

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, LITERATURE AND CULTURE AS TOOLS FOR NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the use of indigenous languages, literature and culture as vital tools for national integration that fosters development in Nigeria. It x-rays the position of indigenous languages in Nigeria since the colonial era and identifies some of the challenges facing national integration and development in Nigeria. Such challenges include; cultural differences, language diversity, religion and political divides. It further highlights on some of the roles indigenous languages, literature and culture can play to foster national integration and development in Nigeria. The paper concluded with some recommendations on the workability of national integration using indigenous languages, literature and culture to create room for peaceful development in Nigeria for a better national building.

Keywords: Indigenous Languages, literature, Culture, National Integration, National Development.

INTRODUCTION

It is a known fact that no society or nation whether big or small will successfully develop without the roles played by languages. In most developed countries of the world, language acts as a source of revenue as foreigners pay to study such languages, without which they cannot acclimatize fully in the system. This is because one needs to know these languages to be able to school there, get a resident permit as the case may be and at times before getting a job. Countries like Denmark, Sweden, Germany to mention but a few, use their indigenous languages officially. English is second to these languages in their countries. Foreigners pay heavily to interpreters to be able to access any document written in these languages. Is this not a means of creating revenue for these countries? Is these obtainable in Nigeria? A long term negligence accredited to our indigenous languages has so much reduced their status to the point of extinction if drastic measures are not taken fast to revive them. Language, literature and culture are inseparable tools for national integration whether we like it or not. These three concepts are complementary in the sense that, they are educative and humanistic resources for achieving national integration. A tripartite relationship between or among language, literature and culture (whether foreign or indigenous) has been well established and documented (Olaoye, 2002 & Isyaku, 2004). According to them, there is no literature without language and so, Language, literature and Culture are inseparable and the trios are intricately interwoven. They play vital role in man's education, development and national integration. It is axiomatic that languages are veritable tools for global integration. This is evident in the fact that the world has now been reduced to a global village through the instrumentality of language. Let us, therefore, look at the role of the language in general, whether as mother tongue, Lingua Franca, Second Language, Foreign Language or other tongues and put them in context. Language is a tool for actualizing human ingenuity, creativity, human skills and knowledge. Through it man as a gregarious animal can comfortably live among his people and adapt to various socio-cultural groups and situations (Soranke, 2006). For instance, Greek and Latin have been regarded as the languages of pristine civilizations, held sway for several centuries before English and French took over as world languages. Latin for instance, during the middle ages, was not only the language of religion but also the universal language of diplomacy, scholarship and culture. Its integrative force was recognized in Christianized Europe, as all personal advancement both secular and clerical depended upon a sound knowledge of Latin. The

rich thoughts of the ancient philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, etc. are being preserved by languages. Contact with these great minds even those of the modern political, linguistic and religious philosophers widens man's mental horizon, and develops man's intellectual faculties. Literature on the other hand, is an art which entertains and instructs. It warns people of danger, and instructs by opening people's eyes to a wide range of experiences and a deeper understanding of these experiences. According to Fatokun (1992), Literature presents situations, interactions and oppositions. It suggests a wide range of values and attitudes and to understand an ethnic group and their culture one may have to turn to their oral and written narratives, their drama and poetry. Culture can be seen as the particular system of art, thought and custom of a society (Nwankwo, Tukur & Adah , 2013) . They further affirm that, 'it is the whole way of life of a people, the social heritage that the individual acquires as a member of his group'. It is the entire attitude, perception and specific traits of civilization that confer to a people and its place in the universe. These traits are speech norms, etiquette, ideologies, ethics, stereotypes, artifacts, technologies, intellectual production, etc. Language whether foreign or indigenous, is thus an indelible mark of a people's identity. According to Fani-kayode (2006), the core values of our people must be the pivot for national reforms. He enjoins that our cultural and traditional values should be embedded in honesty, transparency, respect for institutions, constituted authorities and the sanctity of human person and life. These core values are reflected in the people's identity, cultures, traditions and systems, most times encapsulated in their languages.

Position of indigenous languages in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multilingual nation where English Language has acquired the status of a first or second language to many people, while it is a third language to others. It plays a significant role in education, politics, government administration, the judiciary, economy and legislation. English today can be regarded as the lamp with which the youths can travel through the education tunnel (Ige, 2000). It is even now being referred to as one of the major Nigerian languages (Ogundare, 2004), because its role as a unifying or integrating force is obvious. It is a compromise language of communication in a multilingual setting since political resistance to the choice of an indigenous language as a national official language has foreclosed choosing any of the three major Nigerian Languages as a Lingua Franca. English according to Upah (2010) is the linguistic and symbolic embodiment of political power and authority in Nigeria. Though it was in record that until the arrival of the colonial British government, the history of the pre-colonial Nigeria shows that the various independent ethnic groups lived in harmony. There was socio - cultural identity, socio-political, religious and economic stability in these independent ethnic-linguistic groups. The various ethnic groups were "organized in such a way that each person was his brother's keeper" (Ojukwu & Ojukwu, 2012). In 1914, things fell apart as the British colonial officer; Lord Lugard amalgamated the different ethnic and linguistic groups. This new socio-political situation brought different ethnic groups that have no common history, language, belief system or culture into one nation (Upah 2010). So, it became obvious to the British colonial administration that for the amalgamation to succeed, the English Language National Integration and Social Stability becomes a necessary factor. Thus, introduction of English Language generally afforded Nigerians irrespective of their ethno-linguistic groups, ease of communication, socialization and mutual understanding to certain extent. As a result, the indigenous languages (mother tongue) of the people were neglected and that has been so, even till this day. This has affected our indigenous languages so much that some are even at the verge of extinction if nothing is done urgently. The paper calls for a shift from the status quo as there are many benefits indigenous languages, literature and culture can accord to enhance sustainable national integration that will bring national development in Nigeria.

The concept of national integration and Nigeria as a nation

National integration is an agreement among different nationalities, minorities and other groups constituting the political community which strikes equilibrium between the "communal" identity and the national identity. Such equilibrium is effective through the devices of pluralism and cross-pressuring (Abhishek, 2019). Abhishek asserts that national integration is the spirit of togetherness or oneness towards one's own country irrespective of their individual differences with regards to religion, region, race, culture or caste. Such spirit involves the feeling that brings people from all areas, dialects and believes together in a common endeavor. While Bello-Imam (1987) posits that the difficulty of attempting a precise definition of the concept of "integration" has led to the adoption of three basic approaches: structural, cultural and Marxian. Though none of these approaches is mutually exclusive, we intend to adopt a structural approach which views integration in terms of the extent to which parts interact and complement each other in order to constitute a viable whole. It is within this framework that national integration is considered as involving a process of holding tightly together the various nationalities or ethnic groups and institutions in a dovetailed manner through the bonds of contrived structures, norms and values. It is a process by which distinctive "norms and values" of autonomous people and cultures incorporated into a multi-national state can achieve higher level of mutual trust, co-operation and independence, share values, common identity and national consciousness. National integration is conceived in terms of degrees. Under this framework, generally, there could be vertical integration for instance, of social classes in the society in question as well horizontal integration e.g. the integration of ethnic groups. In both variants it is better to refer not just to the fitting together of diverse sectional interests vertically or horizontally represented in the state system but also their coherence (politically, socially, culturally etc.) in some determinate way through the blurring of differences and prevalence of mutually consistent ideas of values in order to constitute an emotionally gratifying nation state. Thus the operational definition of national integration is the harmonized co-existence of diverse social groups. The modern multi-ethnic nations, frequently described as states or nation – states became common in Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the economic integration of different regions, thereby strengthening the ties between people from different nationalities and fostering the rise of a common language and common cultural features. The question is why Nigeria as a nation cannot emulate what is working for other nation to have a sustainable peace and development? In the words of Ekanola (2006), "there has not been any positive change in regards to true national integration since 1960 Nigeria had her political independence." Rather, the relationship among the diverse ethnic nationalities and religious groups has worsened drastically in spite of all pretenses to be one Nigeria. According to Ekanola (2006), Nigeria became an ethnic homogenous society accidentally as a product of British imperialism. From what is currently happening in the country, instead of integrating into a cohesive community with a common sense of national identity and destiny, citizens of Nigeria are returning more and more to primordial affiliations for identity, loyalty, and security. Ekanola condemned that, "Instead of forging a united front and presenting a concerted effort to face the challenges of development in an increasingly competitive and globalised world, Nigerians are busy waging ethnic and religious wars, struggling for control over resources, resisting marginalization by dominant ethnic groups and contending with diverse problems for basic survival. It is a known fact that Nigeria's social –political and economic circumstances have been having series of problems since independence. Many of these problems stem from its origin as an artificial colonial construct that lumped together a variety of separate people (Ekanola, 2006). Despite all these aforementioned problems, there is still possibility for national integration of Nigerian citizens. There is a great need to induce the citizens into accepting a new sense of Nigerian identity, involving a commitment to the survival of the present state as a cohesive entity. There is need for radical change in the nation as a whole to make national integration workable in Nigeria. We therefore identify the role of language, literature and culture as a catalyst for national integration and development in Nigeria.

Challenges of national integration and development in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the developing countries of the world comprising of different languages, traditions, cultures, religion and believes etc. These differences in diversity have been the main obstacle on the way to the spirit of one nation. Some of these differences are factors affecting national integration in Nigeria:

1. Cultural differences: Cultural diversity is the prime reason why people become prisoners of different regional identities. People from different regions of the country began to fight for their superiority over other regions and wanting to gain autonomy of even independence. Such happenings in Nigeria today of which the IPOB, Unknown gun men , Fulani Herdsmen and Boko Haram groups are typical examples, causing havoc and setback to the economy and lives of the masses. One of the yardsticks of national harmony is the cross affiliation amongst different kingdoms irrespective of cultural and religious discrepancy (Ekah, 2018). According to Ekah (2018), such harmony was expressed by HRH (Dr) Appolus Chu, Egbere Emere Okori of Eleme Kingdom in Rivers State when he took a trip all the way from South-South to the North to attend the 2018 Nzem Berom, a cultural festival of the Berom nation in Plateau State. Our traditional rulers from different states can emulate such gesture to create peaceful inter relationship for the unity of the nation. This can contribute immensely to the social development of our society and as such can trickle development as long as there is peace, love and stability. The unity and prosperity of this great country could be more realized if our traditional rulers through culture in the different parts of the country can interact with one another during festive periods, their subjects will definitely emulate them. It is assumed that through such interactions, religious and tribal crisis which have disturbed this country will be reduced if not eradicated.

2. Language diversity: As a multilingual nation, Nigeria has suffered many language barrier problems ranging from foreign to local languages. This has really affected the status of our indigenous languages, and thus the implementation of the National Policy on Education as regards to language use is nothing to write home about due to cultural and political diversities. These diversity problems have given the foreign languages higher status and recognition in the country at the expense of our indigenous languages. When policies are made by a particular government, it functions for a while, immediately a new government comes on board, such policies collapses. This is as a result of the new government not having interest in the policy or may have their own new policy to handle. This has been the case of language policy in Nigeria; there is no proper monitoring on the implementation as to identify the strength and weaknesses of such policies. All of these led to the state of down grading of which indigenous languages are today. But something can still be done if government and stake holders of Language Education Policy can come together and find a way forward on how to place our indigenous languages where they should appropriately be without being bias. They have to borrow a leaf of how indigenous languages are treated in civilize countries. By so doing, there will be national integration and development in the country even as a multilingual nation.

3. Religion: The differences among people in the basis of religion are one of the main obstacles to national unity in Nigeria. A typical Muslim or Christian finds it difficult to marry outside his or her religion. Why? Because of the fear of the unknown as inter religious hatred and wars has always been the case in the history of religion in Nigeria. The Christians do not feel free with the Muslims and vice versa. Though Nigeria is a secular country that treats all the religions equally, still sometimes communal conflicts erupt leading to tragic loss of lives and properties posing treat to national integration and development.

4. Political divides: This is another big hindrance to national integration and development in Nigeria. Politicians in Nigeria practice regional politics, that is giving support to people from one's own region whether they are good candidates or not. This has led to politics of 'do or die' affair while the poor masses are left to suffer. Most times, the choice of the people are not granted victory in Nigerian elections due to political divides. This has not helped the country in the past years and something needs to be done to change our peoples' mindset towards political divides.

Well, one may come up with a question like, can Nigeria be nationally integrated and united one day? The answer is, since Nigeria is a free country, it has all chances to fight for national integration and unity just as it is in other developed countries. First, there must be a change in people's mindset, so as to really know what national integration is all about and before it can foster development. This can be done by creating public awareness in every sector across the country on the need for peaceful integration. Despite these aforementioned challenges facing national integration in Nigeria, the importance of national integration in any country is indisputably obvious because it helps stabilize the democracy, increase the economic growth, develop the nation and give people all vital rights and duties. Nigeria, being a pluralistic society and vast population has a more complicated task to complete. The wide range of cultures, customs, religions and languages only enriches the county and allows it to flourish but only provided the country reigns with external peace and unity of the people. If Nigeria takes a course of becoming a powerful state with a strong nation, it will make such progress. We should remember that when a society is organized and united, it will never be the object of mockery or attacks. So, national integration becomes a valuable weapon for a county to develop and achieve success.

The role of indigenous languages, literature and culture in national integration and development

Multilingualism fosters national, international and global integration. Those who speak the same language are likely to share common cultural and linguistic traits, thus forming, as it were, one ethno-linguistic global family unit. This is recognized by Nigerian government as exemplified in the national language policy which promotes trilingualism. This National Policy on Education (1998:9) states that: "government appreciates the importance of language as a means of producing social interaction and national cohesion". And that, in the interest of national unity it is expedient that every Nigerian child shall be required to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages, i.e. Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, in addition to his MT and English. Now that French language is being encouraged and popularized in Nigerian schools, quadrilingualism is being promoted. Language could be used as a unifying tool, especially for people who speak the same tongue. For such people, language acts as a national flag, giving the speakers a common identity and a sense of belonging. It is also used for controlling people's behavior since it is rule-governed, and a breach of its rules attracts sanctions. Speakers of the same tongue are bound together culturally and linguistically. This is the socio-linguistic integrative role of languages. Speech norms are to be observed in speech acts to avoid communication breakdown. In the ethnography of speaking of any speech community, languages are regarded as 'law-enforcement agents' under whose sovereignty all speakers must come and bow. The prime objective of any language is co-operation, and this can either be transactional or interactional. When a language is used for the intentional transmission of factual information, it is said to be transactional, and when it is used for the establishment and maintenance of social relationships, it is interactional. It is the interactional function of any language that serves integrative purpose. Ogundare (2004) describes language as a facilitator and an index of a people's capacity to conquer nature and civilize its environment with the capability of carrying the burden of a society's value, experiences and ideologies. Since education is believed to be a tool for the promotion of peace, integration and unity, we therefore posit that indigenous language education, literature and culture can be used as a roadmap to national integration and development in Nigeria. A good piece of literature can be regarded as an authentic mirror image of the society and time. Satire, proverbs and symbolism are used by literary artists to communicate ideas, thoughts and feelings about social ills in the society which are criticized with prussic diction. Proverbs, for instance, are lesson in prudence, generosity, patience and wisdom all of which are indispensable to the guidance of mankind and the stability of the society. Literary artists use languages to ridicule or condemn anti-social behaviors such as corruption, assassination, political thuggery, religious intolerance, oppressive rule or dictatorship, any form of human degradation and undemocratic practices. Through

historical literature, our knowledge of the society is widened. Language is an index of identity which serves as a repository of a people's culture exploits. In other words, it is the vehicle through which people's culture is transmitted for references. Since language is the mirror of the soul, indigenous languages are treasures of culture and self identity. That is to say that language is the indicator of history and self identification as Solanke (2006) supports that, It is an indispensable cultural legacy with which all forms of human interaction are carried out. In Nigeria today, despite the role played by English as an official language, we strongly advocate the use of indigenous languages in conducting state and national matters as in civilized countries. This is due to the fact that indigenous languages are language of the native and dominant people of Nigeria; we are hopeful that if effectively utilized, will play more positive impact than English. Indigenous languages are veritable instruments for national integration as it helps in full empowerment of Nigerians to fully appreciate democracy by knowing their rights and opportunities to participate in party politics, express their feelings and emotions through the media, get involved in cultural shows, drama exhibition of works of arts (Olaoye, 2009:141). As the world is now a global village through mass communication and information technology, local languages are being used in teaching of science and technology, including computer science in advanced countries. We hope same can be of our indigenous languages in order to contribute to the advancement in science, education, health and technology for national integration and development. Literature through language humanizes, entertains, warns people of dangerous practices, ridicules people, guides administrators with historical facts and acts as the mirror of the society. According to Nwankwo, Tukur and Adah (2013), literature criticizes evils such as; corruption, injustice, nepotism, bribery, economic and political sabotage, oppression, colonialism, dictatorship, power mongering and other anti- social and anti-democratic practices. The print and electronic media through sensational and vitriolic languages are capable of purging, cleansing or sanitizing the society of its socio-economic, religious and political filth. Literature is therefore a tool for social and cultural integration and development. As a source of information, literature is one of the most potent instruments for societal enlightenment and integration. Nwankwo et al added that, language, literature and culture are inseparable because the transmission of cultural values is done through languages and literature. Nwankwo et al posit that, language behavior is governed by societal norms and any breach of language rules attracts societal sanction, so people's world view is determined by their language and culture. The world is viewed from the perspective of our indigenous languages, thus a shaper of ideas. We dissect the world through the instrumentality of our indigenous languages (Olaoye, 2009:143). In support to the above, Aliyu (2009:10) postulates the need for an indigenous language for national development as thus:

"It is undisputable that indigenous languages are rich and effective in reaching people.

It is a raw-material that brings about effective changes in the perception of an individual. And if a nation wants her citizens to imbibe patriotism to the ideal of the country, and at the same time reorient their attitude and making them believe in themselves, it should use a language that is effective in conveying the information like indigenous languages which have the criteria and qualification of doing the job".

So far, we have been able to debunk the idea that only English language can bring national integration and development to Nigeria as it is in practice today. We believe our discussions above have proved the need for indigenous languages, literature and culture as tools for effective and sustainable national integration and development in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

Nigeria as a developing nation cannot really do without its indigenous languages, literature and culture. The status of this paper is that the indigenous languages, literature and culture are inseparable tools for national integration and development. The focus of this paper did not advocate the total abandonment of the use of English but rather stresses the fact that Nigerian

indigenous languages, literature and culture should be well utilized for peaceful co-existence, sustainable national integration and uninterrupted development of the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

After much said on the use of indigenous languages, literature and culture as tools for national integration and development in Nigeria, we came up with the following recommendations;

1. The government through the educational authorities should go back to the drawing board and see how to revive and sustain the use of indigenous languages, especially in our schools starting from primary through secondary to tertiary levels. To achieve this, they have to start by looking into the policy on ground, check its strength and weaknesses and come up with a better solution as to promote indigenous languages, its literature and culture for national integration and development.
2. There should be a mass re-orienting on the need to live in peace and harmony among Nigerian citizens, as to be able to accommodate our various diversities ranging from languages, literature, culture, politics, religion and socio-economic attachments if we truly want a peaceful integration. This can be done by use of the mass media, the agents of socialization such as the family, schools, age groups, social groups, churches, mosque, political parties etc. It is believed that, when the environment is peaceful, development comes in even from outside the country. This is because no one will want to invest in a hostile environment where there is hatred, coarse and unfriendliness to mankind.
3. Just as we have football competitions that normally bring diverse group together, there should be inter-tribal competitions on arts and culture. This will enable different groups to come together and have fun and relate with people from different cultures and beliefs.
4. Foreigners should be made to study one of the indigenous languages to enable them fit in well in whatever they want to do in the country. This practice is what Nigerians face when they travel abroad, and so shall be introduced in the country. If well utilized, this practice shall be a source of revenue to Nigeria.

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