

Implications of the Negative Attitude towards Nigerian Indigenous Languages on National Development

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Citation: Opeyemi Emmanuel Olawe (2022) Implications of the Negative Attitude towards Nigerian Indigenous Languages on National Development, *International Journal of English Language and Linguistics Research*, Vol.10, No 2, pp.60-73

ABSTRACT: *Most parents, schools and the society at large in Nigeria today refer to the indigenous languages as the language of the uncivilized and speaking it is an abomination. Surprisingly, the English language is becoming the first language of most children in the nation. Worrisome still is the fact that the indigenous languages are going into extinction and this has not received much attention. The government has been paying lip service to various policies, just as parents are discouraging their children to speak their mother tongue even on informal occasions. It is for this reason that this study set out to highlight the implications of the negative attitude towards Nigerian indigenous languages on national development. It examines the status of indigenous languages and the possible reasons for the negative perceptions as well as their implication on National Development in Nigeria. The study submits that the neglect of indigenous languages results in mistaken identity, self-patriotism, low self-esteem and self-concept, low productivity, polluted social integration, importation of foreign habit, weak social institution, low educational product and language incompetence among others on part of the individual and society at large which have a direct impact on national development. Consequently, the paper concludes that when education, science, technology and moral virtues are led away from the indigenous languages, sustainable national development will continue to be a fallacy*

KEYWORDS: Implications, Extinction, Indigenous Languages, National Development

INTRODUCTION

For indigenous peoples, languages not only identify their origin or membership in a community, they also carry the ethical values of their ancestors – the indigenous knowledge systems that make them one with the land and are crucial to their survival and to the hopes and aspirations of their youth.

Minnie Degawan

Language occupies a significant position and plays a vital role in any human society, embracing her norms, values and traditions. Without language, no human society can exist and no culture can be fully expressed. We cannot reason, produce and articulate ideas as human beings or have a sense of belonging to a particular ethnic group without language. A renowned linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure opined that language forms the way we think which in turn influences culture. According to him, if you are interested in understanding a culture, you have to start from such culture's language. This simply implies that the norms, values, philosophy and traditions of each society are embedded in her language and to kill such language is to kill a society and to deteriorate a language is to fault the society.

No wonder Afe (2012) sees "language as a significant medium through which manner, morals and mythology of the society are passed from one generation to the other." To integrate a child into the

society to which he belongs; passing the history, norms, values, belief system, traditions, experiences, challenges, aspirations and even plans for the future are only made possible through language. Since society differs, what each society seek to pass from one generation to another is bound to be different. This is why language differs from one another even though they aim at communication. What may be termed ungrammatical or unacceptable in one language may be right in another language (Seweje, 2012). As the multilingual society that Nigeria is, there are many indigenous languages, the number of which is yet to be ascertained (Ige and Otutu, 2012). As asserted by Akinkurolere and Adewumi (2013), there are various ethnic groups, each having its peculiar language and dialects being spoken in different communities and Ayeomoni (2012) insists there are over 400 languages in Nigeria, which are from various ethnic groups. Out of all the indigenous languages in the country, the three major indigenous languages under which others are classified are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba.

Due to the multilingual nature of Nigeria and the inability of the government to adopt any of the three major languages as the national language, English (Foreign language) was adopted as the lingua franca to cut across all the ethnic and regional boundaries. Hence, English becomes the language of commerce, government, media, education and social mobility (Ajepe and Ademowo, 2016). English, being a global language coupled with the dominant role played, led to the neglect of Nigerian foreign languages and placed the native languages at the mercy of the English language. According to Olarewaju (2012) citing UNESCO (1953), when Nigerians saw English as a language of commerce, education and medium through which employment can be secured, many parents saw speaking indigenous languages as an abomination; they referred to it as vernacular, the language of the uncivilized. Ayakoroma (2017) says the prohibition of the use of “vernacular” (as indigenous languages were derogatorily termed) in our educational system and the discouragement of speaking indigenous languages in homes has fast become the in-thing because it is being regarded by many as the normal way of civilization and development.

Ajepe and Ademowo (2016) explained the resultant effect is evident in the way most parents prefer that the child starts with the English language; so the schools are made to do so, especially as most children are spoken to in the English language from birth. The English language, therefore, becomes the first language of most children which is influencing the Nigerian language to disappear at an undisputed rate. People have neglected the fact that language is more than communication. Salvador (2014) asserted that the use of language is deeply entrenched in human culture and apart from being used to communicate and share information; it also has social and cultural uses, such as signifying group identity, social stratification, social grooming and entertainment. Every culture has a language through which they communicate meaning, symbols and emotion. English, German, French, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are languages that have social and significant functions to those who use them as a medium of conveying thoughts. This is the reason we tend to feel uneasy when we find ourselves amid a group whose language we cannot speak or understand. Thus, as expressed by the editorial of a news magazine, 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 native land. Such values are priceless (The Chronicle Newspaper, Dec. 6, 2018). In recognition of the importance and vulnerability of indigenous languages, the UN proclaimed 2019 the International Year of Indigenous Languages, to draw attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalize, and promote indigenous languages. The fact that the UN has decided to dedicate a year to indigenous languages is evidence of the international community's view that the subject is one of global importance (The Chronicle Newspaper, Dec. 6, 2018).

Many linguists and researchers (Ayakoroma, 2017; Maduabuchi, 2019, Nwanyanwu, 2017; Oyemike, Anyalebechi & Ariole; 2017) have shown much concern over the heightened ways in which people shy away from their mother tongue and its dwindling effects on the Nigerian languages but unfortunately, Akinkurolere and Akinfenwa (2018) attested that the issue of extinction of indigenous languages has not received much attention. The government has been paying lip service to various policies, just as parents are not encouraging their wards to speak their mother tongue at home; to the effect that there have been no visible impacts.

According to an academics from the Languages Department of Bayero University in Kano, Prof Usman Fagge, in a news interview conducted by Anadolu Agency on December 18, 2017, noted that 520 indigenous languages spoken at the beginning of the 1990s have perished over the years as at of today, the number has dropped down to 450. Additionally, as the number of citizens who speak indigenous languages is decreasing, any language under threat is bound to become lost (www.dailysabah.com). As asserted by Omotolani (2020), over twenty-seven languages have been listed as close to extinction by the United Nations Educational, Scientific And Cultural Organization (UNESCO) while Igbo, supposedly to be spoken among 25million Nigerians is currently an endangered language. Hence, when the real mission should be after how Nigerian languages will grow and thrive well into the future, we are unable to ensure that the languages survive today. It is therefore expedient for all shareholders to pay attention to the growing extinction of many of our indigenous languages and the implication to the future of the country

The Status of Indigenous Languages in Nigeria

The state of indigenous languages today mirrors the situation of indigenous life (culture, traditions, values, norms among others). In many parts of the country, they are on the verge of disappearance. Nowadays, people judge an educated man by his ability to speak English fluently. When you can speak English fluently, people believe you are educated, neglecting other aspects of education. On most occasions, people focus on the language in Education. Their ultimate aim is for children (students) to speak English fluently. Because of this, parents of contemporary times tend to criminalize the use of indigenous language in the glorification of foreign languages, particularly English. They see our indigenous languages as something that should never be spoken in schools, churches, houses, on the streets, in the market places and in society in general. When you speak your dialect, people tend to judge you as local and barbaric and when you speak English, then, you belong.

The researcher's experiences have shown that when two persons converse in their native language publicly, many people would turn to them to first access their physical appearance because the mentality is that, such people must be uncouth, uncivilized and uneducated to have spoken that "local language" in a public place. The belief is that indigenous languages should only be spoken in rural settings; hence, children who are supposed to be integrated into the society through the language are discouraged from learning or speaking the languages. A lot of parents indoctrinated by the modern day's slogan of private schools captioned "speak English. English is our language" have ingested the notion that speaking the indigenous language which is the child's first language will nullify the tendency for writing and speaking Standard English. Such a child is demoralized and prevented from having a keen interest in his native language (Olanrewaje, 2012).

Describing the attitude of people towards Nigerian languages, Omotolani (2020) elucidates that parents don't speak their mother tongue to their children anymore and most children are banned from speaking

their indigenous languages in public places, schools and even at home. she further explains that many people have the belief that speaking one's mother tongue deems you uncivilized, local and violent and native speakers are scared of being judged to be 'razz' and loud. This simply explains why many children especially in the urban cities can neither speak nor hear their indigenous languages. Since mother tongue is often used only by older people, an entire generation of indigenous children can no longer communicate with their grandparents. Children even take pride in saying that they do not understand their mother tongue.

Nigeria school system doesn't help the situation. The study of Nigerian indigenous languages is not a thing of priority both in speech and writing. Ayakaroma (2017) affirmed that our educational system pays no serious attention to giving the study of indigenous languages in our school curricular. Many students are either punished or made to pay a certain amount of money as a fine when caught engaging in the act of speaking indigenous languages. Some could argue that this step is an essential measure to ensure that students enhance their communicative competence in English but mastery in one's mother tongue doesn't mean one cannot learn or gain proficiency in other languages. Unlike the English language that is a compulsory and core subject from primary, secondary up to tertiary institutions, no indigenous languages are placed on such status. For any student to gain admission into any tertiary institution in Nigeria, such student must have a minimum of credit pass in English but this cannot be said of any indigenous language. They are handled and taught with much levity.

It is quite common to see young Nigerians who cannot have a simple conversation in their mother tongue. They feel there is no need to speak their language when their friends probably don't speak it back to them or it isn't cool to speak it. Today, an utterance in an indigenous language is incomplete without the addition of English lexicons which result in code-switching and code-mixing to conceal their weakness and inadequacies in both the native and second language. What exists now is a hybrid form of language where English is filled with bad grammar and bacterized accent as well as Indigenous languages is characterized with wrong lexical choices and unacceptable sentences.

Reasons for Treating Nigerian Indigenous Languages as Inferior

Many factors continue to debilitate the importance of indigenous languages in Nigeria. Olarewaju (2012) has blamed both the white men who introduced their language to us and the Nigerian native speakers as the major cause of our native languages going into extinction. Olarewaju sees the colonial government as being guilty of selfish ambition of introducing the white man ideology to the Nigerian natives while the Nigerian natives are guilty of ignorantly allowing the colonial government/Christian missionaries to brainwash them to the extent of preferring foreign language (English Language) to their own. The researcher agrees more with the latter. It is not the fault of our colonial masters but that of ourselves: government, parents/Guardian, schools and society at large To buttress this, some of the reasons Nigerian indigenous language have been regarded as local, uncivilized and a mere vernacular by the Nigerian native speakers themselves are highlighted below

A). Non-Challant Attitude towards Teaching and Learning of Nigerian Languages

As stated in the NPE (1977, revised 1981, 1998 and 2004), the government recognizes the peculiar multilingual nature of Nigeria and would in best capacity promote the use, teaching and learning of the indigenous languages to enhance social interaction, national unity and preserve culture. Therefore, according to the provision of the NPE, every child is expected to learn the language of his/her immediate environment and also one of the three major languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Ige and Otutu (2012)

explained the provision of NPE means that it is required of a child at the junior secondary school from the south to learn Yoruba as the language of his/her immediate environment and learn either Hausa or Igbo as L2 in the interest of national unity. For his counterpart from the North, he/she must learn Hausa as a language of his immediate environment and learn either Yoruba or Igbo; while the one from the east would learn Igbo as a language of the environment and either Yoruba or Hausa.

Furthermore, the national policy of education states that every child should start his education in his mother tongue or the language spoken in the immediate environment. So at least, in primary one, every subject should be taught in the child's mother tongue or the language spoken in the area. If we look within ourselves, it's crystal clear that these laudable policies are not implemented.

The implementation of this national policy on education in most of the primary, secondary and tertiary institutions has either been poorly handled or neglected. The mother tongue which is the language of the immediate environment is hardly taught not to talk of one of the other Nigerian languages. The major emphasis on language in a Nigerian school system is the English language. It is a fact that the majority of both state and private-owned schools have neglected the teaching of mother tongue languages, hence, the vast population of the students cannot read or write in their mother tongue. Though, even when mother tongue language is offered and seated for in examinations like WAEC, NECO etc., students are more unserious towards the subject because it neither adds nor subtracts from the quality of their result. Since students on numerous occasions are prohibited from speaking the Nigerian languages within and outside the school, they misplace and confuse their priority and thus become demotivated and unserious towards indigenous languages. The non-implementation of the laudable language policy continues to ridicule the values of Nigeria languages and place them on an inferior scale

B). English Dominance and As the Language of Instruction

English is used in Nigeria for a large number of purposes. It is the language through which employment opportunities are guaranteed. In our society today, people who can speak English are placed above those who can't. Ige and Otutu (2012) asserted that the Europeans who came to Nigeria in the 19th century used their native language (English) as the medium of communication, promoting it in schools by making it the language of instruction, giving annual grants to schools that taught English and their graduates were offered ready-made employment. This influenced Nigerians to be disposed to using English both in oral and written modes, allowing English to penetrate most cultures and educational systems. This important role being played by English in Nigeria and in the rest of the world place English above Nigeria indigenous languages and suppress the enthusiasm of Nigerians towards indigenous languages.

Apart from being the language of Dominance, one of the major functions played by the English language in Nigeria is being the language of instruction. It is the tool that the teacher uses to impart knowledge, skills, ideas, aptitude to the students. The idea is that a student who is defected in English would not be able to have access to the information being passed by the teacher and other educational materials. Since English is the language of education, people believe that every child who has gone to school should be able to use it effectively. Nwanyanwu (2017) commented that there is a rigid and erroneously pattern of language behaviour among both literate and illiterates that intelligence or knowledge is synonymous with competence in English. It is believed that when children speak English, it reflects their intelligence and ability to cope educationally.

Equally, the language of instruction being English makes indigenous languages less important. It will be difficult to write 'addition' or 'subtraction' and other English words on the chalkboard and start teaching in the mother tongue. Therefore, we tend to behave as if English is better than the mother tongue. When we adopt this attitude, it affects the way we react with children when they use their mother tongue. Thus, mother tongue is regarded as vernacular or local language and students are compelled to speak the English language. Students become uninterested or see learning the indigenous language as not being useful to them. Reading materials are not available in the mother tongue and they don't need a credit pass in the subject to gain admission into the university or get a job. The value placed on education and English as the language of education blinded us to regard our Nigerian languages as a shadow of our formal self or uneducated folk

Neglect of Nigerian Languages by Parents

Due to colonial hangover, most of the elite parents in Nigeria do not only see the English language as superior to Nigerian languages but more financially rewarding to study. For that reason, the parents do not encourage their children and wards in any form to speak in Nigerian languages (Ige and Otutu, 2012). Many parents behave as if the indigenous languages should be forced out of sight. Some parents could figuratively kill their children because they spoke their mother tongue. It should be English at all times and this culture influences the woman next door to want her child to speak English like other kids, thereby relegating our much valued indigenous languages to the ground and reducing it to nothingness. The constant discouragement of many school-age children nowadays from speaking Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa and others which is their native language is the principal reason Nigerian languages is about to be washed ashore to the realm of invisibility

The School/ The Teacher

The private schools and teachers share part of the blame for the inferiority of the indigenous language in Nigeria. Studies have shown that educators are not adhering to the policy of indigenous language in education. It is evident that what most schools especially private schools place much emphasis on is speaking English and since many parents want their children to speak the white man's language fluently, private schools continue to ridicule our indigenous languages at the glorification of English; instilling the belief that our indigenous languages are vernacular and not worthy to be spoken at all. Instead of identifying the times that are appropriate for pupils to speak English, they simply indulge in punishing the pupils who speak 'vernacular' as they would call it as if they had committed a crime in doing so. To motivate students to be effective in learning English, teachers paint indigenous languages in colours that portray them as inimical to their success and future attainments. As stated by a news magazine: *Culture Digest* (2010), cited in Ayakoroma (2017), many unwise teachers place an embargo on the use of the vernacular in schools to encourage proficiency in the use of the English language, the same reason some ignorant parents speak only the foreign tongue with their children at home. This practice is one of the reasons children, parents and societies do not see the important role of indigenous languages other than being cantankerous to their life achievement

Glorification of Foreign Values

One of the damages colonialization and civilization has done to Nigerians is the appreciation of foreign life more than ours. Right from the time when colonial masters arrived upon the shores of Africa and Nigeria in particular, the admiration of the white man's way of life has continually propelled us to lose touch with things of our own. We accepted to sell our brothers in exchange for white man's materials; we sold our heritage to live like the white man. We did not just lose our sense of belonging but also our

traditions, customs and norms, dressing, religion, behaviour and most importantly, our language in which all our culture and philosophy are explained and understood. Since English is a white man's language, many people would kill to speak the foreign language. The more fluent your English is, the more prestige you get, the more educated you are positioned and the more you are positioned above others who can't speak the language. This has been one of the major reasons our indigenous languages have lost their values because every man and parent is after speaking the white man's language

All these factors identified and discussed above are some of the reasons that serve as an impediment to the recognition of our indigenous languages as an important language that plays the central role of socializing us into the values, norms and beliefs of our community

Implications of Regarding Nigerian Indigenous Languages as Inferior on National Development

As an individual, one might have problems of health; it might be a headache, sore throat, sprain or the like. When any part of the body is disturbed, the overall performance will be affected. This is the same with language. Since language is an essential attribute of human society with which man's intellect is structured and made functional, the inferior quality with which we handle our various indigenous languages will affect the level of development both socially, economically, politically and technologically.

For the sake of clarity, the implications of the inferior ways we handle our indigenous languages are enumerated below

The Effect on Society

Speaking one's indigenous language is important to pass oral traditions, heritage and diversity through generations. Language is the key to the heart of the people and if we lose the key, we lose the very essence of the people. Sadly, it seems this generation of young Nigerians is well on its way to losing its command of traditional languages. It then implies that in the future, small ethnic groups will lose their cultural identities and languages and become lost tribes relegated to the history books. Discussed below are some of the societal effects of treating the indigenous language as vernacular

Polluted Social Integration: one of the means through which a child is integrated into his society is through language. It is through language that the norms and values, aspirations, experiences, history and challenges of his society are handed over to the coming generation. When this language is saturated with another alien language, it is like describing a black colour from a white colour perspective when they are obverse to each other. Our belief systems and values are changing. Our norms, taboos, values, attitudes, thinking have turned towards the likes of the foreign people whose language we ardour. The language that should preach the values the society prefer and those rejected, what one should, ought and must do as well as what one should not, ought not and must not do have been compromised. This is one of the reasons our taboos have been discarded as superstitions. Our culture and traditions are now seen as barbaric and archaic. We longer cherish our own but we continue to appreciate foreign life. Our youths today now have so many distinctive styles of dress, behaviour, speech, distinctive tastes especially in music and distinctive values (social and political) in varying degrees of strength. These pervade all aspects of youth life both in the rural and urban areas and it continued to grow. Invariably, we produce citizens with no culture; people who neither belong to the foreign culture nor understand those of their immediate environment.

Importation of Foreign Habit: Today, foreign habits, dressing, behaviour, attitudes and ways of life are the order of the day. Concepts like divorce, baby mama, cultism, immoral dress in the name of

fashion, prostitution and pornography that are preached against in our various indigenous languages have been glorified. It is not hard to see a secondary school student become a drug addict, or a six-year-old girl crushing on some guy. All our moral rectitude has been thrown away as a result of the glorification of foreign language. One thing we forget is that a behaviour that is socially acceptable in one society can be judged immoral in another setting. Its rightness or wrong is embedded in the language which we have either discarded or neglected. The result of this, according to Ajepe and Ademowo (2016) is that the younger generations are beginning to lose the core values and virtues in their cultures. The dress culture of the younger generation is also taking after the dress culture of the people whose language they speak. They wear shirts on the street with an inscription of bad guy, fuck you, and so on. The younger generation is reflecting the culture of the language they speak more by gradually modifying their names to be pronounceable in English.

Weak Social Institution: When children are poorly integrated into society, culture becomes disorganized and social order collapses. When social order collapses, the mores lose their compelling power and the social core of common values, shrinks. Individuals feel insecure and confused in a society whose norms have become undependable. When most people do not conform to well-established norms, most of the time, a society cannot function efficiently

B. The effect on Individual

The individual self is very important in nation-building. The individual plays a significant role in the making and destruction of a nation. Therefore, the individual needs to understand himself and his environment before he can adequately contribute his quota to his society. That is why the Nigerian educational philosophy lay much emphasis on the integration of the individual into a sound and effective citizen... and geared towards self-realization, better human relationship, individual and national efficiency, effective citizenship, national consciousness, national unity, economic, political, scientific and technological progress (NPE, 1977). With language, the tool with which a man defines himself alloyed, the individual are faced with a lot of confusion that tells on the development of the society. Some of these include:

Mistaken Identity: Language is society itself. Without language, there is no society, people or culture. The people, culture, belief and philosophy are all embedded in the language in which the society speaks. Speaking the language of the society makes one part of that society. Language is the most potent form of identity politics in Nigeria. People hardly believe a person is from a region if he cannot speak the language of that region. Most times, the intonation identifies where one hails from and give way to our origin. Therefore, glorification of the foreign language at the detriment of our indigenous languages is deteriorating and causing misidentification. When you prevent a child from speaking his indigenous language, you are preventing him from identifying himself with the society to which he belongs; he finds it difficult to associate himself with the culture, tradition, norms and values of his society. Treating our languages as vernacular and beating a child when he speaks such language is more or less seeing ourselves as taboos or calling ourselves mistakes and errors. Transferring these erroneous beliefs into the young ones that our indigenous are vernacular and not worthy to be spoken is more or less telling our young ones that our culture is wrong, and our way of life is primitive. This negatively affects the upbringing of the child. He forms characters, attitudes and behaviours that are alien to his environment and inimical to reasonable growth of the society since he doesn't know which society he's identified with. he neither understands the culture of his environment nor can he associate with the culture of the language he speaks. He is then propelled to import the character of the culture he doesn't understand

well and behave in such a manner he can explain. Consequently, national development is impeded with such confused individuals.

Self-Patriotism: Everywhere in Nigeria today, Self-Patriotism has become the order of the day. Since we cannot associate or identify ourselves with the society in which we belong, we lose the sense of our national patriotism. When a person cannot associate with the language of his society, such person loses his identity, his patriotism and love for his country; he loses his sense of belonging as a citizen and invariably seeks means to escape to other countries. It is no doubt that this will bring corruption, indiscipline, underdevelopment and immorality. This is because the cultures embedded in our indigenous languages that seek to curb these vices are seen as vernacular, taboos and primitive. This leads to the glorification of foreign culture which appears to work against our country.

Low Self-Extreme and Self-Concept: We hardly depend on ourselves to provide the solution to Nigerian problems. We depend critically on the foreign to lay our beds. We could no longer rely on our intelligence to do anything. If it has not yet been said or Okayed by the foreign men, it's not yet positive. This continues to develop into our unconscious sense of the negative attitude to our nation. When people see made in Nigeria, they are tempted to think that such product is inferior and of low quality. That's why we see made in China, Italy, India etc. on almost all products in Nigeria. Until we learn to be proud of our language, cherish our own culture and traditions; our eyes will remind closed to meaningful national development

Low Productivity: Nigeria as a nation can only be built by individuals with acceptable character, intellectual and vocational skills who are willing, ready and capable of revolutionizing ideas from patriotic minds for the sake of development. When such individuals cannot express their thoughts and experiences adequately or exhibit characters of a foreign language, the right attitudes and skills needed for positive development will be eroded. The drug addict, the cultist, the alcoholic, the prostitute, the armed robber or the economic saboteur hardly contributes to national development. These are people who have been disoriented through the norms handled to them by implicit languages. Many workers in their various places of work display wrong attitude and poor skill that one would wonder about the kind of education we get in schools. Productivity comes from one's ability to think and create but with indigenous languages eroded, there is a low motivation for positive creativity. Those who try to find solutions are rarely appreciated because we do have trust in them. Hence, attempts are directed towards personal glory and wealth while national glory is neglected

The effect on Education

Education can serve as a tool for developing an effective value system. By this, it means education can help us understand better our beliefs and how they can affect our society. Education, whether formal, informal or non-formal, is made achievable through language and such education does not supersede the society in which it is being operated. Some of the effects of treating our indigenous languages as vernacular on education include:

Low Educational Product: It is a fact that nowadays, what we have mostly are people who are highly schooled but less educated; people with high intelligence but low skills, less self-esteem and low self-worth. Ajibade (2019) in his work questioned the quality of education in Nigeria. Ajibade (2019) faulted education to be directed more on the certificate rather than knowledge gained. The education is Certificate-Based rather than Knowledge-Based. That is why the standard of education is falling

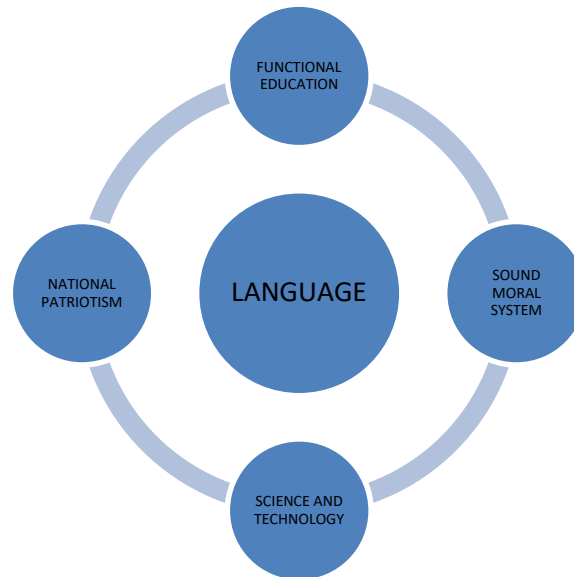
drastically, producing many unemployable graduates. It is a matter of fact that language enhances our thinking and reasoning and since this language is distorted, many people are less aware of themselves. If you ask why a university student chooses a course of study, it is unlikely for him to give a logical reply because he hardly understands himself or realize what he wants to do. Today, all we hear are many big grammars with no content, giving way to “malpractices of different forms such as result buying, bribery, impersonation, forging of certificates, ghost students” (Ajibade, 2019) and so on.

Language Incompetence: Jacob Mey in Odebunmi (2006) opines that context determines what we say and what we do not say. Learning to speak a language means learning to use the language appropriately in a different context. A wink from one's mother is enough to pass the message across to the child. In our everyday life, we vary the kind of language we use according to the levels of formality and familiarity. In context or situations where there is an obvious status difference between participants, we are careful to express the right amount of respect. These days, young Nigerians do not have the required sociolinguistic competence to use language as dictated by the social-cultural environment. In their everyday life, they rarely vary the kind of language they use according to the context of language use. They are hardly careful to express the right amount of respect when there is an obvious status difference between participants. This leads to many grammatical but unacceptable sentences. Many students are rude in their expressions. They rarely consider the age and status of a person before raining on such person several abusive comments. Teachers complain of high moral decadence among students. Many students have lost the polite way of addressing elderly people. When some students talk, one would question if such persons pass through the realm of school at all.

Apart from this, many students do not possess the ability to understand and create forms of the language that are longer than sentences, such as stories, conversations or letters. They have low thinking and reasoning ability to the extent that they can hardly express themselves in logical manners. Many students can't produce their imagination in concrete ways because of their poverty of language. The ideas expressed in English by Nigerian speakers of English already exist in them in their local languages or dialects. They merely interpret these into their equivalent words in English. When these ideas are not properly formed in the language in which they think, presenting these ideas would be faulty in their utterances and written communication. This is evident in their poor performance in essay compositions. Some of these problems are due to the interference of one language on the other and the inability to think clearly. That is why today, we have children with big mouths but empty brains.

Despite the high morals embedded in indigenous languages, enriched with proverbs, warnings (ikilo) and didactic folklore and folktales meant to teach morals, these indigenous languages are hardly taught in schools. Many students cannot read or understand texts written in the indigenous language. Though there are books that have been published in the indigenous languages which are highly didactic, they are inaccessible to most students. Those who can read it lack fluency while many cannot attempt to read at all; so many prefer to read and write in English. They can hardly speak pure or undiluted Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa without code-mixing with lexemes or phrases of English or code-switching from Yoruba, Igbo or Hausa to English intermittently. Hence, we have students who are not proficient in English and not competent in the indigenous languages.

Conceptual Framework



(Language brings about the Synergy among the Four Elements that lead to A Higher National Development)

Language houses any meaningful change. Since education, science and technology which are the backbone upon which national development is based cannot exist without the dictate of the society to which it is established, the language of the immediate environment enhance functional education, self-awareness, a good sense of belonging and effective understanding of societal problems and ways to resolve it.

This framework shows that all the kinds of development that we see every day in the world are achieved through the medium of man's intellect which is structured and made functional by language. When education, science and technology are led away from the language of the immediate environment; education, science and technology will be watery and the more difficult it will be to attain virtues that enrich the country.

Sound moral values, self-awareness and national identity, unity and national patriotism which are promoted through indigenous languages are always needed to ensure national development. Hence, the only way in which functional education, real development in science and technology and appreciation of our society can be attained is when we place our indigenous languages where they belong. If we promote our languages, there is a high possibility that the crime rate will be reduced, patriotism will increase, tolerance among diverse ethnic groups will heighten, people will be able to think and provide the solution to the problems of our immediate environment rather than seek means to compound or escape such society. We will be proud of our heritage, culture and we will have no shame in identifying ourselves to the society in which we belong.

According to some estimates, there are fewer than 10million people in china who can speak English, not even fluently. That's less than 1% of the whole population of china (The second-lowest percentage of English speakers out of all countries in the world). Yet, China is the world's largest developing country in all spheres of life. Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania were once colonialized. Still, Swahili, the language

spoken in these countries is an official or national language and one of the highest growing and popular languages in Africa. As a matter of fact, in 2018, South Africa legalized the teaching of Swahili in their schools as an optional subject to begin in 2020. India has more than 2,000 ethnic groups; yet, English is not the official language of India, neither do they regard their languages as vernacular. Then, we can stop ridiculing our indigenous languages if we want to. We are not the only country with diversity and multiplicity of ethnic groups. Until we open our eyes to see the importance of language (indigenous languages) other than communication, the Nigerian languages in the near distant future will be displaced by English and English will eventually become creole in Nigeria. Our values, culture, traditions that define who we are will become lost. We will become a slave in our land and eventually, docile national development.

CONCLUSION

It is a fact that English is our lingua franca and the language of the world. It is a window through which any interested person can see the world and in the Nigerian case, English can only be the tool for effective communication among the vast ethnic groups. For a Yoruba man to communicate effectively with a Hausa man, there is a need for a mutual understanding of English before communication can take place. But the point is, there is no need to condemn the language of the Hausa man because he couldn't use it to communicate with the Yoruba man. Thus, these languages should be given equal importance and one should not be rated excessively higher than the other. Every language has its role and one isn't more important than the other. As English serves as the language of education, so does indigenous languages preserve traditional knowledge (stories, legends, songs, values, myths, prayers); as English serve as the language of development, civilization and globalization, indigenous languages consist of asses to a different perception of the world, understanding diversity of culture, cooperation, cultural identity and sense of belonging.

If Arabic, Japanese and Chinese are becoming immensely important international languages today; why can't Igbo, Yoruba or Hausa not become a West African lingua franca? There should be proper accordance of respect rather than being treated as an abomination, taboos or vernacular. Our society is woven around the language we speak so our indigenous languages should be treated well. Rather than ridicule it to nothingness, we should appreciate it because it is our own, our value and our heritage. The more we reduce our language to nothingness, the more we are left with nothing; the less we think of ourselves, the less we value our own, the less productive we are, the more inferior we will continue to see ourselves, the more it will be difficult to unify ourselves, the more it will be difficult to attain peace, self-patriotism will continue to dominate, the more it will be difficult to have a functional education, the more complicated attaining meaningful development and the easier for enemies to divide us, distract us and put a rift between the country and meaningful national development. Given the above, this study recommends that:

- i. Nigerian indigenous language should be taught and made compulsory subjects across all educational institutions. It should be mandatory and effectively implemented for all schools, pupils and students to study their indigenous languages and educators must adhere to this policy. By making local languages compulsory in education, it will stimulate pride and discourage the encroachment of English. A widely spoken language will be more efficiently taught and a more effective tool for mass communication.
- ii. As English is a core subject for admission to higher institutions, Nigerian languages should be made a compulsory requirement for admission into the universities. A minimum credit pass in any of the

languages would do well to reposition the prestige and burst the status of Nigerian languages in education and society in general. Just as GSP 101 is taught in higher institutions as a general subject, indigenous languages should be taught too. This will not only reposition the status of our indigenous language but familiarize the students with the norms, culture, traditions of the society in which they belong. Therefore, adequate teaching materials should be provided in all schools for the teaching and learning of the language to create an enabling environment.

- iii. The government needs to encourage the use of indigenous languages in all spheres of social life. If the government in Nigeria wants to counteract the growing dominance of English, they will do well to use indigenous languages in government business. For example, they could be used in reading the yearly budget speech, giving state broadcasts and performing other important government functions in the judiciary and legislative arm. (Maduabuchi, 2019)
- iv. Society shouldn't make native speakers feel ashamed to speak their language. Parents should also be encouraged to share their cultures and traditions with their kids and not ban their children from speaking it. They should correct the mentality that our indigenous language does not train children to develop intellectual skills or civilized habits as a child can be fluent in his indigenous language and equally fluent in English.

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