

YORUBA INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION: A PANACEA FOR SUSTAINABLE BASIC EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The importance of indigenous language as a medium of instruction in our schools has been a point of discussion in educational sector over the years. Despite the fact that this is clearly written in the National Policy on Education FRN (2004:10) that every child shall learn one of the major Nigeria languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. It is unfortunate that we still find it difficult to implement this in our schools. It is believed that our indigenous language especially Yoruba is spoken by the second-class citizen and this has been one major problem facing our educational sector. Much has been said about the terrible state of our schools ranging from the low quality of our graduates who could not express themselves fluently in the borrowed language of which the language of their immediate environment could have helped them in a great measure if put in place. But up till this moment not much has been done in bringing the level of our education to an enviable state. It is when we go back to the starting point in which learning and teaching will be carried out in our indigenous language (Yoruba) which the colonial education took away from us. In order to have a sustainable basic education and regain our total freedom, we need to embrace Yoruba indigenous language as a medium of instruction. This paper therefore looks into the use of Yoruba indigenous language as a medium of instruction, challenges and way forward.

Keywords: Indigenous Language: Medium of Instruction, Sustainable Education.

Introduction

A language is a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing. Language is a means of

communication; it is a means through which human communicate. It must be concrete and specific, precise and clear, also it must not be ambiguous nor inaccurate but be constructive and appropriate. According to Oxford Advanced Learners dictionary, Language is the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area. It has been found out over the years that the major problems confronting effective teaching and learning in primary schools today is that of language of instruction. (Oderinde, 2007). It was stated in the National Policy on Education (2013) that every child shall learn in the language of the immediate environment. It is so sad because little or nothing has been done to implement what this policy stated. Thus, it has gone a long way in affecting our education. It should be of note that German learns in their own native language, Chinese learn in Chinese language and Japanese also in Japanese. These make learning easy in their countries but the reverse is the case in our own area Nigeria.

Language is a medium of thought and expression which helps to organize and shape human faculty. The ability to participate in higher-order cognitive reasoning depends almost solely on the use of language. Without language, it will be impossible to develop and transmit the shared values and traditions of a particular community. This explains why an indigene of a given place is able to enjoy the jokes, comprehend the idiomatic expressions and figurative usages and interprets correctly and accurately the non-verbal signs that make up the totality of that community's language. (Olaoye, 2007).

Language, a system of conventional spoken, manual or written symbols by means of which human beings as members of a social group and participants in its culture express themselves. Language serves as a strong means of communication in every society and a

vehicle of reaching every strata of the community. Language as the whole body of words and combinations of words used by a nation, race or people for effective communication and interpersonal relationship. Before any meaningful communication can be achieved, language must be involved. Communication is an essential tool for human existence and human relationship. This involves two or more individuals who exchange views to influence one another. Araromi (2005) defines language as a deliberate system of communication and interaction which can be spoken or written. Language is the human vocal noise or graphic representation of his noise in writing used systematically and conventionally by a community for the purpose of communication. It stresses that language is the vehicle of communication per excellence.

Ezekoli (2005) opines that language is a resource of which human being use to structure and organize their experiences as well as to construct information, attitude, idea or points of view. Language is the ability to express oneself in words, utterances or speech. He sees language as a process by which we name, label, communicate and use words meaningfully and freely. The totality of man, his existence and survival as he goes about the business and pleasure of his daily life is closely related to his capacity to use language and the development of his linguistic potentials. (Kolawole, 2005). Coming down to language of instruction for children, as a means for sustainable basic education, the children are expected to be exposed to language from their early years. This is because the language with which they are exposed to goes a long way in helping them in their later years.

The first point of contact with language development is the child's home. Children are exposed to indigenous language from home. Language has been seen as an indispensable tool in the impartation of the ideas, concepts, skills and knowledge to the learners. Fadoro (2008:4) explains the importance of language to education and posits that without language, education cannot take place. Language according to him is a medium of instruction. The teacher imparts knowledge while the pupils/students take down their notes and also questions when necessary. The learners are also assessed and evaluated through the means of language.

Concept of Indigenous Language

An indigenous language is a language of the community into which one is born and lives. The language is from a linguistically distinct community that originated in the area. Indigenous language enriches the spirit because it shows diversity between cultures and the importance, promoting respect

among them. Education must be a source of revitalization of the cultural identity of the children. The revitalization of indigenous language is essential for ensuring the continuation and transmission of culture, customs and history. Yoruba language is one of the major languages recognized by the government of Nigeria as a medium of instruction at school. It is the language of the people living in the southwestern part of Nigeria. The Nigerian National Policy on Education NPE (2013), stipulates that the medium of instruction in the lower primary schools should be the mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment and at a later stage English. Adeyemi (2004) and Okewole (2009) note that for proper, meaningful and purposeful education at the primary level, the mother tongue of the prevailing language of the locality should be used as the language of instruction. The role of the mother tongue is to ensure resourceful educational system and language is a vital tool in the teaching and learning process at all level of comprehension of a learner and this rests on his/her ability to understand the language in which the instruction or information is passed. Indigenous language help in improving early literacy outcomes in primary schools. More so, the new curriculum provides for the study of indigenous language as career subjects later on. This implies that learning the languages might be source of employment like in working as interpreters, book writers, teachers and as linguists. When a language dies, so do the songs, stories and insights of an entire culture. However, keeping an indigenous language alive allows communities to preserve knowledge acquired over the years and fosters pride of ownership and connection with the nature land. Such values are priceless.

Indigenous Language as a Medium of Instruction

Scholars and policy makers have advocated for the use of indigenous language as a medium of instruction over the years having understood its importance and benefits. Government also knows the importance and glamour for the use as stated in National Policy on Education (2004). "Government appreciates the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and natural cohesion, and preserving cultures. Thus, every child shall learn in the language of the immediate environment, in this wise, language of a given community or ethnic group is the language of the nature speakers and serves as the mother tongue".

Studies revealed that not much has been done about the fundamental fact that to get the best out of our educational system, we must go back to the starting point. The starting point is what Fafunwa (1998) described as "Learning and Teaching in our

indigenous language. His contention was that colonial education robbed the Nigeria child of his inventiveness, creativity and originality. He argued that since the Nigeria child is forced to think in English, other than in Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and other local languages. The child finds it hard to assimilate instructions easily and build manual dexterity effectively. Truly Fafunwa's proposal makes sense not only because education is best acquired through the indigenous language as many researchers have said, but because in its initial phase – our adoption of 'colonial English' to teach in our education system lacked practical basis. Teaching in English Language at the expense of our indigenous language if not a misconceived idea must be morally unfair and mentally unjust to our innocent school kids. Adetugbo, (1979), Akere (1981) have established that English language has accorded a position of supremacy over the myriad of Nigerian indigenous languages. Consequently, many Nigerian speakers have imbibed the notion that their tongues are only good enough for secondary communication purposes since that indigos language have over the years been overshadowed by English.

Apart from the experiment conducted by Fafunwa 1970 and 1975 at St Stephens primary school, Ile Ife, Adejube (2000) also conducted another survey research in the primary school system where indigenous language was expected to be used as the medium of expression for the first three years. He observed that there are discordant and discrepant practices among the public and primary schools with respect to the language provision. The private primary schools are yet to come to term with the implementation. The public primary schools in the urban centres where there are many ethnic groups in the school system are still communicating to their learners in English.

Basic education is an evolving program of instruction that is intended to provide students with the opportunity to become responsible and respectful global citizens, to contribute to their economic well-being and that of their families and communities, to explore and understand different perspectives. We have three types of education. Formal, Informal and Non-formal. Basic education brings growth and development to the young one's intellectual capacity as well as their morals, attitudes and how they relate to those around them. Every child is entitled to have a qualitative and sound education for a more promising prospect.

Goal of Basic Education

The main goal of basic education is to provide the school age population and young adults with skills, knowledge, and values to become caring, self-reliant and productive citizens. The Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria was launched in 2010 with the goal of providing “free universal and compulsory basic education for every Nigeria child aged 6-15years. Every government in Nigeria shall provide free, compulsory and universal basic education for every child of primary school age. Every parent shall ensure that his/her child or ward attend and completes (a) primary school education and (b) junior secondary school education. The goal of basic education is to provide the school age population and young adults with skills, knowledge and patriotic citizens.

Other goals are:

- i. A free and democratic society
- ii. A just egalitarian society
- iii. A united, strong and self-reliant nation
- iv. A great and dynamic economy
- v. A land full of bright opportunities for all citizens.

Component of Basic Education

There are three components of the UBE- universal basic education programmes and these are: Early childhood care and development Education (ECCDE) 6 years primary education. 3 years junior secondary school education (JSS)

Language of Instruction

Language of instruction is a language used in teaching. It may or may not be the official language of the country or territory. If the first language of students is different from the official language, it may be used as the medium of instruction for part or all of schooling. Research shows that when teachers incorporate pupils' native languages into classroom instruction, pupils increase their meta linguistic awareness and learn more academic content. It makes learning to be accomplished in an easy way. Native language/indigenous language instruction is crucial to optimize pupil success, for many reasons. Development of a pupils first language facilitate development in a second language. In other words, it is far easier to learn a second language when pupils already have a strong foundation in their first language.

Olopade (2009) opined that when a person uses his indigenous language it is found out that complex ideas might just be easier to grasp and that the level of

understanding of the same idea in a second language is generally lower or at best can be at par with that of the mother tongue. When Yoruba language is used in teaching and learning, pupils tend to understand better and their participatory level is also high compared to when a borrowed language - English Language is used. Indigenous language is highly important in giving people an identity in a very rapidly changing world. It carries much of the wisdom of the people who speak them. One of the ways through which our citizens can be preferred is the use of our native language, because Language is power. Teaching through Yoruba indigenous language is one of the best ways by which we can drive our lessons home to our pupils without any problem because it is the language of their immediate environment which they can easily understand.

In our private schools, the speaking of vernacular is totally prohibited, while the National Policy on Education (2004) emphasized the use of mother tongue for nursery and early primary schools' education.

Faseun (2007:2-3) remarked: learning and understanding are made easier in the mother tongue. The German learn in their native German language, the English in English language, the Chinese in Chinese and the Japanese in Japanese. But the Yoruba-abandoning their own language, learn in the borrowed language of English, French Russian and so on. They therefore learn the hard way in our sweat to translate technology in our language. Yoruba language in Yoruba kind has been relegated to English. If we are not careful, our language may become vestigial and gradually go into extinction”.

There is convincing evidence that teaching at the primary level via the mother tongue is a rewarding activity with lasting effect. The Ife experience brought to the fore, the significance of co-operation between the school and the home.

Challenges of Indigenous Language

A lot of people in the city found it very difficult to speak their native languages to even their children. Some people feel it is shameful to speak their native language in public. Another challenge facing indigenous language is the negative attitudes of parents. they don't want their children to speak the language parents do not want their children to speak in Yoruba Language some parent even goes the extent of fighting the school which their children attend because their children speak Yoruba language, saying they don't teach them adequately in the school. If

African's especially Nigerians, do not encourage their children to speak some of the languages, who would? They need to borrow a leaf from their Mexican, Vietnamese and Chinese counterparts who Endeavor to speak English as well as their native languages with their children. It has been discovered that one of the major problems confronting the effective teaching and learning in primary schools today is that of language of instruction. Oderinde (2007) language is central to all human activities, hence, it forms the basis of whatever social cohesion can attain and it determines our world view.

Awobuluyi 2004 opines that when a language is observed to manifest falling standard, it presupposes that such language at some time in the past had enjoyed high standard and patronage among the people. Our parents believed so much in the use of our Yoruba indigenous language. They speak English language fluently and still did not jettison the use of indigenous language. Essien (2005:6) says many educated elite parents do not speak the native language to their children and ward at home and other social gatherings and thereby reproducing a generation whose attitudes are very antagonistic. Owolabi (2006:16) in his inaugural lecture at the university of Ibadan summarizes the attitudes to the native language with the acronyms “NALP” meaning native language prejudice syndrome” this explained as an attitude of dislike for the use of native languages as medium of expression particularly for official purposes.

Implication of not Using Indigenous Language

It has hampered academic pursuits of many gifted and talented children who are denied progress because of their weakness in English. It has also affected the pride of our culture and tradition. It has led to what Owolabi (2006:8) calls “Native Language Prejudice Syndrome”. Another disadvantage of not putting our indigenous language into use is the breeding of unstable bilingual who are jack of all trade and master of none. Some graduates cannot express themselves flawlessly in English.

Importance of Indigenous Language

Native language instruction is crucial to optimize a student's success, for many reasons. Development of a student's first language facilitates development in a second language in other words, it is far easier to learn a second language when students already have strong foundation in their first language.

- I. Our indigenous language not only allows us to communicate and connect with one another, but it allows us to understand and appreciate the

history of our ancestors and our upbringing. It cultivates an appreciation and understanding that is beyond beneficial for children, especially those from diverse familiar backgrounds.

- ii. Research shows that when teachers incorporate pupils' native language into classroom instruction, pupils increase their meta linguistics awareness, learn more academic content, increase their English proficiency, and have more well-developed identities and self-esteem.
- iii. Indigenous language or mother tongue develops a child's personal social and cultural identity. Using mother tongue helps a child develop their critical thinking and literacy skills. Research shows that children learning in mother tongue adopt a better understanding of the curriculum.
- iv. Indigenous language makes it easier for children to pick up and learn other languages.
- v. It develops a child's personal, social and cultural identity.
- vi. It helps in the development of a child's critical thinking.
- vii. Children learning in mother tongue/indigenous language enjoy school more and learn faster due to feeling comfortable in their environment.
- viii. Pupils self esteem is highly developed for they are able to express themselves freely in the mother tongue
- ix. Indigenous languages were used by our parents to impact the acceptable norms and values to their children in those days.

Conclusion

It is high time we switched from using a foreign language to teach and pass information to our children. Yoruba language is best understood when we adopt it in teaching. The act of bending and shifting the minds of our children from the use of their mother tongue/indigenous language has caused a lot of damages more than good as children grow up to adolescent, they are unable to speak their indigenous language fluently especially Yoruba language as they give reasons for not able to do so. This has affected our culture as we find it difficult among children and youths to be able to complete a proverb without adulterating it. By so doing, we are gradually losing our cultural values for not allowing our children to be vast in our indigenous language and by not teaching them with this language in their various schools. This has gone a long way in affecting our morals on the society today. Indigenous language/mother tongue without many words is the surest way of imparting

knowledge and disseminating knowledge and skill that will be impactful. Through the mother-tongue, sound cultural values that will be impacted positively on socio-economic life of the people will be enacted. Akinola (2007).

Recommendations

- i. Indigenous language is the best way of impacting knowledge and skills in our children, teachers are advised to go back to its use.
- ii. Parents should take it upon them to speak Yoruba to their children and not to discourage them from speaking it at home.
- iii. Parents should be proud of their mother tongue as they encourage their children /wards to do same
- iv. Teachers should desist from punishing pupils for speaking indigenous language they should rather encourage them
- v. There should be more Yoruba authors who will write novels in Yoruba language to encourage pupils as their teachers guides them in reading
- vi. Television and radio stations should put up more Yoruba programs like storytelling, folklores, rhymes and so on for pupils to enjoy and so create the interest of the language in them
- vii. The use of indigenous language should be enforced and implemented by the government for effective teachings. Since German learn in their native language, the Chinese in Chinese and Japanese in Japanese, while we Yorubas are stylishly abandoning our own language
- viii. Our indigenous which is known as mother tongue especially the Yoruba language should no more be relegated to a second language
- ix. Government should as a matter of urgency see to the implementation of the use of indigenous language as a medium of instruction in our schools. Akinola (2007)

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