

CHILD EDUCATION AND NIGERIAN LANGUAGES

By

Uzoma, Mercy Udumma

National Institute for Nigerian Languages
Demonstration Secondary School, Aba

Abstract

Language plays a vital role in the daily interaction and communication by human beings. The Nigerian government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures. The National Policy on Education (NPE) states that “every child shall learn in the language of the immediate environment in the first three years while English language shall be taught as a school subject”. The Nigerian languages in written or oral form transmit culture from one generation to another. Mother tongue offers a plausible framework for preparing coming generations to become better adaptive and rich contributors in the intercultural world. Every child in Nigeria is mandated to learn the language of the immediate environment. Hence, every child is required to learn one of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. This is an encouraging policy statement by government in its efforts to ensure that Nigerian Languages are taught and learnt as second languages. This paper examines the importance of Nigerian languages in communication and the setbacks towards implementation of using the language in the class. Vital recommendations are given to improve the effective implementation of the languages in communication processes. These include that: the government should make it compulsory that students should include not less than two Nigerian Languages in their choice of courses in secondary school, government should recruit qualified teachers in Nigerian languages especially in the tertiary institutions, Nigerian Language teachers at all levels should be exposed to sensitization programmes like seminars, workshops and conferences to get acquainted with new trends in teaching and that Nigerian languages should be recognized as a means of communication from home by all parents.

Keywords: Communication, Nigerian Languages, Setbacks.

Introduction:

Language is an indispensable material for communication in the transmission of culture socialization and education. The use of language for effective communication cannot be overemphasized. Nigerian languages stand out like other indigenous languages. The use of indigenous language according to Ezezin (2001) will help learners in school to understand and perform well in most subjects. It will also entail greater freedom in the use of language in the public places and at home. Language according to Ezeudu (2013) is a means of preserving the people's culture. To Chidi (2016) language is a system of sounds which human beings use to communicate experiences. In reality, language is a special characteristic of human beings.

However, the Nigerian Language is the most important factor in identifying who is who, where one comes from, one's culture and tradition. Chidi (2016) also states that language is the pivot around which every activity rotates, hence it is an instrument of public relations. Nigerian languages serve the above purposes and in addition stand as means of national and political interaction. In fact, a gateway to national unity; Gomwalk (2000) is of the view that language regulates all human

activities and embodies culture and its understanding. He stated further that one must understand and appreciate the language of the culture as an essential medium of cultural transmission. The language of the cultural transmission is the mother tongue. The major mother tongues in Nigeria are the Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa language. In support of the above statement Ezeudu (2013) and Igbojinwaekwu (2015) state that using another language other than the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, impairs and inhibits the development of the child's personality and ability. Hence, the Nigerian language (mother tongue) drives thought, culture and communication.

Communication as a process is important, so important because it is the chain of understanding that integrates the members of the community. When one communicates in the Nigerian language he coordinates, counsels, evaluates and supervises freely than with a borrowed language. Many of the problems that occur in relations are the direct results of people felling to communicate. This happens when the communicator uses the wrong language. It is in reality one this to communicate and another for real communication to have taken place. Communication takes place when the right language is used. According to Mowlana (1990) in Otisi (2011) faulty communication leads to confusion and can cause a good plan to fall. Truly effective communication occurs only if the receiver understands the exact information or idea that the sender intends to transmit. The three major Nigerian languages are not deficient; hence they can serve the above purpose.

In all, communication and language cannot be separated. Otisi (2011) explains communication takes place through the language. This language is the channel through which effective communication can be achieved. An individual using the mother tongue to communicate attempts to truly share his own feelings, purpose and knowledge and to understand the feeling, purpose, knowledge and to understand the feeling, purpose and knowledge of others. Communication effectiveness that the message must be received and this is done through various forms of languages like in sign, spoken or written form; Nigerian languages can present the forms stated above. To Nnabue (2001) proper (Nigerian) language is the means by which organized activities is unified because its social imputes are felt into social system, behavior is modified, change is effected, information is made productive and goals achieved.

To Peretemode (2001) communication serves four basic purposes these are: coordination, problem solving and innovation, leading and appraising and regulating. However, effectiveness of communication depends on choosing a medium that is well suited to the condition under which the message is to be sent. In our society today based on the importance and the out cry everywhere to uphold the Nigerian languages the best medium remains any of the Nigerian languages depending on the people concerned. This will make for easy understanding and better on-time feedbacks.

Truly, mass literacy entails full understanding between the educator and the educand. However, communication in school cannot be complete when the learners do not show evidence of having received the information passed on to them. Since the purpose of communication for mass literacy is to effect a positive change, administrators in school can only justify that their tasks are complete when there is evidence of change in behavior by the teachers. The use of the language of the immediate environment can facilitate the expected change because it entails good communication. Good communication can help the school head to help the teacher actualize the stated educational goods through improved performance with Nigerian languages in school activities.

Global Communication and Nigerian Languages

The global growth and the spread in the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages in our schools help in creating a sort of consciousness that will help in creating awareness in strengthening the desired national unity in Nigeria. Many Nigerian language teachers are recruited to teach Igbo in the Federal Government Colleges, State Secondary Schools, Federal and State Colleges of education. This is done to improve mass literacy in Nigeria. Arohunmolase (2006) states that ethnic divisions are based on linguistic lines hence, the existence of many languages in Nigeria, means the existence of many basically distinct ethnic nationalities.

The global growth, in the learning of Nigerian languages for example Igbo language as a foreign language in the United States of America (USA), Britain and Brazil, has really helped in encouraging many people to study the language. This encourages mass literacy in the Nigerian languages and creates employment for graduates of the languages. Globalization is a recent occurrence that affects the economic, social, political and cultural changes all over the world has also affected the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages.

The age of globalization requires scientific and technological development through indigenous languages. Hence, it requires that the acquisition of the Nigerian Languages should be taken to another level to meet up with global expectations. Shyamlee and Phil (2012) stress that if we neglect or ignore technological and scientific development (through Nigerian Languages), we will not be able to catch up irrespective of our previous efforts. For this reason, many Nigerian language teachers make efforts to infuse new technologies into their jobs not just to get exposed but also to present the Nigerian language on the global map.

The Benefits of Nigerian Languages in Communication

Achieving mass literacy entails improvement of the educational section. The goals of education are not achievable with the language suited for the level of the learner concerned. Language according to Ebo (2014) is the surest way through which people can retain, safeguard knowledge and wisdom authenticated by their culture, inherited from their ancestors, transmitted from one generation to the other. Egwu's (2014) contribution supports the above state thus, language is fundamental; it is a means of preserving the people's culture.

Therefore, when the learners are educated with language that is closest to their cultural environment, achievement is easier, more facts are retained, concepts are better explained and examples are based on everyday life experiences. The culture of the people is the beauty of the people. Hence, when a learner sees his natural beauty expressed in the learning experiences through the use of Nigerian Languages as language of classroom instruction, he is highly motivated to attend classes, participate and achieve more. Truly, the benefit of Nigerian Language in mass literacy and scientific development cannot be overemphasized because education through communicating learning experiences in Nigerian Languages leads to mass literacy without much difficulty.

Meanwhile, the specific benefits of Nigerian Language in communication include the following:

- i. Expression of better ideas:** The use of Nigerian Languages as a medium of instruction for learners especially in primary school can facilitate better expression of ideas understanding of

lessons. The researcher's experience during teaching practice of a student – teacher confirms this. The pupils after listening to their teachers' practical teaching could neither answer questions nor make their own contributions until the teacher used the language of the immediate environment (Igbo) to teach. At the end, many hands were up to answer questions. The teacher noticed that the thought, feelings and understanding of pupils in the class were easily expressed using the Igbo Language. Parents recently view that the government probably wants pupils to learn better and faster using the Nigerian Languages; having noticed the negative effect of second language in learning, many are turning back to Local Language at home. Parents has confirmed this too, when pupils listen to stories in their local language they express their ideas easily. Local language as medium of instruction presents better comprehension of lessons with real understanding of what is read compared to mere articulation of English sound with no real understanding of concept;

- ii. **Building self-confidence:** When classroom communication is based Nigerian Language the meaningfulness of the lessons empowers the learners to develop self-confidence and more active participation in class work. One teacher is of the view that by the time children begin school, they have began gaining confidence in their ability to communicate meaningfully in their mother tongue. According to Malone (2007), carefully planned programmes of instruction in Nigerian Language can facilitate students to build a firm educational foundation when they;
 - (a) Enable and encourage learners to develop oral fluency;
 - (b) Are used to introduce reading and writing which help learners to become fluent and confident; and
 - (c) Build their capacity to use the language for everyday communication and learning in school;

- iii. **Presents Better Retention:** The writer as a school-head, in 2007 discovered that the use of Nigerian Language as a medium of instruction results to better retention of lessons. When lessons are taught in Ibibio (Akwa-Ibom) it leads to better understanding and the concept will be easily recalled when situation call for it. John (2016) writes that students can easily understand and retain lesson taught in mother tongue, thus making them more productive, not only on a personal scale but on a wider scope. John quoted World Bank (2016), that children whose first language is not used at school experience lower levels of learning and are much less likely to be able to contribute to a country's economic and intellectual development. He cited a Local Government education officer who mentioned that children beginning to learn how to read and write using their mother tongue (Nigerian Languages) are more confident, more dynamic and most likely successful in school and therefore become truly bilingual. They are undoubtedly proficient in both their first language and the natural language, thus more active participant in, and catalysts to national development. When such is the case mass literacy is assured.

- iv. **Promoting Friendly Environment:** Experiences during the early years in school can bring significant influence on the learner's outlook on studies, on career and on life. Promoting effective learning environment must be one among the important task teachers perform. Encouraging a child to participate in class begins with allowing the speak in his own immediate environment language. In addition, a school administrator noted the reduced cases of pupil

dropouts because they no longer feel alienated in the classroom unlike the cases of previous years when pupils were exposed to foreign language in the delivery of lessons. The findings of World Bank in 2005 as cited by John (2016) supports the above statement stating that 50% of the Wards out of school children live in communities where the language of schooling is rarely, if ever used at home. However, this presents the biggest challenge in achieving mass literacy, a legacy of non-productive practices that lead to low levels of learning and high levels of dropout and repetition.

According to (Quane 2003) a positive learning atmosphere where learners and teachers feel comfortable with the overall language use creates a successful literacy. Also, dynamism in learning improves self-esteem and motivation to attend school. Stress and anxiety destroy learning and research discloses that teachers resort to threatening measures when they deliver lessons in less familiar language.

The benefits of Nigerian Languages in communication cannot be overemphasized. Such benefits are expressed at various levels and places of communication be it school, home, formal and informal organization.

Setbacks on the Implementation of Nigerian Languages in Communication

(i) Multilingual Environment:

One of the major challenges in the implementation of Nigerian Language in communication generally is the issue of multilingual environment not only on the part of the learners but also on the part of the communicator either as a teacher or as parent who cannot speak well the first language of their pupils or children. The commonly sought solution is to use the foreign language which is normally English. However the NPE (2014) emphasized the importance of Nigerian Language in the education of a child as a means of preserving the culture of the people and for national unity. Hence, efforts should be made towards improving Nigerian Languages in communication instead of resorting to the foreign language with its varied negative effects.

(ii) Lack of Teacher Training:

To achieve mass literacy through Nigerian Languages in communication adequate teacher-training is highly essential. Lack of teacher-training includes unpreparedness of the teachers to teach their learners with the use of their native language considering that not all the learners are free with the foreign language. According to Mary and Horna (2018), another process here lies with learners who are not all speakers of the same native language. Teachers have difficulties when they are not experts of the different native language. In this situation the teacher would resort to the use of the foreign language as language of instruction in classroom communication, since it is assumed to be understandable to the pupils. This weakens the implementation of Nigerian Languages in communication.

(iii) Difficulty in Translation:

Translating communication in the Local Languages and even the dialects as a way of addressing the use of Nigerian Languages in communication is a challenge to communicators. Most times communicators including teachers in the classroom translate unfamiliar words with

the foreign language. Some may just change the sound or spelling or both to suit his explanation.

John (2016) discovered another compounding problem that relates to this situation as he observes the problem on academic language on lessons that create impractically longer terminologies like in counting numbers and place value chart translating ones, tenths, hundreds etc. a close observation shows that learners achieve more in mathematics with native language than with foreign language. A closer observation exposes surprisingly that a number of learners prefer English language as the medium of instruction so that they can communicate with English speaking children. This challenge may be attributed to their earlier exposure in English language. Truly learning the English language is necessary but that does not entail neglecting the native language. In fact, the foreign language should only be introduced at a stage of a child's development and learning when he would have mastered the native language.

(iv) Inadequacy of instructional materials:

This stand to be the most commonly raised issue by the stakeholders on the implementation of Nigerian Language in communication. It includes unavailability or inadequacy of textbooks and learning materials that can facilitate the proper delivery of instructions. Teachers and administrators professed that the scarcity of teaching materials affected their delivery of instruction communication in native languages according to John (2016) has not been criticized as regards its relevance to instruction, but the availability of needed instructional materials poses great challenge in its right execution. John cited Dutcher (2013) who posited essentially the programme is fruitless when there are scanty teaching materials, inferior teacher training and deficient language development.

Ambatchew (2010) argued that unless adequate learning materials like books, ICTs, Software, Print and Broadcast media are provided as instructional media the programme may be very difficult to achieve.

(v) The Prospects of Nigerian Languages in Communication

Nigeria is a multi-lingual and multicultural society where many languages compete for national recognition and higher political status. Chidi and Ogbu (2017) are of the view that it is therefore probable that having realized the all important role of language as a unifying force, Nigeria embarked on a national language policy, which she probably hoped would be the magical instrument, which would restore the so much desired national unity.

The NPE (2014) emphasized the importance of Nigerian Languages in (communication) and education of a child as a means of preserving the culture of a people and for national unity. It is a laudable policy of Nigerian government. The National Commission for College of Education (NCCE) has developed curricula named the minimum standards for Colleges of Education for the teaching of Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. The Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC), has developed curricula on Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa for the JSS to replace the former one that had so many problems.

In addition, the Federal Institute for Nigerian Languages, Akpa Abia State in order to help in the production of Nigerian language teachers. All these efforts are for the actualization of implementing the language policy which includes communication in Nigerian Languages.

Recommendations

For effective actualization of communication in Nigerian Language the following recommendation are made:

- The government should make it compulsory that student should include not less than two Nigerian Languages in their choice of courses in secondary school.
- Government should recruit qualified teachers in Nigerian languages especially in the tertiary institutions.
- Nigerian language teachers at all levels should be exposed to sensitization programmes like seminars, workshops and conferences to get acquainted with new trends in the teaching.
- Nigerian languages should be recognized as a means of communication from home by all parents.

Conclusion

This paper examines the benefits of teaching in Nigerian Language towards achieving mass literacy. It is a known fact that there is the development and spread of native languages all over the world; such languages are studied in schools as foreign languages; these include the Nigerian Languages especially the Igbo Language. The Federal Government should introduce the teaching and learning of Nigerian Languages from primary school level to tertiary level. The government should assist institutions of higher learning in the production of teachers of Nigerian language. They can actualize through providing the necessary required materials such as Language Laboratories, Computers with diacritic marks, libraries and other materials that can make the teaching and learning of Nigerian Languages easier. The National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) should be encouraged adequately to deliver their major responsibilities which include to run degree programmes for students both in L₁ and L₂ in the three main Nigerian Languages. This will go a long way to help in the production of teachers to teach the Nigerian Languages as a first or second languages.

REFERENCES

- Ambatchew, M. D. 2010. Traversing the quicksand in Ethiopia. In K. Menken & Garcia(Eds). *Nogociating Language policies in schools: Educators as policy makers* (pp. 211 - 231). New York: Routledge.
- Arohnmolase, Oyewole (2006). Globalization and the problems and prospects of teaching and learning of Yoruba as a second language (L₂) in Colleges of Education in Nigeria. In selected proceedings of the 36th annual conference on African Linguistics, ed Olaoba F. Arasanyin and Michael A. Palmerton, 129-132. Somerville, M. A: Cascarilla Proceedings Project [www.lingref.com.document #1416](http://www.lingref.com.document#1416).
- Chidi – Ehiem, U. I. and Ogbu L. C. (2017). Globalization and the problems and prospects of teaching and learning Igbo language in College of education in South East. *International*

Journal of Progressive and alternative Education, Volume 4 No. 1, August (2017) ISSN: 2408 - 6452

- Ebo, N. O. (2014). Skill acquisition through Entrepreneurship Education. *Journal of Education Management*, 3(1), 25-35.
- Egwu, K. N., 214. Igbo Arts and Craft: Community and Cosmos. Retrieved December, 2016 from <http://www.encyclopedia.com/topic/Igbo.aspx>
- Ezeani, E. (2001). Learning the Sciences in Igbo Languages. *The Nigerian Academics Forum*, 1, 39 – 183.
- Ezeudu, F. O. (2013). Effect of instruction on Junior Secondary School (JSS) Students Academic Achievement in basic science. *Journal of Education and practice*, 4(19), 44 – 60.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria: 2004 National Policy on Education (4th ed) Lagos: NERDC Press.
- Gomwalk, S. (2000). Language and Power: A tool for successful political speeches. In K. Babarinde (ed). *Education and the challenges of patriotism in Nigeria*. Ogun: Adventures.
- Igbojinwaekwu, P. C. and Dorgy, T. E. (2015). Igbo Language as a medium of instruction and enhancement of retention levels of pupils in primary school mathematics. *British Journal of Education*. 3(4), 21-36. www.eajournals.org
- Malone, S. E. (2010) SIL International, Mother Tongue based multilingual education current challenges and some strategies for moving forward. *Multilingual Education Conference*, Jomo Kenyatta University Nairobi, Kenya.
- Nweze I. M. and Ugbor G. N. 2018. Challenges of teaching Igbo language in Nigerian Universities in the 21st century. *Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research* 26(2): 256-264, 2018 ISSN 1990 – 9233.
- Quarie, A. & Christine G. (2014). *Mother Tongue Literacy in sub-Saharan Africa*. UNESCO Institute for Education. Retrieved from portal unesco.org/education/en/files/43180/11315379981 Quane A.doc/
- Shylanlee, S. D. and Phil, M. (2012). Use of technology in English Language teaching and learning: An analysis *International Conference on Language, Media and Culture*. IPEDR 33, 150-156. <http://www.ipedr.com/vo/33/030 - ICLMC2012 - L10042.pdf>.
- Sobrecarey, M. AC and Lorna T. G. 2018. Supervising the use of Mother Tongue Language in K – P Education: IP School in Focus *International Journal of Management Excellence*. Vol. 11 No 2 August 2018.