards the Abo kingdom. To the Ogba, this king, deserves perpetual punishment from the supernatural. In Oboburu, there is this derogatory remark that (if an *Ogboguperson* has not received a stroke of the club *akube*, he will not have appetite for fresh fish". This is a synastries way of saying that if you do not punish an offender, he will not respect you.

Imperatives for Education

In most culture, linguistic and cultural education is the responsibility of the adults. This is not to say that adults themselves do not deserve education, however, the younger ones need these more. Premised on the above supposition, Obodoegbulam (2007) contends that "in all cultures, parents' guide their children in their social, moral, spiritual, mental and intellectual development. In another respect, Obodoegbulam, Obasi and Dimkpa (2011) hold that the family unit is the medium of transmitting moral, values, and precepts which distinguishes it from other institutions". Taking the above into consideration, it is obvious that the family has crucial role in formulating and sustaining the values, morals, precepts, ethics and culture of society.

When the younger generation are properly educated, they are placed in a position to cherish and protect the cultural heritage which parents' treasure. Where the contrary is the case, children will not mind destroying the very fabric which their society hold in high extreme. Relating the above to the social responsibility of children, Obodoegbulam (2014) argued that in a civilised culture, it is morally and socially wrong for any citizen to carry arms against his fatherland. Instead, citizens die for their country. Through proper education, the values and morals of society are transmitted from one generation to another. Perhaps, this is why it is often argued that education is the greatest legacy any society can be quit to its younger generation.

In the words of Davis (2015) Language and culture are veritable source of identity and unity which build relationships and lead to national cohesion and security. Base on this assertion, the peace and security of any society can best be guided through proper language and family interaction. Unfortunately, these symbols of identity and unity is almost being lost in the multitude of western influences and culture.

The discourse above concerning the Ogba people, also applies to their Ikwerre neighbours. To this end, linguistic and cultural education in Ikwerre tradition occupy a central place as it encourages peaceful coexistence, tolerance, and ensures dialogue and mutual respect among the people of

Ikwerre. Without it, the quest for peace and security cannot be achieved. As a result, there is the need for reviving linguistic and cultural education in the home front and in all institutions of learning in Ikwerre society so that people, especially the children and youths can learn to speak their mother tongue (MT) *Iwhuruohna*(Ikwerre dialect) and appreciate their culture. This will in no small measure, foster unity among the people of Ikwerre and erode all forms of insecurity that have threatened the peace and oneness that the people of Ikwerre were once known for.

There is a common trend in contemporary Nigerian society where most parents find it rather absurd to teach their children their cultural values or even allow them speak native language believing that it will affect their ability to speak impeccable English language, and Ikwerre society is not left out. Unfortunately, this is erroneously regarded by many as the normal way of civilisation and development. Ayakoroma Barclays (2017) argued that “There is no gainsaying the fact that our indigenous languages are very essential in giving children the opportunity to develop their native ability; but rather, they shy away from using them, and placing preference on foreign languages at the expense of local languages”.

Some critiques argued that it is owing to the fact that most families are culturally crossed-breed. This happens when the parents are of different cultural background and as such do not have similar cultures and do not speak the same language. This assertion is true, but it should not be a justification for lack of cultural and linguistic education.

Moreover, Africans are of the belief that a woman does not have a locality until she is married. Ideally, a woman assumes her matrimonial home town as hers immediately after marriage and as such both her and her children becomes natives of her husband’s locality. The Ikwerre society is known for their patrilineal practice which allows the children right of inheritance from their father’s side, this includes language and culture too. So, irrespective of cultural and linguistic differences among spouses in Ikwerre tradition, the children should be thought the language and culture of their father. However, In the event where the father is an absentee parent due to work and other activities outside the home, then the mother should teach them her own native language and culture. This is to ensure that the children are not oblivious of their cultural heritage. In order to ensure that language and culture remains the "strength" of ethnic minorities such as Ikwerre languages and culture must often be further developed or revitalized saved from extinction as it were.

Steps to Revitalize Language and Culture in Ikwerre Society

One of the needs of humanity, Ikwerre inclusive is the desire to preserve memory of very important achievements and events of their lives for generations unborn. This task has been done over the years through oral tradition (word of mouth) and written texts. Through this medium, people have been able to trace memories back to distant histories but it has not been exactly the same with language as no one can boast of any record of the exact sound of speech of our ancestors until the late 19th century, which is a far more recent discovery compared to the most ancient written documents of the people of old. For this reason, language documentation is necessary.

Language documentation is the records of languages through audio and video recordings of speakers and signers for the purpose of preservation. This comprises of the collection, processing and archiving of linguistic data. When language is documented, it becomes easy to pass its original form to the next generation thereby making it very difficult to be extinct. This is highly recommended among the Ikwerre people, in fact, this should be treated as urgent if the Ikwerre people want to at least preserve some of the wealth that the *Iwhuruonha* language possesses before it goes extinct, for language is extremely important in any given community, as it serves as the repository of a people's culture, and history. Why is this necessary for Ikwerre society one may ask? It is expedient for the preservation of Ikwerre cultural heritage. It will keep aid in memory keeping both for the present generation and the ones yet to come. It will promote a sense of Ikwerre, Nigeria in every Ikwerre home whether here in Nigeria or in the Diaspora.

Cultural Revitalization through Education

Before the introduction of Western education in Nigeria, the Ikwerre people had a culture that was real and true to them as a people. The Ikwerre had a culture that was functional and had moral uprightness before the wholeness acceptance of a foreign culture which spelt doom to some useful cultural elements. If nothing is done urgently, Ikwerre people may risk losing every aspect of it to westernization which unfortunately has not being wholly grasped by theindigenes. Elements responsible for the culture loss in Ikwerre society include: Inter-marriage, lack of parental presence in the lives and upbringing of their children, loss of cultural values, unwillingness of parents to inculcate cultural values into their children, removal of history from educational curriculum, and of course, the embrace of western culture. Culture as stated earlier in this paper, is the nerve-centre of every society which ought to be preserved. It is an important function of education to help in the preservation of culture. Education, through its specialized agencies, tries to inculcate the

traditions, customs, values, arts, morals into the tender minds of children and youths.

Implication for national security

The above discourse presents language and cultural education as instrument for national security. As it were, most of the challenges experienced in Nigeria, are blamed on linguistic and cultural bias prevalent in the country. Ordinarily, language and culture are supposed to build bridges across ethnic, linguistic, cultural, social, vocational and religious divides.

Unfortunately, many Nigerians owe allegiance to their ethnic group and pay little attention to the Nigerian project. In Nigeria, agriculture is the main stay of the economy. Whether it is animal husbandry or crop farming, this is not only an occupation but an integral part of the people's culture. To this end, all the people involved ought to be educated on how to manage their practice so as not to encroach on the culture of the other group. While the herders enjoy absolute freedom with their cattle's, farmers have none to their traditional crop farming.

Nigeria as a country is yet to really under-score the importance of nationalism in our social, political and religious life. For instance, when citizens recite the national anthem, they only enjoy the lyrics without reading any meaning in the words and spirits of the anthem. In the first line of Nigeria's national anthem, Arise Oh compatriots, Nigeria's call obey! the question remain show many persons are answering the nations call? As if this is not bad, when playing the anthem, "The labours of our hero's past" is usually played very low as if it does not matter. Unfortunately, where the labours of our hero's past are played down, who will like to labour for the country.

In another respect, the National youth service corpse (NYSC) is intended to serve as an integrating force for the youth and upcoming generations. Unfortunately, many youths have lost their lives in the course of serving their fatherland, which is supposed to protect them. However, with the influence of bad blood which stems from hate speech to stereotyping, labeling and use of derogatory remarks by citizens in the country, insecurity continue to stir Nigeria in the face.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, the need to preserve indigenous culture through education cannot be overemphasized. This is owing to the fact that there has been a massive down grading of these instrument of national security in recent times, especially among the youths and children. Failure to do this with the urgency that it requires would continue to set youths and children apart from

their culture. Education itself is a key to self-determination, and educational instruction for the younger generation with emphasis on national security is supposed to take place in indigenous culture. As a matter of fact, the Nigerian culture and history should be taught in schools and colleges across the country to enable children and youth develop interest and assume a sense of belonging in their indigenous background. Similarly, cultural education will modify education in the light of changes visible in the needs and demand for Nigerian society. As societies evolve, new cultural patterns are formed by replacing and reorienting the old-fashioned cultural forms to suit the changing need of the time. So, to this end, this paper suggests ways culture and education can be used to revitalised security issues in Nigeria for instance: (1) history should be made a compulsory subject in all schools across Nigeria. (2) Marking of cultural days should be encourage in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions as this exposes the younger ones to their cultures. (3) Parents should teach their children their cultural values, morals, precepts and encourage them to appreciate their cultural attire and not to feel inferior about it (4) citizens should be taught to love and appreciate national institutions and symbols (5) the politic of winner takes all should be discouraged.

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