

ASSESSING LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE EFFORTS IN NIGERIA TOWARDS ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

This paper is an attempt to considerably assess various language maintenance efforts in Nigeria using conceptual framework of literature search method with a view to understanding how far they help toward achieving sustainable educational development in the country. In essence, the paper investigates the meaning and nature of language maintenance as well as its different forms, and how the adopted types of language maintenance are contributing to the success or hindrance of achieving sustainable development educational development in Nigeria. The paper discovered that the efforts of language maintenance are less effective and that government and other relevant stakeholders need to do a lot to recover the lost glory and status of our indigenous languages in as much sustainable educational development is to be achieved in the country. The paper also made some useful conclusions, that in order to have effective language maintenance for sustainable educational development, the country should try to overcome fear of ethnic inferiority and superiority as it rejects change egalitarian participation in modern nation building. The paper further recommends that government as a major stakeholder in educational development needs to investigate the language use and patterns and attitudes of Nigerians as a means of determining factors that helped to maintain the indigenous languages.

Keywords: Language maintenance, Educational development.

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a multilingual and multicultural society where languages compete for national recognition and higher political status. Unfortunately, none of the co-available languages and their varieties within the nation is yet considered to be integratively worthy. There is also no integrating or unifying great tradition of past, present and future authenticity. Worth still, there is an outside, foreign language whose cultural imperialism is so dominating that if planned and reinforced language maintenance efforts are not embarked upon, one serious consequence may be of language death.

The consequences of continued use of English language as Nigeria's lingua-franca, and under-utilization of our local languages need to be borne in mind. English is a contact language in Nigeria, and situation such as this, it is natural to expect reciprocal influences (Ansre 1971 as cited in Olaoye, 2007). But the influences of English on Nigeria's languages are so pervasive that the purity of our local languages may be stained if not completely eroded. What then is the future of the Nigerian local languages vis-a-vis English, and what role can education play in language maintenance towards sustainable development in Nigeria. This paper seeks to address these questions in the light of the propelling language maintenance efforts towards sustainable educational development in Nigeria. However, the methodology employed by the writer is the conceptual frame work which basically involved literature search methods that took closer survey of various efforts made by the researchers, scholars and the like in language maintenance in Nigeria and elsewhere with a view to achieving sustainable educational development.

2. MEANING OF LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

Language maintenance is the degree to which an individual or group of people continue to use their language, particularly in the bilingual or multilingual area or among immigrant group. Language maintenance refers to a situation where a speech community continue to use its traditional language in the face of a host of conditions that might foster a shift to another language (Holmes, J. 1992 as cited in Sofiana, 2013). On the other hand, language maintenance is concerned with the relationship between stability in language usage patterns, (Bamgbose 1971 as cited in Olaoye, 2007). The ongoing psychological, social and cultural processes and changes, on the other hand, in communities that use more than one language for both intra and inter group communication (Fishman, 1972 as cited in Olaoye, 2007).

If language maintenance does not occur, there can be several consequences. One is language death, speakers become bilingual and sometimes multilingual, younger speakers became dominant in one language and passive in the other language the later is said to be eventually dying. The speakers of

the community does not die, of course, they just become a subset of speakers of another language. The end result is language shift for the population, and if the language is not spoken elsewhere, it dies.

3. TYPES OF LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE

In a multicultural nation like Nigeria, there are certain policy options which promote language maintenance and which should be vigorously pursued and implemented. There are 3 of these options as observed by many scholars such as: Fisherman 1972 as cited in Olaoye, 2007.

3.1 Type A: this option gains followership in a setting where educational authorities or governments feel compelled to select for educational purpose a language which is not native to the country for fulfilment of national desire and sustainable educational development. This policy option is taken where and when none of the available local languages is considered to be of any integrative significance.

3.2 Type B Policy: the policy is adopted where there is not only an internally integrative great tradition but also exists in smaller traditions which are recognized. It obtains where administrative units or federal governments recognize an overriding integrative principle yet, provides for local variations.

3.3 Type C policy: This policy recognizes the existence of many languages in animation and accepts that each locality could teach its own local language which is used as a medium of instruction. For it to succeed, a favourable climate has to be created. To establish this climate, the federal government and the entire citizenry must wake up to the awareness that our national creativity and personal purposefulness will be rendered ineffectual when the nation is rubbed of its national cultural resources by the inroads of foreign language and culture. Cultural and linguistic diversity must become a serious topic of public interest while the mother-tongue education should evolve multi-cultural and multi-lingual curricula for teacher education.

4. LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN NIGERIA

Language maintenance is a way to which individual or group of people continue to use their language in order to maintain its status. This is actually realized through the preservation of the language in certain domains, although the language has lost its grip in several other domains (Onadip, 2003). This is true, because people often inculcate the behaviour of using foreign language in different life style, politics, business and other social activities like song, conservation and even in the school now, English has taken advantage as expense to indigenous languages.

According to Onadipe, S (2013) what is most important and relevant to language maintenance is having few dedicated individuals. The need to examine the issue of language maintenance in multi-lingual Nigeria is of utmost importance to us today because Nigerian indigenous languages are not only compelling with European languages, even among themselves, competition exists. In the case of Hausa language which I know better the speakers see other Nigerian languages as just a threat to their language and culture. They have self recognition to their language.

The complex multi-lingual nature of Nigeria therefore presents innumerable opportunity to attempt an exploration into the patterns of language contact, maintenance and shift situations in Nigeria. Empirical research covering the entire nation in the important internal and external factors in language maintenance in Nigeria is practically non-existent. Onadipe, S (2013) says "...until now, the country is yet to get a comprehensive data on language use". (Adebigjo, 1994 as cited in Dada, 2015) observed that only 3 of the over 500 languages spoken in Nigeria are given official recognition. In view of this, it is imperative to investigate the language use and patterns and language attitudes of Nigerians as a means of examining the factors that helped to maintain the Nigerian languages and those that are indicators of language shift.

5. PROSPECTS AND SHORT COMING OF LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE IN NIGERIA

Nigeria is linguistically the most heterogeneous nation in Africa and it happens to be one of the 22 most linguistically diverse countries (Dada, 2007) in the world. In spite of this linguistic feature, it has greatest occurrences of language shift and loss. Our central concern here is language maintenance as opposed to language shift and loss.

Languages have been in existing and evolving together with the development and changes in human society (Jonnes, 1998 as cited in Quang, 2011). Language is obviously an indispensable tool of human beings. Not only is it a means of communicating thoughts and feelings, accumulating experience and

knowledge but it frames friendships, culture ties, and economic relationships of communities, nation or even human beings as well (Heng, 1999 as cited in Baker, 2008).

For the linguist Joshua Fishman (2000) language is not only a vehicle for the expression of thoughts, perceptions, sentiments, values and characteristics of a community; it also represents a fundamental expression of social identity.

Language maintenance can enhance linguistic interaction among the speakers of that particular language. Language maintenance is the protection and promotion of the first or native language in an individual or within a speech community, particularly among language minorities. Yet languages have no existence without people, the process of language maintenance involves different levels, individuals, community, nation and linguists through bilingual education and language planning, (Pakir, 1994 as cited in Baker, 2006).

There are five basic arguments the researchers usually made why language maintenance is important? However, there is endless controversy on the topic (M.C Carty, 2006). The view of this paper is whether language maintenance is important or not based partially on the owners/speakers of the indigenous languages. The reasons for this however, are categorized as follows:

1. **Language diversity:** as some scholars stated “because with the loss of a language comes the loss of inherited knowledge and an entire thought world. The paper often compared losing a language to losing a natural resource or an animal species” (Garrette, 2005). So, if there is such kind of linguistic diversity, emphasis need to be paid to maintain the indigenous languages otherwise, it will lead to death.
2. **Language express identity:** the child’s first language is critical to his/her identity. Maintaining this language helps the child value his/her culture and sacred heritage from their ancestors, which contributes to a positive self-concept. It is the language that makes human beings distinct from animals and among themselves (Bakhorst Hend, 1999 as cited in Baker, 2008).
3. **Social relationship:** when the native language is not maintained, important links to family and other community members may be lost. By encouraging native language use, parents can prepare the child to interact with the native language community both in Nigeria and overseas.
4. **Intellectual and repository history of language:** for instance, immigrant students need uninterrupted intellectual development. When students who are not yet fluent in that indigenous language, switch to using only that language, they are functioning at an intellectual level below their age. This system is currently being used in countries like US, UK and Bulgaria etc. Interrupting intellectual development in this manner is likely to result in academic failure. However, when parents and children speak the language they know best with one another, they are both working at their actual level of intellectual maturity (Cummins, 1994 as cited in Quang, 2015).
5. **Educational advantages:** research shows that there important educational advantages in being bilingual particularly when bilingual learners also become biliterate or literate in two languages. The more bilingual learners can use both their two languages support each other and are interdependent, and bilingual speakers, the more they have some cognitive advantages over those who know only one language (Cummins, 1981 as cited in Quang, 2015). Students who learn English and continue to develop their native language have higher academic advantage in later years than those who learn English at the expense of their first language. This may be right because those who still link with their mother-tongue community, have strong motivation and desire of learning, and tends to be doing something to help their community to develop and progress (Cummins, 1994 as cited in Quang, 2015).

On the other hand, there are some intellectual problems which hindered effective language maintenance in Nigeria. Some of these problems have been identified below:

1. It seems that the elements of social structure and status have ambiguous effect on language maintenance. In Nigeria people have that strong belief on their social differences. This can be identified even among elites and lower class of people. We need to analyze complex interrelationships of place and social structure of each group.
2. Religion helped plays important role in language maintenance, if it was a national religion. In Nigeria there is no national religion. There is serious effect of religious bigotry among the two major religions (i.e. Islam and Christianity), and other differences of culture and linguistic background.
3. Immigrant culture: immigrant culture in Nigeria was given a great freedom to establish religion and culture particularly in schools and churches. There is no control of publications and our culture has been thrown overboard and cultural organizations are not given priority. American culture has now become the major threat to our languages, it was translated and

enforced to our people especially in the universities and colleges, the mode of dress and language accent. Our question here is “how could American culture be in conformity with ours? Fisherman (2002) suggests that the enormous assimilative power of American civilization of ideologies have positive impact on culture and language of the globe.

6. EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Education in a broad sense is a process by which an individual acquires the many physical and social capabilities demanded by the society in which they are born to function. In an ideal sense, education is an ultimate value and hence, through the provision of social service, it is an agent of change. Therefore, the single most significant complex of social –control tools for national development is found in the educational system it formal or informal. In ancient Greece, the cradle of western scholarship, education was a highly functional search light beamed on society. It transcends reading and writing (Orobosa, U 2010). This shows that they emphasize on literacy. But Nigeria is still under pressure of imperialism on educational sector by our colonial masters. Our educational sector is always deteriorating. The issue of literacy in the context of development is very fundamental. No country can develop without high level of literacy. If we look at the industrialise nations like US, Germany, U.K etc, have about 90% and above level of literacy, but a multilingual nation like Nigeria has a literacy rate of 25.6%.(UNESCO 2005).

The essence of education whether formal or informal, is to produce a person who will be a useful member in the society. The genesis of the compounded problems we have in Nigeria started from here. Judging from the first post independence organized in 1969 by the Nigerian Conference on Curriculum Development organized in 1969 by the Nigerian Educational Council with the following resolutions:

- Provision of expansion of educational facilities to ensure education gets to the door step of every Nigerian child.
- Overhauling and reforming the content of general education to make it more responsive to the socio-economic needs of the country.
- Development and consolidating the nation’s higher education in response to the manpower needs of the country.
- Developing technological education in order to meet the growing needs of the nation.

All these resolutions failed to achieve due to the defects in our implementation and adaptive style has compounded its success. As a result of this, there are many quack graduates, incompetent leaders with selfish motives an act gotten from the colonial masters. They are just there creating more problems.

7. LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND SUSTAINABLE EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Language maintenance is concerned with stability in habitual language use, while education is an agent for change and a tool for national development. The language policy designed on how to maintain the use of indigenous language for sustainable development in Nigeria suffered a lot in the hands of those who designed it. This happened for not having proper and effective implementation of this policy.

The curriculum for multicultural education has been well illustrated (Jeff Coate, 1981as cited in Olaoye, 2007) to foster language maintenance for national educational development. In view of the picture painted above, this paper highly suggests that we should revise this curriculum and see how it works for the development of this country.

7.1 Cognitive knowledge: Entails respect for others and this include respect for linguistic and ethnic differences, comparative and contrastive studies of mother tongues and English customs, belief and values of Nigerian cultures. Language loyalty in a multi lingual nation is very difficult. People have sense of belonging and recognition to their ethnic groups than the others. They just see other languages as a threat to their norms and culture. The government considers it to be in the interest of the national unity, maintenance of language and preserving of peoples culture that each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major languages other than his own mother-tongue (NPE, 2014). We owe this observation to Awobuluwu (2001) who opines that each child in the country should be able to communicate in a major indigenous language, native to some major cultural zone in the country other than his own.

That being the case, because the policy was just on paper. It’s obviously lacking visibility and practicalness in both private and public schools. Similarly, this part of discussion of the paper to categorically state that, an effective language maintenance effort in the country will go a long way to build trust and respect between or among different ethnic domains in the country. As such, all stake

holders responsible for the conduct of the task of proper and effective maintenance of our languages here is a challenge one that requires swift actions or scholarly appreciations.

7.2 Communicative skills: This means that pupils should be able to communicate in their MT and one or two other languages within their immediate environment using appropriate register in context situation. They should also master other basic skills of reading and writing in their mother-tongue and one or two other Nigerian languages, and the last, they should master the rudiment numbers in their MT and other's MTS.

In this policy, the reverse is the case, in government primary schools. For instance, a school where the language use is the language of the immediate environment, you will often see that consideration and priority are not given to other indigenous language(s). That is why the primary school students being produced today are only able to communicate in their own mother-tongue rather than any other Nigerian languages. Moreover, the students we have in both primary and secondary schools today that come from different linguistic background do not bother to learn or hold any discussion among them with our languages, and even if communication is to take place between them; the medium should be English. None of them ready to learn other language than their own. And school itself and the governments are not ready to put this policy into practice. Therefore, if the students are not interested in learning other languages and government also not serious to implement this policy, at the end, the target to achieve for pupils to master even rudiment numbers of others' mother tongue will not be achieved. And to proof me vindicated, test the students with the language other than the one speaking within that environment.

Eluk (2005) traces literacy problems in primary education in Nigeria to the universal primary education (UPE) scheme, first introduce in to Nigerian education system in the former western region in 1955 and later in eastern Nigeria in 1957. According to her, six years of primary education and automatic promotion are legacies bequeathed to the primary school system in Nigeria irrespective of their learning capabilities by the universal primary education, (UPE). Other problems are compounded by use of a foreign language (English) as a medium of communication and learning in the field of education system. Adeyemi (2007) notes that there is a peculiar problem of learning English as a second language (L2) in many Anglophone African countries. Most students are exposed to English too late in school; additionally, they are taught by teachers who themselves are not proficient in the language (Okon, 2003).

The burden of learning and understanding of new language rests on the weak shoulders of pupils. The result is poor, oral language skills, reading and writing difficulties at the primary education level.

Evaluation: teachers should be able to design bilingual test items on Nigerian languages and English, and bilingual test items of Nigerian language. There is a problem of teachers in our schools today they are lacking method of teaching and even the language they used as medium of instruction is not sufficient to them. Therefore, there is a need to train them in order to meet the challenges we are facing in maintaining our languages for educational development of Nigeria.

8. THE WAY FORWARD

As suggestion to some of the problems and issues raised in this paper, national appeals for language maintenance can be supported by making reference to Nigerian values, traditions, and history. It must be noted that bilingualism does not exist in vacuum; it exist in the context of ethnic, religious and cultural differences.

The federal and state governments should encourage the growth and use of our local languages and cultures in the education system. This could be done by language institutes, Academics, National commissions for Educational agencies etc, who are charged with the following responsibilities:

1. Writing bilingual text books in some of the Nigerian languages, especially those which have orthographies, and developing the orthographies of many more languages.
2. Training and retraining teachers in mother-tongue education and how to implement bilingual education policy
3. Devising bilingual education evaluation methods.
4. Preparing special teaching and learning materials oriented towards raising the level of students' competence in their mother-tongue.
5. Removing ethnic prejudice in classroom practices by recognising and respecting students' varied cultures.
6. Encouraging inter-ethnic language competition.
7. Encouraging language/cultural exchange programs for language students and lecturers.

9. CONCLUSION

In lights of the major issues raised so far, in the foregoing discussion, the paper would like to conclude that for productive language maintenance, Nigerians should try to overcome fear of the ethnic inferiority and superiority as it rejects change and egalitarian participation in modern nation building. Educators in Nigeria need to come up with appropriate methods for achieving effective literacy development in the country's multilingual educational system. The "three elephants" Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (Ameh, 1987) need to not fight after all; their peaceful co-existence and mutual cross-linguistic interpretation is more desirable in order to face the threats posed by English that hindered effective maintenance of our indigenous languages.

Besides, while developed nations are busy adopting localization method with regards to their indigenous languages, it will be sad to remember as discovered by the paper that since our independence, we have been trying effortlessly to maintain our languages. And as a result, English has become more indispensable to be challenged by our local or native languages. This trend must be properly and adequately reserved.

10. RECOMMENDATIONS

For effective language maintenance towards achieving sustainable educational development, the following recommendations have been carefully selected and presented by the paper:

1. Government as a major stakeholder in educational development needs to investigate the language use and patterns and attitudes of Nigerians as a means of determining factors that helped to maintain the indigenous languages.
2. Government should seek partnership with other non-governmental agencies to introduce cultural and linguistic competitions in schools in order to retain the value of our languages.
3. Emphasis should also be paid by the government to identify factors that cause language shift and get solutions to that.
4. Educational bodies and agencies should review the existing curriculum in education designed for language maintenance in order to suit our current educational situation.
5. The uncontrolled establishment of private schools should be stopped, as it goes contrary to policy pronounced by the government for language education.
6. Scholars and relevant institutions should ensure that indigenous languages that have no orthography should be reduced to writing to avoid their endangerment, and those with a writing system should be maintained.
7. Finally, teachers who have no proficient skills on indigenous languages should be re-trained on both teaching methods and grammar in order to create ways of language maintenance.

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