

Promoting Indigenous Languages a *Sine-Qua-Non* for the Re-Branding of Nigeria Education

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Abstract

For a long time now the idea of Nigeria as a nation has been variously comprehended, even among the founding fathers of this entity called Nigeria. This has severally resulted to responses that appear challenging to the multifaceted structure of our nation's polity. It has often amounted to socio-economic crises-and other existential hazards. Indeed, Nigeria is hundred since the Amalgamation of 1914, yet she cannot boast of a stable political system nor are there visible signs of functional and efficient education. The dream of having bright, brilliant, confident and bold men and women steering the sheep of our nation appears unrealizable. What we tend to offer are personalities who cannot boast of being authentic representatives of their people. Instead they are "humans" who convincingly believe that they are still under the bondage of colonialism. This paper elucidates the views that it is high time we woke up from this damnable slumber and optimistically look forward to serious re-branding of Nigeria education project. The only assured option is the promotion of indigenous languages which are our identity rather than assiduously and superficially focusing on foreign languages while our own languages are fast disappearing or going into extinction. Indeed, proficiency in one's first language (mother tongue) is a veritable catalyst for human development.

Keywords: *Education, Functional, Indigenous, Language Development and Re-Branding*

Background to the Study

Ferdinand de Saussure (1857 - 1913) the father of modern linguistics is associated with the saying that "in the lives of individuals, and of societies, language is a factor of great importance than any other (2005:7). Through language people's worldview and progress are documented and are perpetuated. In the age of information communication technologies (ICTs), the question of language has eventually become one of the most important and fascinating topics one could ever hope to encounter (Trask, 1995).

The issue of the status of the indigenous languages in Nigeria as a nation has remained questionable and in state of disarray. Since 1960 when Nigeria gained her independence from the British government people have watched with optimism as to what the status of the multiple but rich linguistic features of this giant of Africa would look like (Udoh, 2003). It has been said that a lot of the setbacks in Nigeria polity is the negligence meted on our indigenous languages. The language policies often sounded flamboyant and conducive but the implementation appears as very impossible. Today, there has been a clarion call for a re-branding of Nigeria. The implication is that there are observed lacuna and a manifested failure in the Nigeria's *status quo*. The objective of this paper therefore is to benignly bring up an option which is a *sine-qua-non* in the re-branding project. This option is aimed at assiduously focusing on the promotion of indigenous languages of Nigeria. This is deemed necessary because language is a surest way to safeguarding the identity of peoples, and a very positive step towards the recognition of people's value and even a veritable means of human emancipation and self-actualization (Emenanjo, 19996, Chinagorom, 2004 etc.).

A Retrospective Expose

Kingfisher (1995 :6-17) holds, that the history of the various nations of the world and civilizations contain the sum-total with regard to their development and experiences. It is also a known fact that the survival of a people lies in competently harnessing the values and potentialities of their homeland, by transmitting them into meaningful levels of advancement. This is much more challenging when they become conscious of the existential realities and the demands of the time, and what the future is likely to be. Indeed, the nature of social interactions, the gradual realization of how things were and how things are and how it ought to be, give a signal for either survival or hopelessness. The situation on ground tends to evoke a problematic scenario in the face of conscientious Nigerian who had nostalgia for a great and prosperous "Nation". It is not necessary to recount time and time again the historical experiences of our past leaders or the lack of political will, or the recurrent ethnic conflicts in Nigeria since independence. These have shown a clear cut inability to institutionalize the people of this geopolitical area for national fiscal

responsibilities.

The dream of having brighter future for Nigeria as envisioned by our founding fathers appears unrealizable. Paa Anthony Enahoro, is reported in *Nigerian Compass* (2009: 10) as lamenting that “this is not Nigeria of my dream”. Historically, before the amalgamation of 1914 of the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria, by the British administration into one Federation, the areas were made of multiracial groups with their languages (Ohiri-Aniche, 2004). These languages saved the purpose of effective communication and other essential values. The remotest parts of the land used their mother tongue for education, commerce, politics and other social interactions (Nwanunobi, 2001). The languages contained veritable linguistic qualities and we were able to acquire social stratifications within the traditional setting (Chinagorom, 2013). Suddenly, the colonial settlers saw the Nigerian languages as un-centralized, seminary and not capable of being used for efficient communication. Nwadike (2002 and 2008) raise the issue of 1882 education ordinances which stipulated that the subjects for teaching shall be reading and writing of the English language. The education ordinance of 1926 which favoured the use of indigenous languages for African education was an indication that the past ordinance was a failure (Nwadike, 2008). After the independence of 1960, Nigeria had the audacity to manage her internal affairs. This brought in the education and language related policies, which resulted to the 1977 education policy, which subsequently gave rise to the National Policy on Education (NPE), which has been revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004 respectively.

Status of the Indigenous Languages

The worry of this paper is the inability of the Nigerian nation to courageously uphold and appreciate the importance of indigenous languages in the holistic nature of its advancement and integral development. There is no doubt that the national language policies of Nigeria, have always indicated the awareness of the importance of these indigenous languages, Hence such beautiful statements like:

In addition to appreciating the importance of language in the educational process, and as a means of preserving the people's culture, the Government considers it to be in the interest of national unity that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages order than his own mother tongue. In this connection, the Government considers the three major languages in Nigeria to be Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (NPE 1981: No 8).

This policy has been on and has experienced several revisions and some added reforms, of 1998, 2004 etc). Especially the revised edition of 2004 made some changes thus:

Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of social interaction and national cohesion; and preserving cultures. Thus every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment. Furthermore, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every child shall be required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. (NPE, 2004: 10a).

From these excerpts, one sees that the statuses of the indigenous languages are given attention especially by recognizing them. Also, their demographic elements are considered with regard to the need to preserve culture, promote social interaction and national cohesion. Again there is a consideration of language diversification in ethnographic settings which gives rise to the mention of the three major languages of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (NPE, 1981: 8, 2004: 10). The question of implementation becomes a thing to be examined.

How well is the Institutional Support?

Looking at the issue of language diversification with regard to Nigeria's language situation, within this perspective, one would say that the indigenous languages have received some amount of institutional support from the colonial time to date. Emphases have been laid on indigenous languages, but there is the problem of implementing the decrees. The National Policy that gave preference to the indigenous languages appear to be a mere paper work. The government seems to support and promote English rather than these indigenous languages. Most of the gazettes are not yet translated into the indigenous languages; schools are not motivated to carry out the language policies effectively. Some other institutions like the religious bodies are not doing enough. The tendency for some religious bodies to use the non-indigenous languages like Arabic, English, Latin etc. for some religious activities has also been of no help to the indigenous languages (Anumudu, 2008). Bearing in mind that religion has played a very big role in situating a language of a people in the linguistic atlas, it would have been of immense aid to these languages (Schade, 2006).

In our educational institutions, the number of schools offering these indigenous languages is not very much enough, especially where we have urban areas. Even parents who are speakers of these languages prefer sending their children to model schools where English is the medium of communication and is assumed to be needed for "qualitative education". Again in some areas, the governments and other bodies contribute in killing the languages by adopting dialectal variants and teaching them as against the standard form. Some of the policies appear to be an expression of the non-professionalism with regard to language. The issue is that dialects are branches of a language; they should be made to be part of the standard form, which give room for literature and systematic education (Crystal, 2006, Chinagorom 2010a)

Government has not paid enough attention to the speakers of the languages. It is expected that government should from time to time organize census, paying attention to the number of those who are yet speaking a language to ascertain the level of usage whether low, medium or higher (Edwards, 1992). How can one be silent over the purported decision of Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (2008) making Nigerian Languages Elective Causes under the New Senior Secondary Education Curriculum under the guise of introducing some current courses that appear more lucrative, and in the words of NERDC, " *...in the Process not only Encourage Collaboration with International Development Partners but also Foster Public-Private Partnerships in our bid to render Educational Research and Development Efforts Sustainable and NEEDS driven.*

For those who are conscious of the value of integral human development, this aforementioned "Mission", provokes reactions for the fact they appear sensational and counter-productive and at the same time projects a dangerous signal (Okere 2013, Chinagorom 2013 etc).

The mass media are not doing enough too, how many mass media in Nigeria are using the indigenous languages efficiently well? Today most of their activities and programmes are in English. The radio and television have not made enough especially when we consider the number of hours mapped out for English language and local languages. Business bodies are not also aware of the fact that some of their products need to be source of promotion to the languages when they carry advertisements of their goods in the local languages even the bill boards need to be in the local languages instead of English or in two versions.

The Re-Branding Project

Barnhart and Barnhart (1992:242), indicate that the act of re-branding shows that someone or something was in a state or placed in a state which needs to be remodeled or placed at a better state. It can also indicate an act of giving it another particular design in order to advertise its products and services, as in the case of goods. Human beings are rational and the capacity to uplift oneself from the levels of rottenness to the levels of dignity needs not be postulated. Today, the nature of the Nigerian nation and the rate of progress reached need much to be desired. There is need to ask why the nation's polity has remained in shambles and the various facts of our existence stand on the brim of collapse. The rate of progress does not tally with the expectations of the world League of Nations.

The issue remains that we have not been realistic to ourselves. The indigenous values stored in the languages are being toiled with. The policies on indigenous

languages are not implemented whereas the languages of the people manifest their moving force, their potentialities, indeed their “clan vital”. The hues and cries in some quarters by some individuals on re-branding Nigeria project seems to be unproductive because the core of the matter has been neglected. There is no need of thinking about re-branding when alienation is the order of the day. A story is told about a hungry man who fainted of hunger and the family gathered and was trying to remedy his situation, until somebody asked whether he has tasted any food. Immediately, the dying man shouted in support of that enquiry, and they gave him food. That ended the pandemonium.

Equally in our land, the lessons from other lands have failed to create impressions on us. Lack of patriotism has blindfolded our minds; the desire to be like the “Whiteman” has reduced our nation to non-productivity and unsettled pattern of life. This has thus institutionalized in us that “mentality of the colonized”. Our inferiority complex has been -extended even in the areas of football and other international competitions (Obijuru 2012).Enslavement is a denial of human dignity and potentiality whether self inflicted or meted on us by others (Chinagorom 2013b).

A story is told by a Japanese scholar that in looking over undergraduate notes taken by his ancestors, in Japanese Universities since the 1850's, he noted that his grandfather took all his notes in English; his father half in English and half in Japanese, and his own notes are completely in Japanese. Thus, Japan today has a very strong indigenous technology – a technological base that is now the envy of Europe and America. In fact, their appearances in the concluded FIFA 2010 World Cup tournaments show that they have come to be reckoned in the world of football also. The secret of these advancements are not farfetched, rather, in the views of Benedict XVI (2009:27-29), it is the fruit of a structured pattern of the integral human development.

Conclusion

Man's inventive genius places him at the helm of affairs in the midst of the world order, but when at the various moments there seems to be no basis for achievement or progress what the human mind does is to search out better avenues or make appraisals of what is on ground. Our discussion has so far exposed us to the bemoaning situation of our nation's progress. We uphold the view that promoting indigenous language is a better option for the re-branding project in Nigeria. The indigenous languages need to be given maximum support, though the fruit of these may not be magically expected, but once one is on a right path the future remains bright. Thus, it is obvious that when this option is headed to, the whole fabric of Nigerian society would receive a new look. Nothing has disproved the pragmatic

and realistic saying that proficiency in one's first language (mother tongue), is a veritable catalyst for human development (Ohiri Aniche 2004, Chinagorom, 2010, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c 2014 etc).
Chinagorom (2013c:31) asserts”

The widely observed abandonment of the local indigenous languages of Nigeria Nation has become a worrisome phenomenon among some conscious and conscientious scholars and students of Linguistics of our time. The question therefore is: What is the status of these Languages in the National Language Policies (NLPs) of Nigeria? Or what is their place in the various National Policies of Education (NPE) of Nigeria past and Present? These and many more question may appear very cogent especially this year, that providentially marks the 60th anniversary of the UNESCO's Declaration of 1953 which unequivocally and categorically states that humans amass their potentiality greatly through the use of Mother Tongue, while any attempt to continually expose them to a foreign language leads to inadequacy and naturally retards human cognitive maturation, development and intellectual capacities.

When we appreciate what we have and the stuff with which we were made of, there is the tendency to build from the known to the unknown. The events in the cause of the world order have manifested a clear interface between a people's language and advancement in their placement at the echelon of sustainable development.

Recommendations

Having gone so far, we deem it worthwhile to present some panacea as a kind of way forward for self-actualization and optimal personality building for a better Nigeria. Indeed, when we talk about self-actualization which is an important aspect of the human person and *sine-qua-non* for sustainable development and nation building, it is important for us to set goals for ourselves. These goals ought to motivate us to work harder for the future and at the same never lose sight of the things that matter like the status of language in genuine development (Chinagorom 2011). In a nutshell, the following principles can aid us on the path of Glorious Nigeria: setting target, determination, Godliness/prayer, positive image, setting out of our comfort zone, willingness to change, discipline uniqueness, honesty, examining our motives, evaluating our progress, acknowledge our successes and at all times keep on moving.

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