

EMERGING ISSUES IN THE STUDY OF INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES IN THE 21st CENTURY

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to discuss the current pertinent issues in the study of indigenous languages in Nigeria. Nigeria is a multilingual nation with well over four hundred different languages major and non-major. The paper will discuss different methods and principles of teaching these indigenous languages in our schools and colleges. The paper also discusses the relevance and place of indigenous languages as they affect teaching and learning. Teaching and learning indigenous languages are active and passive versions of each other.

Introduction

Language is the vehicle of communication and expression used in all human interaction situations; political, commerce, education and culture language is used for the purpose of communication by these living within a given society. It can be said that a particular language spoken by a group of people is a mark of social identity. If a man cannot communicate with its environment, particularly to education, inform, socialize, request and entertain, life will be sadly incomplete, seriously burning and totally meaningless (Sangotoro, 1977). It should also be known that language is a tool that breaks ethnic and tribal barriers, jealous, suspicion and ignorance. Language is also used to educate students within and outside the school.

Language issue in education is inevitable since it is through language that knowledge is transmitted (Bamgbose, 1991).-The concept of language is a highly valued societal resource because of its communicative and identification functions.

Nigeria is a nation blessed with human and natural resources. It is a country with different people having different languages. These different languages that Nigeria people speak are referred to as indigenous languages. These indigenous languages are classified into two major and non-major languages. The major Nigeria languages are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. While the remaining languages like Igala, Nupe, Kanuri, Efik, Ibibio, etc. are classified under non-major languages. Speakers of indigenous languages have a very important role to play. The indigenous languages also, are recognized and entrenched in the national policy on education.

Multilingualism is a situation where an individual is capable of using more than two languages to express himself. Multiple developments of Nigerian languages eliminates the danger that is posed to nation unity by the enforcement of one national language on the different ethnic groups in the country.

The place and value of indigenous languages in the new national policy on education can best be understood as stated in the policy and succinctly reported by Essien (1990), this policy recommends the use of three major languages throughout the secondary school system. It severely limits the use and study of minority languages to the primary schools and the junior secondary schools.

The national policy on education recommends that indigenous languages are to be used and studies at the pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels in Nigeria. The mother tongue education in the National Policy on Education of 1981, is informed by the global awareness that using mother tongue in teaching is best for the pupils at the early stages. This has been proved by researches carried out by the UNESCO (1953).

Indigenous Languages in the School Curriculum

In the school curriculum the place and position of indigenous languages is recognized. The indigenous languages major and minor are contained in the school curriculum from primary to tertiary level.

In the tertiary institution level, the curriculum of the major languages are designed in two forms: language one and language two. The language one curriculum is designed and targeted for the native speakers while the language two curriculum is designed and targeted for the non-native speakers. In Hausa language for example, which is one of the major indigenous languages in Nigerian, the curriculum is designed in two ways (Hausa LI and Hausa L2).

The course contents, codes and status of Hausa language one is different with that of Hausa language two. In Igbo language and Yoruba language also, one finds the same thing. The design of

curriculum for the teaching and learning of the indigenous languages as second languages is a recent phenomenon, because its introduction into the school curriculum is as a result of the revised Nigeria language education policy of 1981. The study of indigenous as first and second languages confronts the students with various operations of language. The second languages learners should be aware of the importance of applying the language of literature as a model. The teaching of indigenous languages has a practical value of enabling the students to learn about the second language as well as use it. The indigenous language teacher should strive to incorporate the elements of sounds and speech.

Indigenous languages teaching demands commitment and dedication. Teaching of these languages also involves teaching the cultures of the people who speaks the languages. This is so because language and culture are related, while teaching a language you are equally teaching the cultures of that language.

Principles and Methods of Teaching Indigenous Languages

There are many principles and methods that can be adopted in the course of teaching Nigeria indigenous languages in our schools and colleges. Many methods of teaching have evolved from the desire to impart language skills without some rigid conformity to any background theory. However, the listed principles and methods can be used in indigenous languages teaching like in teaching other languages.

1. **Grammar Translation Method of Teaching.** This is a method that involves the analysis of translation works of languages as well as for comprehension purpose. This is an older method* of language teaching which is still in place and use.
2. **The Natural or Oral Method of Language.** This is based on the involvement of the learner; who is encouraged to think in the second language.
3. **The Silent Method.** This is the method that allow the learner to use the language items in the; lesson.
4. **Discussing and Questioning Method.** This is the approach that requires learner to mention and discuss whatever impression they may have. Again, in this method also question may bother on what the teacher taught or what the students learnt. The teacher also by this method can ask questions on the language generally.
Williams (1990), refers to this method as the introspective approach used by teachers to elicit genuine responses from the students.
5. **Dramatization Method:** This is a language teaching method that can be used for prose, poetry and drama. Practical activities are used at this place for effective language teaching to students.
6. **Community language Learning Method.** This method develops the sense of association between the teacher and the language learners." In this methods, the learner says something in his native language which is translated in the second language. At the same time, the learner repeats what the teacher has said.
7. **Natural Method:** In this method, there is no correction of mistakes but aiming at communication in information in informal setting. Also, there is more stress on the importance of emotional values.

The Relevance and Development of Indigenous Languages

In a nation like Nigeria, indigenous languages should be considered as relevant as well as developed in the society. These languages are rich in vocabulary and also, sufficient in grammatical items. The languages (indigenous) are capable of containing the grammatical rules and categories. They are rich in deferent spheres. The future of indigenous languages in Nigeria in formal education is bright.

In the development of indigenous languages in Nigeria, we can rightly say that attempt have been made to develop indigenous languages when we look at school curriculum where the languages are studies. Also, many researches were carried out in our schools and colleges on the development of the indigenous languages. Literature hooks on prose, poetry and drama were written in our indigenous languages. Many scholars also have developed the literatures of these indigenous languages exposing them to the outside world.

Not only that there is another aspect of indigenous languages development from the side of government itself were their study was included in notional policy on education, but language development centers were create like the national institute of Nigeria Languages (NINLAN), the

languages development center and the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council.

Recommendations

However, in order to encourage the study of indigenous languages in a country like Nigeria, the following recommendation are made:

- a) **Language Policy:** Teaching indigenous languages should be made mandatory in our schools and colleges. There is need for policy review with regards to language education so that the study of indigenous languages in the curriculum should be made compulsory. Government should support and back the policy so that there will be full compliance
- b) **Provision of Adequate and Qualified Personnel:** There should be provision of enough teachers to teach these languages. They should also be qualified. That is, teachers of indigenous languages, in our school should possess minimum teaching qualification. To successfully implement language policy adequately qualified personnel are needed.
- c) **Funding Indigenous Language Development Centers/Programmes:** It is not possible for government alone to provide funds for indigenous language development centers/programmes. Individuals, organizations and communities that are interested in funding their languages development programmes can be identified. Committed language development communities can be supported in their languages. Also, government, individuals or organization through scholarship and bursary awards can assist students studying indigenous languages financially. Proficiency course should be arranged for both teachers and students teaching and learning indigenous languages.
- d) **Training of Teachers:** Teachers of indigenous languages should be given regular training in their different disciplines (language or literature) by organizing and sending them to conferences and workshops for the purpose of updating their knowledge. Indigenous languages teachers should know the current trends in their subjects areas so that they will not lag behind.
- e) **Indigenous Language Study Encouragement:** Pupils and students should be encouraged to learn their native languages. They should be made to appreciate the beauty in our indigenous languages. To do this government and communities should carry out enlightenment campaigns especially in the mass media to enlighten Nigeria on the need for them to develop interest and commit themselves on the development of their indigenous languages. Also, the enlightenment campaigns should be directed to the right people.
- 0 **Provision of Materials and Equipments:** teaching materials and equipment should be provided for the purpose of teaching indigenous languages: teaching materials both traditional modern like audio visual materials as well as textbooks should be provided for teaching and learning of indigenous languages in Nigeria.

Conclusion

From what has been discussed in this paper, Nigeria is a multilingual nation with different communities speaking different languages. Some of the languages are studied in the schools. These different languages are referred to as indigenous language. The importance of their study in schools is very apparent. Nigerians should be proud of their indigenous languages and should strive to develop them. The progressive methodologies of teaching indigenous languages should be followed to facilitate the learner's acquisition of knowledge. Equally important also is, the fact that these languages can be developed like other languages of the world.

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