

## NIGERIAN LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION AND GLOBALISATION: CHALLENGES AND REMEDIES

\*<sup>1</sup>Bosede Abiola Oludare & <sup>2</sup>Sheriff Olamide Olatunji

<sup>1</sup>Department of Curriculum and Instruction,  
Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo State, Nigeria  
Email: [bosyde2000@gmail.com](mailto:bosyde2000@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Department of Arts and Social Sciences Education,  
National Open University of Nigeria, Abuja  
Email: [olatumjisheriff07@gmail.com](mailto:olatumjisheriff07@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

*This paper discusses the role of Nigerian languages as a tool of education in the emergence of a global society, their challenges and solutions. For development to take place in any society, language is very essential. Language is culturally transmitted. It is the integral part of culture, a reflection of many features of a given culture. Like culture itself, it is learned behaviour which can be facilitated or enhanced through direct or indirect context and acculturation. Language is very important in teaching and learning because it plays a prominent role. It is central in the educational system of any nation if such a nation wants to move forward. Language is a powerful tool in educational system. Whatever knowledge is inculcated in a child is hardly as important as the language used as medium of instruction. Using the wrong medium can kill or destroy the child's cultural orientation and by the same stroke, his personality. Undue importance has been attached to the English language in our educational system, there is no reason why Nigerian Languages cannot be used in education because a language is not inferior to the other. Globalisation is a phenomenon that affects or includes the whole world. It is the defining process of the present age which is facilitated and influenced by technological developments such as modern information and communication technology. This paper looks into Nigerian Languages in Education and Globalisation: Challenges and Remedies*

**Keywords:** Nigerian Languages, Globalisation, Education, Challenges, Remedies

### Introduction

Language is not innate or inborn. That is, no human being is born with a language but every living human being has an innate tendency for acquiring a language. Language is therefore a phenomenon whose learning is facilitated by contact with a sociolinguistic situation. Human development as individuals or groups is said to be impossible without the use of natural language and remains "the principal signaling system used by humans for the transmission of information since it is the most communicative of all semiotic systems (Osakwe, 2006). It is the fund to which all human beings contribute and is generationally transferred in various contexts. In one form or the other, whether spoken or written, language involves humanity in its entirety, in much the same way that it voices

the existence of specific groups. It is the basis of all cooperative forms of socialization (Oyetade, 2015).

Language occupies an important position in human life. It is very important because it is the means through which concepts, ideas, thoughts and facts can be conveyed. Language is indispensable to man because it helps man to give expression and fully explore his environment to his advantage (Kolawole, 2016). Finocchiaro (2014) describes language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols which permit all people in a given culture or other people who have learned the system of that culture to communicate or interact. Language occupies a very strategic position in human affairs. It is very strategic in the sense that language is the vehicle through which concepts, ideas, thoughts, facts and a host of others can be conveyed. According to Omonike, Alufohai and Idiakhwa (2020), language is a system or means of communication through spoken or written words by any group vital to the users as air is to human beings. It occupies an important position in human life. It is very important because it is the means through which concepts, ideas, thoughts and facts can be conveyed. Anthony (2015) notes that language is any set of system of linguistic symbols as used in a more or less uniform fashion by a number of people who are enabled to communicate intelligibly with one another.

Appreciating the importance of language in society is tantamount to understanding the role of language in education. It would be nauseating for one to begin to scratch from the surface now how every field and levels of education depend on language and how it would be impossible if there is no language to serve as a vehicle for our education. Language is central in the educational system of any nation if such a nation wants to move forward. That explains why meaningful policy on education must include a policy on the language or language that would serve as medium of instruction. Whatever knowledge is inculcated in a child is hardly as important as the language used as medium of instruction. Using the wrong medium can kill or destroy the child's cultural orientation and by the same stroke, his personality.

### ***Nigerian Languages***

According to Bamgbose (1971), there are about 450 indigenous languages in Nigeria. In Nigeria today, according to the 15th edition of the Ethnologue report for Nigeria, there are about 510 living languages co-existing with one another. It is interesting to note that apart from the many indigenous languages, which are of course the mother tongues of Nigerians, non-indigenous languages such as English, French, Arabic, German and Russian also exist. English has become a second language in Nigeria, while Pidgin English, with probably the largest number of speakers has also emerged as a result of the contact of English with the indigenous languages. There are over 520 languages in Nigeria, there are still some major languages. Hausa, Urhobo, Fulfulde, Igbo, Yoruba, Ibibio, Edo and Kanuri have most of the speakers in the country (Ethnologue, 2019). Papua New Guinea has the most languages, with 840 living languages. Indonesia has 710 living languages and Nigeria has 515 living languages (Ethnologue, 2019).

These Nigerian languages have been categorised as major and minor or class I, class II or class III, among others. using a number of factors such as the population of speakers, range of functions/domains of use, level of linguistic analysis. Nigerian languages are classified into three levels-major languages, state languages and local languages based on their status as dominant languages, their territorial spread and the population that speaks them (Ethnologue, 2019).

### ***Nigerian Languages and Education***

Education is a concept that encompasses everything that happens to man that makes him adopt new behaviour or modifies existing one. According to Fafunwa (1980), education is the aggregate of all processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive values to the society in which he/she lives. By this definition, education is the basis of the child's behaviour and will determine how his existence could benefit the society. These attributes are acquired by the child through the process of education.

Akinkuotu and Olufowobi (2016) viewed education as a process of transferring or imparting knowledge to individuals in the society so as to understand what is expected of them or what they should know. It is crucial in the development of a nation without which the nation cannot progress meaningfully (Meroyi, 2016). Education involves the young and the old. It is the cornerstone of a nation. Nigerian languages have roles to play in the education of the Nigerian children. Nigerian languages are simply the best medium of instruction to the Nigerian children in schools and homes. It ensures revitalisation through continued transmission and the image of the languages are enhanced by their use in teaching concepts hitherto believed to be only teachable in a foreign language (Ugwu, 2017). Besides, initial literacy in the child's first language makes the transition from the home to the school easier for the child and is likely to minimize dropout rates associated with inability to cope with an unfamiliar medium of instruction (Ugwu, 2021). The plain truth that initial literacy is best conducted in a child's mother tongue has given birth to bilingual education programmes (Oyekunle, 2022).

The roles Nigerian Languages play in education of the Nigerian child cannot be over-emphasized. The Ife six-year primary project began at January, 1970 at the then University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University). The controlled class that was taught every subject in Yoruba performed better than those that were taught in English. In fact, a good example of such is the Afrikaans language of South Africa used as the sole medium of instruction from the primary to the university level. Using one's mother tongue makes it possible for a child to develop the talent God has deposited in him/her. Nigerians stand to benefit from the use of Nigerian languages as media of instruction instead of the foreign language. To use Nigerian languages as media of instruction from primary to the university level is achievable; although it will be a long-term project. Russian, China and Japan did not achieve that feat in a day (Ugwu, 2021).

Education in Nigeria is carried out largely through ex-colonial language of English. The presence of these dominant languages has largely hampered the development of the numerous Nigerian languages and dialects. The Nigerian languages are therefore underdeveloped in terms of inadequate usage and status. It is disheartening that Nigerian have apathy towards the study of Nigerian Languages at all levels of educational system in the country. If a French man could study French language in France as a discipline and citizens of Britain study English in Britain. Then, what is wrong with a Yoruba man studying Yoruba language in Nigeria? Some Nigerians feel it is degrading for them to speak their mother tongue openly with their children. What is interesting is that these children who are not allowed to speak Nigerian languages cannot speak correct English (a foreign language). We seem to have forgotten that the ability to speak one's mother-tongue enhances one's dexterity in foreign languages (Bamgbose, 2003). While recognising adult literacy as a form of education concludes that using a Nigerian language

enables to make as many people as possible literate, since literacy will be provided in a variety of languages and adapted to community needs.

Today, there is imposition of English language as medium of instruction in schools at the expense of the Nigerian languages. Education is carried on through the English language. The English language has taken the position of national language in Nigeria. The English language has become language of administration, trade, commerce, education, politics, international exchange and interaction.

### ***Importance of Nigerian Languages in Modern Education***

The development of a child is closely bound with the use of the language he has spoken from birth, the language of his parents, brothers, sisters, friends and people he has acquired his first experienced of life, from the language in which he dreams, thinks and in which he can easily express his feeling and emotions. To ignore the indigenous language which the learner is familiar with and begin to teach him in a language that is foreign as soon as he come to school is like taking such learner away from home and putting him among strangers (Oyekunle, 2022).

Nigerian languages should be taught and used as medium of instruction in schools for peace and development to take place. Educationally, instruction in the indigenous language will help the child to understand the concept easily because he is familiar with the vocabulary. Considering the researches carried out by scholars, they found out that learners learn better in their indigenous languages. It is now reasonable to say that if we want to develop and cope with contemporary issues in the society, we need indigenous languages (Ugwu, 2017).

Language and culture are inseparable, through the use of indigenous language as medium of instruction in schools, students will imbibe the cultural values of the society. It is a means of maintaining and preserving culture (Ugwu, 2017). Awobuluyi (1998) notes that if we are not ultimately to lose our national identity together with our rich indigenous culture, then we must begin to pay attention to the teaching of indigenous languages more effectively. According to when a language is threatened, their speakers too are most likely equally threatened because

people's agitation for the recognition and preservation of their language is invariably a cry for their own survival. There is a strong link between language and education, any language which the school promotes is more likely to survive than the one that is not recognised.

Ball (2010) says indigenous languages are important for children's cognitive development and their academic achievement. If the children are growing up with one language, educational provisions need to support them in becoming highly proficient in that language before engaging in academic work in L2. Bilikis (2003) it is believed in educational linguistics circles, that the indigenous language and not any language is more effective in learning and should, therefore be used as language of instruction in schools. This because it is the language, which a group of people in their early years and which normally becomes their instrument of thought and communication. To stress this, United Nation Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO 1953) recommended that pupils should begin their schooling through the medium of indigenous language and it should be extended to late stage in education as possible.

### ***Globalisation and Nigerian Languages***

Globalisation is the expansion of economic activities across political boundaries of nations. It entails a process and this process constitutes the integration and interdependence of economic activities between and among nations of the world (Shahzed, 2006). It is a phenomenon that affects or includes the whole world. It is the defining process of the present age which is facilitated and influenced by technological developments such as modern information and communication technology. The developed countries-United States of America, Britain, France, Germany, Japan, China etc. are well placed to determine the globalization agenda. They are well organised within their own countries with language experts who assist to plan and map out policies and strategies for the development of their languages for global use. This has made English language for example, a global language. English is used today by more than 400 million people all over the globe and second to Chinese. It is the native or official language of one fifth of the surface of the earth, it is being used throughout most of the North American continent, British Isles, Australia and New Zealand. It is important in Africa, Asia and the Islands of the central and Southern Pacific (Bamgbose, 2011).

At present, English is the most widely studied language in areas where it is not native. It is the chief foreign language taught in the schools of Latin American and European countries. Children in Japan study it in the seventh grade, and in Philippines, it is all classes from fourth grade. In India, English is an official language alternative to Hindi. In addition, the use of English is widely spread in international trade, international scholarship and scientific research. More than half of the world's scientific and technological journals as well as newspapers are printed in English. Three quarters of the world's mail is written in English and it is the language of three fifths of the world radio stations. The Soviet Union and Chinese use English in their propaganda broadcast to the developing countries of Africa and Asia. Finally, the United State information agency with its centres and libraries in various countries, and the British Council and its English languages schools aid greatly in spreading the knowledge of English. "As a result, a speaker of English can travel around the world and almost never find it necessary in major cities to employ a language other than his own in order to be understood (Oyetade, 2015).

In contrast, the Nigerian languages are not well disposed to meeting global challenges. For the global development and progress of Nigerian languages, certain problems must be tackled. In fact, the context of language learning and language use in Nigeria has advertently posed as constraints in language education. These problems are historical, socio-linguistic, socio-cultural, economic, pedagogic and political. The historical constraints are well known. Nigeria has continued to be prisoners of the past by not being able to largely rise above the colonial linguistic legacy. Nigeria continues to live under the illusion that colonial language is rallying point for the many ethnic nationals (Bamgbose, 2011).

The socio-linguistic problems have to do with language status, size of speakers and state of language development. All these factors are working against global status of the Nigerian languages but this is not the case with the ex-colonial languages which are most widely spoken at the present day. For example, the English language is an international language. Millions speak it either as first language or second. It is the vehicle of a great world literature and the main language of commerce. If not until recently, when organised bodies like the Centre for Advanced Studies of Africa Society (CASAS) started taking a

continental view of language problems in Africa, socio-linguistic study of Africa had not known the kind of networking that would speed up the process of language development in Africa. Also, in African states, some foreign educational agencies such as United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), among others had lent their support to effect a positive development which is slow for global challenges.

The socio-cultural problems involve the problem a child faces when his language is ignored in the educational process. A child must have opportunity to learn his language and/or learn in it since education is to enhance integration, harness ethnic differences and reduce religious conflict. A child must be taught on these principles apart from giving him the skills in writing and reading from primary level. This was the agenda and focus of education during the colonial period. English language was used to achieve this agenda.

The economic problem has to do with the multiplicity of languages and the huge financial cost of developing them. Bamgbose (2011) states that the huge cost of developing the numerous languages is a necessary investment for the national unity and development. The pedagogical problem involves the conditions and facilities for teaching. In a situation where, successive governments in African states go after immediate gains in their policy formulation and implementation, spending money on education in terms of facilities, infrastructure and teacher training has become a problem. For instance, in Nigeria we have heard about some state Governors diverting or mismanaging the Universal Basic Education (UBE) fund given to them by the Federal Government. Lastly, the political problem has to do with policy, declaration without implementation. This situation is partly due to lack of political will or cavalier disposition on the part of the political class.

### ***Challenges of Using Nigerian Languages in Education.***

Many scholars have studied and made use of Nigerian languages in education but they encountered some difficulties. Nigerian languages are rich in traditional settings but they are generally insufficient to cope with the modern curriculum and concludes that this insufficiency is a major problem. Language is a tool for expressing our innermost views, feelings, desires, thoughts and experiences. The challenge therefore is that there are certain concepts in modern education which may not be adequately conveyed by any of the Nigerian languages (Ugwu, 2020).

The prestige the English language enjoys in Nigeria makes it impossible to make use of indigenous languages in education. Most of the elites in the country prefer to communicate in the English language and they look down on citizens of the country that cannot communicate in the language as illiterates and uncivilized. Parents believe that the only proof of literacy that their children can exhibit is to communicate in English. Jubril (2005) says most Nigerian parents prefer their children to have a head start in English and therefore prefer it as medium of instruction and sometimes as the language of the home, neglecting their own languages. Oyetade (2001) reports that negative attitude towards our indigenous languages has made some parents go to the extent of banning their children from speaking their indigenous languages at home even though both parents speak the same language.

Olugbuyi and Olaleye (2005) see language policy as a plan of action or statement of aims by the government on matters relating to language use in public life such as trade, administration, politics and education. The National Policy on Education (NPE)

acknowledges the federal government's appreciation of the importance of language as means of promoting social interaction, national unity and preserving culture. It encourages every child to learn the language of his/her immediate environment as well as the three major Nigerian languages namely Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. This indicates a serious effort on the part of government because they aimed at developing indigenous languages but implementation of the policy is poor.

According to the National Policy on Education (2013), the English language is to assume the status of language of instruction from primary four and must be continuously used for the purpose onwards. The major challenge that confronts the development of modern education through indigenous languages is that the NPE does not support the use of indigenous language as medium of instruction from upper primary school. Bamgbose (2003) said that language policy has failed to work because for political reasons, government failed to specify how the policy is to be implemented. He identified some reasons such as perpetuation of colonial language policies after independence, dominance of English, marginalisation of the so-called minority languages, formulation of language policies without any plan of action for their implementation and drafted policy with escaped clauses.

Furthermore, the nature of orthographies of some of these indigenous languages particularly those with cases of tones and diacritic marks usually discourage publishers as the required characters are not contained in most of the computer keyboards. The poor attitude of Nigerians especially the elites towards reading or patronising newspapers published in indigenous languages. It is quite unfortunate that indigenous languages cannot develop without publications. Lack of literature in some indigenous languages hinders the sufficiency of such languages as media of instructions. Most of the textbooks are written in English language. Teachers cannot teach without textbooks. So, if indigenous languages are to be used as media of instructions where do teachers get textbooks. Most indigenous languages also do not have standard orthography. For instance, there are confirmed cases of variation in the orthography of the Igbo language; such variations will make it difficult to have a uniform, standard and acceptable system of writing making it difficult to develop textbooks in indigenous languages.

### ***Remedies to the challenges of using Indigenous Languages in Education***

A lot has been said about the importance and challenges of using indigenous languages in modern education but there is need to suggest possible solutions to some of the problems identified. Although, the indigenous languages have been described as insufficient to meet the demand of modern education but they should be developed and the orthography needs to be improved on (Olatunji, 2018). Emananjo (1996) drastic steps need to be taken to improve the orthography of most indigenous languages.

Textbooks and educational materials should be developed in indigenous languages while the primitive ones should be upgraded to meet the current realities of modern education. There is need to educate people on the dangers of relegating indigenous languages for a foreign language. They also need to orientate people on the importance of using indigenous languages in modern education (Olagbaju, 2009).

The mass media should promote the status of indigenous languages through her programmes. There is also a need to standardise the orthographies of the indigenous languages so that, they meet the demands of modern education (Olatunji, 2020). Emananjo (1996) suggested that indigenous language teachers should be trained and there

should be courses in indigenous languages in tertiary institutions in the country. He added that graduate teachers should be produced for all indigenous languages in Nigeria

### **Recommendations**

Problems militating against the progress and development of Nigerian languages for a possible global acceptability have been enumerated and discussed. There must be a way out, hence, these recommendations. This ex-colonial language (English) achieved its feet in the area of language development and global acceptability. So, if Nigerian Languages could toe those lines, there will be progress. We have realised that the problems are internal and external.

Now for the internal, it has to do with the attitude of Nigerians themselves (individuals, groups and government at all levels). Until Nigerians change their attitude towards the preferred use of ex-colonial language to Nigerian languages, things may not work as we expect. Nigerians must stop to live under the illusion that the English language is the rallying point for their national.

Efforts must be made at developing these languages in the area of orthographies. Some of the orthographies worked out for them are not adequate for teaching and learning. Published works in the areas of language, culture and literature must be available to meet global challenges in history, sciences, linguistics, economics, sociology etc. This will enhance the status and the size of speakers of these languages.

Governments, groups and individuals must be ready to invest in Nigerian languages development for Nigeria's technological advancement. Government must be ready to spend money on education in terms of facilities, infrastructures and teacher training.

Nigerian languages must not be used as instruments of exclusion through measures that have to do with language requirements, literacy, official language, language medium in schools, language proscription, language stigmatization, majority/minority language status and neglect of immigrants' language. All of these measures are the way by which any language could serve as a factor for participation or exclusion.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it had been argued that for any meaningful development to take place in any society, education must take place in any society, education must take place using language as a tool. It was argued that Nigerian languages are central to the education of Nigerians. Nigerian languages must be developed to meet the global challenges. Emphasis must be placed on the use of Nigerian languages in education than English language. Japan and China abandoned foreign language before they could move forward technologically. All hands must be on deck to ensure that Nigerian languages attain global acceptability.

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