Review

Harnessing multilingualism in Nigeria for development: The challenges and strategies

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The arbitrary and haphazard territorial boundaries imposed by the colonial masters in the last two centuries or so did not take cognizance of the people’s diversities before differentiating Nigeria and other sub-Saharan African states. As a result, the geo-political enclave now known as a country encompasses people with varying linguo-cultural identities. This has continued to have far reaching effects on the socio-economic potentials of the nation. This paper argues that the post independence Nigeria’s slow pace on the road of development is due to the non-participation of the Nigerian monolingual majority in the socio-economic and political affairs of the nation. This phenomenon is either as a result of the non-availability, non-utilization or defective language policy geared towards the use of mother-tongues. This paper therefore contends that positive results can still be gleaned from the resourceful utilization and positive involvements of the Nigerian factors despite her multilingualism. An empirical survey on the area of activities where English domination is mostly manifested was conducted among some secondary schools located in the South western part of Nigeria. It was found that European influence had continued to have series of devastating effects on the self actualization ethos of the nation because a wealth of indigenous knowledge was being locked away in the local languages and was gradually being lost as the custodians of this knowledge passed on. It is conclusively posited, therefore, that sustainable developments of the Nigerian individual and society only reside in turning a new leaf to the involvement of mother-tongues in the production and consumption of the world knowledge.

Key words: Harnessing, multilingualism, linguo-cultural, mother-tongues, nationality, Yoruba.

INTRODUCTION

The general conception on multilingualism is that it clogs up the pipe of states’ cohesion and economic developments. This notion does not only conceal the reality of the whole phenomenon but it also underscores a major part of African/Nigerian colonial masters’ concept of nation building. The basic truth is that colonialism and state creation did not mind the diversity of languages spoken within the frontiers of a particular region and the heterogeneity of their linguo-cultural identities. States were created in Africa haphazardly (Uchendu, 1988).

Characteristically, therefore, African countries lack overt common language, although they shared common cultural heritage which was found to have been discoloured, illusory and separated by the colonial imperialists. By the beginning of the eighteenth century or so, the colonial powers went ahead to impose haphazard territorial boundaries across the length and breadth of Africa thereby creating artificialities in all shades and colours and with different calculations and intensions. One basic fact is that a common feature like language...
which is supposed to be the key attribute of a nation became elusive. It is noted that wherever nations are lacking in this basic common features, such lack turns out to account for political disintegration in the affected nations. People’s passport to their independent culture is their mother-tongues. One outstanding argument that has continued to reverberate in the studies of sociolinguistics is that the moment you deny people the effective uses of their indigenous languages, they have become linguistically colonized. This scenario foregrounds the socio-political and economic constraints of the African countries today (Ajayi, 1988).

Moreover, the phenomenon of politics of cultural and linguistic assimilation coupled with the hegemony of divide and rule tactics which were the direct fall-factors of the above constraints, were observed to discolour and disrupt even the entire world polity and administration; leaving a scar which still gnaws in Africa till date. The effects of this dislocation on the peoples’ socio-economic and educational potentials could be over-emphasized.

It is also very pertinent to note that the fundamental roles of language in all the spheres of modern developments to initiate appreciable knowledge economy empower the individual citizen and turn him into a polyvalent, critical and a self-fulfilled person have been observed to have been eroded and disappeared. The contention in this paper, therefore, is that these losses are only recoverable through the systematic uses of the mother tongues among all the stakeholders within the nation. The only effective process by which this can be achievable is through the formal system of Bilingual/Multilingual Education that will be loaded with enhanced socio-cultural orientations which will condemn cultural alienation in the hearts of the indigenous people. It therefore means that the place of Language Education that will evolve a society stocked with producers and consumers of African-based knowledge is very important and necessary.

As it were, three major perspectives shall be explored on the issue. One, we shall explore the linguistic realities of the emergent Nigeria within the context of multilingualism. Two, we shall attempt to underscore the latent benefits of multilingualism in a third world country like Nigeria. And thirdly, we shall highlight the strategies considered appropriate for optimally harnessing the multilingual features of the country in order to derive the needed advantages. Now, we consider the preceding issues in turn.

**Multilingualism in Nigeria**

The linguistic characteristics that are prevalent in all the countries south of the Sahara is that each of these countries is composed of many ethnic groups with a resultant effect of cluster of local languages. According to UNESCO, quoted by Roy-Campbell (2006), Africa harbours about 2000 languages which is 30% of the world languages. It is however noted that just only 18% is spoken in Europe and the Americas.

Apart from those languages whose speakers fall within the linguistic border lines and whose speakers inevitably have to acquire more than one particular language for survival, the three principal languages in Nigeria are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. But the phenomenon is not as simple as that. There are majority-minority indigenous languages and minor-minority indigenous languages. For the non-major/minority indigenous languages, Iwara (2008) gives a rough index of their number as 396. According to him, the major minority languages are given as about 12 in number – Fulfride (or Fulani) Kanuri, Tiv, Nupe, Jukun, Ebira, Edo, Ibiobio, Idoma, Ijaw, Efik and Urhobo. The population of the speakers of each of them is put as ranging between 2 to 8 million people. As a matter of fact, these groups of people do not only enjoy officialdom at their state levels, they also have a relatively standard orthography and a vast body of literature. The minor languages, on the other hand, number about 385 and have up to 2 million speakers. However, a few of them have just around half of a million. The body of the present study therefore shall be factored along the multiplex structures of the Nigerian languages as enunciated above.

By the current varying estimates therefore, the figure of native languages spoken in Nigeria ranges between 250 to 400. The record which supports 400 languages is about the most acceptable going by the UNESCO estimates as given in Ouane and Glanz (2010)’s account. Out of this number, however, it is assumed that of all the countries in Africa, Nigeria stands out as a country where three of the continent’s four major language phyla are most represented (Iwara, 2008). The only exception is the Khoisan family of languages which are ‘spoken by the people inhabiting the South-west corner of Africa, in and around Namibia’. Besides, there is a large scale of endogenous bilingualism which means that some communities find that they need a second indigenous language for communication and interaction with the linguistically dominant group in their immediate local environments. Iwara (2008) cited Ejagham and Bekwarra languages in the Cross River state as two examples. This second language is usually learnt and used, as a necessity, for interaction with a more dominant neighbor.

It will be noted that the above scenario portends a gloomy administrative convenience. Oyewole (1977) then explains what is meant by political integration as being “what is it that holds a society and political system together” for progressive coexistence. It is also noted that loose integration could be a serious threat. Pye (1966) therefore categorizes the problems emanating from loose integration into two thus:

(i) those integrations that have to do with bridging the social distance that language, ethnicity, culture or religion may have created among the people of a country.
(ii) the political distance between the masses of the
country and their national leaders.

What can be gleaned from the above submissions is that political integration deals with the process of reducing culture and religious tensions and bridging the gap between the “elites” and the masses. As such, the Nigeria’s post independence experience is marked by being primarily obsessed with integrative capacities which have to be built into the political structure of the nation. Therefore, the nation has been initially pre-occupied with the problems of holding the diverse people of the nation together and transferring the loyalty from the tribe or ethnic groups to the centre. It is for this crucial purpose of developing a national symbol, that a national language (English) is felt. However, not every scholar accepts the imposing nature of English as a necessity that cannot be circumvented. We therefore briefly examined shades of opinion expressed in the literature so far.

Highlights of English Language in Nigeria

The status and standard of English are adjudged to be unparal lle not only in Nigeria but also in Africa and indeed across the globe. This is because in terms of its usages and domination, English language has become a world language, an international language without equals. On this note, Bamgboso (1995) opines that in order to make English language a medium of day-to-day communication in Nigeria, the speakers need to imbibe the phonological, syntactic and semantic patterns of English to reflect the evolution of distinctively Nigerian usages, attitudes and pragmatic features of the language. It is however observed that these have not been wholly achieved due to the forces of natural tendencies.

However, the heavy functional load of English in Nigeria can be typically recognized along the following parameters as highlighted in Quirk et al. (1985).

(i) English is instrumental to formal education. In Nigeria today, English being the national language is incorporated into the school curricular right from the primary up to the tertiary institutions – University and Polytechnics. In private primary and secondary schools, it is an anathema for students to speak in the native languages.
(ii) Usage as Regulative engagements for government administration and law courts. English is used for different circulars in all government parastatals. Judgments are delivered in courts of law even if the litigants do not understand English or are able to interpret the article of law to which they have been accused and liable. In many homes (among the children and their parents) and family meetings, English is preferred.
(iii) Usage as communication for interpersonal communication between the individuals speaking different native languages. Also, English language is used as a common code which facilitates all forms of communications between different strata of people. This use is considered the greatest.
(iv) Usage as occupational medium, both intra-nationally and internationally for commerce and for science and technology. Quirk et al. (1985) observes that “not only is English the universal language of international aviation, shipping and sport, it is to a considerable degree the universal language of literacy and public communication”.
(v) Usage in creative works. It is used for non-technical writings such as fiction and political works. People of different groups are involved here. English is being used in the use of text messages, bill-boards and announcements in electronic and print media.

Bamgbade (2012) reported an empirical study he undertook on the students’ preference for English language vis-à-vis the indigenous language prevalent in the Southwestern Nigeria- the origin and homeland of the Yoruba native speakers. It was found that the students’ preference for English language was unparallel at the expense of the indigenous language (Yoruba) being spoken in the region, thereby giving credence to an earlier study undertaken by the present writer. In the study, it was argued that the negative and disdain attitudes of both the government and the younger generation to the use of indigenous languages in Nigeria was undoubtedly the bane of our socio-economic and educational advancements.

The study identified six parameters as the areas where dominations were mostly manifested within the contexts of socio-linguistics and educulture in Nigeria thus:

(i) medium of communication
(ii) extra-curricular activities
(iii) choice of literature books
(iv) choice of entertainment
(v) choice of names
(vi) medium of teaching other subjects

The schools chosen as the subjects of the investigation were:

(a) Emmanuel Alayande College of Education Model School, Oyo, Oyo State
(b) Ebunoluwa International School Osogbo, Osun State
(c) Nazareth Secondary School, Lagos, Lagos State
(d) Oke-Amu Community College, Oyo, Oyo State

The major criterion for the choice of these schools was their scattered geographical locations which spread across the Yoruba speaking communities with varying levels of urbanization. However, 800 secondary school students and 80 class teachers were randomly selected in all, ranging from urban to semi-urban; and among rural Community Secondary Schools to allow for variations of choices from both the educated and uneducated parents. However, some questionnaires were not filled while some
students declined from making themselves available for the interview thereby creating some gaps in the expected total figures and the calculated results. Out of 587 respondents sampled as presented in Table 1, 73.4% preferred to speak in English as opposed to 26.6% that prefer to speak using the indigenous language. However, a sizeable amount of those speaking in their mother tongue (Yoruba) were from the rural area of Oke-Amu. This indicated that the Yoruba society’s medium of expression in their day-to-day medium of communication is not English, as it was in elites’ homes resident in the urban centers.

We subsumed literary and debating activities, membership in social clubs, dramatic societies, etc under extra-curricular activities. During these activities, two principal languages – English and Yoruba were spoken by the respondents (Table 2). 560 students preferred to get engaged in the activities enunciated using English, while 240 respondents preferred to use the indigenous language. This gave 70% as those who preferred to be engaged in these activities using English while just 30% would prefer to speak in the indigenous language during their extra-curricular activities. It was observed that students in urban centers like Emmanuel Alayande College, Oyo (64%), Ebunoluwa International School, Osogbo (94.5%), Nazareth Secondary School, Lagos (98.5%) preferred being engaged in an extra-curricular activities using English language as the medium of expression, whereas at Oke Amu, (a rural community) the use of indigenous language ranked highest (77%).

Under this investigation, attempts were made to elicit the type of literature text books that were preferred by the candidates either as recommended or as preferred during their leisure (Table 3). It was discovered that their choice of language had preference over the type of texts they read; the urban which was almost dominated by the elites preferred to read text such as detectives, adventures, romance, military escapades, etc story based novels written in English anywhere, anytime as opposed to the practice in the sub-urban schools where the day-to-day communication is predominantly in Yorùbá. In Oke-Amu, a community school, for instance, the highest number of students preferred to read literature texts written in Yorùbá.

It was found that the students’ proficiency in either English or Yorùbá continued to play a very important role in all other spheres of their extra-curricular activities. Essentially, home background was a key factor in the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Indigenous language</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel</td>
<td>172</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebunoluwa</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oke-Amu</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>179</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>587</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>26.6</td>
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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Indigenous language</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tr>
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<td>128</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebunoluwa</td>
<td>189</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>98.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oke-Amu</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Indigenous language</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>52.5</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebunoluwa</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oke-Amu</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>520</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Table 4. Choice of entertainment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Indigenous language</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebunoluwa</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oke-Amu</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>567</td>
<td>70.8</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>29.2</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5. Choice of first names.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Indigenous language</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebunoluwa</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>87.5</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>97.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oke-Amu</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>67.5</td>
<td>260</td>
<td>32.4</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Medium of teaching other subjects by the teachers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Indigenous language</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Mixture</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emmanuel</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1b</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ebunoluwa</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazareth</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>Nil</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oke-Amu</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>68.75</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>22.5</td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

students’ choice of entertainment. While Emmanuel Alayande College records 87.5% preference is for English, the same school records just 12.5% for using the indigenous language as medium of communication during entertainment, and even as low as 10% and 0% at Ebunoluwa International School and Nazareth Secondary School, Lagos, respectively especially in music, movies and playlet composed in the indigenous language (Table 4).

With the present socio-linguistic situation in the South western Nigeria where this investigation was carried out, most respondents have three names; especially for record purposes. We regarded the one with which their parents call them as the first name. First name invariably contrasted with the given and family names. Interestingly, it was found that European mentality continued to have remarkable influence on the type of names borne by these respondents. For example, at Emmanuel Alayande College 75% preferred English first name. 87.5% prefer same at Ebunoluwa and 97.5% at Nazareth. However, only 2.5% prefer names in indigenous language in this Nazareth Secondary School. Perhaps for the reason expressed on the choice of literature text and other variables, 90% of the Oke-Amu Community students opted for names having the indigenous language; given credence to their family background and parental cultural leaning (Table 5).

Despite the acknowledged fact that education is best acquired through the medium of mother tongue, the European legacy of using the mechanism of English to teach was still very pervasive; except in the rural areas as evident in Table 6 above where Ebunoluwa and Nazareth record 0% while all others had high percentages.

The exposition on the hitherto unchallengeable roles of English in all spheres as depicted in the above survey was deemed necessary to enable us see the extent of the English language dominance in the socio-economic fabrics of the nation and thus provided sufficient backgrounds on which to rest our arguments in the subsequent section.

The contentious issues about English Language in Nigeria

This paper is of the opinion that there are contentious arguments about the choice of English language in the educational and socio-political phenomena in Nigeria. Our description of the crisis emanating from the British
legacy will allow us make critical comment on the state of impotence at which the indigenous languages are in Nigeria. First, it is wrongly assumed that the multiplex nature of indigenous languages in Nigeria will be tantamount to a veritable obstacle on the way to national unity. It is further argued by the colonial authorities that the use of several mother tongues will create inter-ethnic conflicts. To prevent such conflicts, therefore, they posit that a trans-ethnic and foreign language should be chosen.

This paper argues on the contrary that management of diversity is what the nation needs through recognition of the people’s diverse cultural identities and the optimal utilization of these diversities for sustainable developments. This view is corroborated by Human Development Report (2004). It is certain that conflicts in our socio-political history emanate as a result of economic inequalities and struggles over power not as a result of any other reason.

Secondly, those who preferred the continual utilization of English language over the applicability of indigenous languages to harnessing sustainable developments further argued that Nigerian languages were deficient to serve as the medium of instruction in tertiary institutions and therefore could not act as a potent vehicle for the dissemination of knowledge in science and technology. In other words, local languages were rated as not being able to modernize people through universal knowledge nor be able to develop themselves on their own. It was also assumed that the languages were inferior to the ex-colonial languages which had been adopted as official languages almost universally.

This argument becomes tenuous and contentious in view of the fact that multilingualism has been explored elsewhere to be a strong and effective force towards creating a sense of belonging among the people of ‘disparate origins’ like Nigeria. There are several identities in humanity – (gender, religion, nationality, profession, ethnicity, e.t.c) to which people could belong and still share the values of their variety as a social group to advantage. A more concrete evidence of the richness of mother-tongues in the efficacy of teaching and learning is found in the success of the Ife Primary Education Research Project led by Prof. Babs Fafunwa which is reported in Fafunwa (1989). The products of this project recorded amazing excellence both in the Arts, social sciences and the sciences. Recognition of linguistic diversity, therefore, does not compete with the unity of a state because identification with a state will always be one of many identities of individuals. Harnessing the nation’s linguistic diversity, therefore, is capable of making the nation to grow if properly handled.

For instance, Papua New Guinea is a multilingual Island with about 800 languages. This Island has just about 5 million people with relatively slim economy. Yet, they are able to face the challenges posed by multilingualism through gradual process of multilingual education starting from kindergarten. So, each child of school age is exposed to many local languages. As a result, by the year 2000, the Island had developed up to 380 local languages.

Instead of going by the preceding precept, the British imperialist deemed it inevitable to introduce English language as a unifying factor. They claim that communicating technical and administrative information to the people who need the knowledge most would be too cumbersome if a standard language such as English is not used.

The weakness in their argument is that most of the technical terms being used in science and technology today are not originally from English. According to Bamgbose (1995), meta-languages are found aptly useful in areas where a particular language is found deficient. To think that acquisition of knowledge through indigenous language would be too expensive would only amount to being “pound foolish, penny wise”.

By and large, the use of English is considered unethical because it represents our colonial master’s symbol. It portends that we still remain within the bounds of their shackles and still linguistically and culturally tied to the apron string of colonialism. No wonder why the so called elites are neither typical Nigerian nor British in the directions of their language attitudes and orientations. As a matter of fact, when they communicate, they intersperse every sentence in native language with English.

Moreover, the choice of English is also deemed appropriate by the British imperialists because they asserted that whoever had no good knowledge of English would be lacking in creative thinking and so would be restricted socially. They also claimed that the person would be immobile and eventually be politically uncomfortable.

Our reaction to the preceding claim is that the kind of class structure emerging in Nigeria/Africa today is basically not on capital accumulation but on linguistic consideration. This does not only separate the minority from the majority socially, but it also makes it possible for the minority (the speakers of English /elites) to organize/manipulate modern sector of the economy for their selfish ends. As it were, only the minority are fully participating in the affairs of the nation at the detriment of the majority. This is essentially the bane of national development.

Now, let us examine the other side of the coin to see what exactly we should do to turn this apparent weakness to an overt show of strength.

**Challenges and strategies of multilingualism**

As discussed in the preceding section, it is evident that when indigenous languages are devalued, the native knowledge (like the ethos and value systems) as contained in these languages (and societies) automatically
becomes devalued as well. One pertinent fact is that “a wealth of indigenous knowledge is being locked away in these languages and is gradually being lost as the custodians of this knowledge pass on” (Roy-Campbell 2006:2). The direct result of this loss is that African countries become a receiver of knowledge, a mere consumer of technical-know-how like machine, books, etc rather than being a contributor as if the Africans have nothing of recognized value to offer to the global knowledge pool.

Prah (1995) aptly corroborates this submission by saying that:

Knowledge and education have to be constructed in the native languages of the people… new knowledge must build on the old and deal specifically with the material and social conditions on which the people live and eke out a livelihood.

Lagere (2004) also reports a heartwarming research cited in Ouana et al. (2010) thus:

A linguistic research project on biological terminology in Vidunda found an impressive richness of wild plant names and knowledge about their uses which has enriched existing botanical knowledge.

There is no doubt that similar display of knowledge abounds and is being locked away across the length and breadth of Africa. It is along this similitude and in line with the African Union’s Language Plan for Action (2006) that the subsequent perspectives are construed:

One, the interactive domains of language usage should be primarily engaged by making multilingualism an essential tool for social cohesion. Individual and community should form a sort of back-up language policies that build on the natural mastery of two or more local languages. This new orientation should be well packaged as a language policy and expressively using the medium of local languages.

Secondly, all stake-holders should strive to invigorate and value the development of Nigerian languages to make them attain the most vibrant and positive means of communication. Mother tongues should be seen and acknowledged as a veritable source of identity of the Nigerian majority.

A dynamic partnership system should be set up. This will include all the stakeholders in the Nigerian community in order to establish participatory dialogue framework. This framework will enhance the mobilization of a large scale support for diversified and integrated multilingual education and participatory democracy.

In this kind of education system, stakeholders should endeavour to conduct series of interdisciplinary researches and workshops that will mobilize all local resources that are capable of making a turn around. Awareness raising campaigns in the language understood by the grass-roots people to update their knowledge for development should be inaugurated. This can be achieved through gradual reinforcement of all local languages to make them suitable instruments for national developments.

Deliberate framework and research networking should be embarked upon and be tilted towards investigating the fauna and flora of the traditional ecosystem across the nation with a view to engaging all the branches of medicine and traditional technology. This should be complemented with massive documentation and translation.

Specifically, mother-tongue based multilingual education which is tailored to address the peculiar nature of the individual nation, the vision, resources and challenges of the individual person and ability should be focused and considered with a view to preparing him for active citizenship and productive life-long encounter. This should be made accessible and affordable.

The overall synergy of the efforts should be exerted within the governments’ pro-active programmes geared towards the capacity building of the citizenry. This can only be achieved by providing ample opportunities for information dissemination and learning effectiveness through modern technology.

However, if the preceding efforts would yield any positive result and be impacted on the socio-cultural and educational advancements of the nation, the problems of cultural alienation would need to be tackled first. It is observed that the people’s disdained attitudes to anything indigenous in preference for foreign culture are due to the factors associated with alienation where the western educated elites remain veritably alienated from their kith and kin. The synergy of efforts earlier discussed and recommended are to be succinctly directed towards the following strategies:

(i) Government should embark on mass training of teachers who are well grounded professionally to teach in the aspects of indigenous languages at all levels of schools-primary and post primary. This should be complemented with mass production and supply of instructional materials that will aid their teaching in all ramifications, including the tertiary instructions.

(ii) Adoption of major and major-minority indigenous languages as media of instruction in the primary schools is yet to be implemented. Up till now, the present writer found that primary schools in some states in Nigeria do not have a workable syllabus for Yoruba in their primary schools. This should be reversed.

(iii) The teaching and usage of major Nigerian indigenous languages should be more encouraged in the local community gatherings, media and at government functionaries leaving English language to do the official documentation for inter-regional reference. In this regard, efforts should be made to train more experts in the area of translation.

(iv) Government should promote and coordinate the overall management and design of research needs by conducting and encouraging research projects that will...
cover all the relevant needs geared towards the promotion of indigenous languages. A viable, none tribal oriented National Language Commission is necessary here. The commission will organize series of seminars and workshops covering language, literature, education, culture, mass-media, etc. Moreover, government should not hesitate to give grants and subsidies to institutions, qualified agencies, individuals and organizations; where necessary and important, both locally and internationally.

(v) The number of indigenous languages in Nigeria that are yet to be committed to writing runs up to several hundred today. Governments and Institutions should team up to evolve standard orthographies for these unwritten local languages to enable them accessible, researchable and teachable for them to be able to participate meaningfully in the tasks of nation building. The scope of the vocabularies of these local languages should also be expanded to cater for their use in science and technology.

Conclusion

The essence and potentialities of language to any society, economy and political well-being cannot be overemphasized as discussed in this paper. However, developing nation like Nigeria has not given language development any rightful place of recognition. As a result, the neglect has continued to stare the nation on the face and unabatedly weigh hard on the process of development. The study therefore highlighted the linguistic situations in Nigeria which made this to become an imperative especially within the context of the contemporary status of the English language and the indigenous languages. It found that the English language occupied a place of pride in all the Nigerian socio-economic and educational lives of the country. The paper therefore identified the discarded but profitable uses of mother-tongue which could be harnessed to yield veritable panaceas for the current myriads of problems besetting the nation. It further spelt out various aspects of multicultural/multilingual educational activities that were capable of combating cultural alienation in all its ramifications because they were considered strong banes on the educational, political and economic advancements. It was therefore concluded that developments would continue to elude the African nations, and indeed Nigeria, unless multicultural and multilingual forms of education are accorded accelerated promotion. Regional and state governments in developing nations therefore, should begin to initiate programmes that are capable of harnessing the status and involvement of mother tongues.

REFERENCES


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1 The rough estimates in the literature are 800 and 1,900 – Iwara (2008:12)
2 Native languages, mother tongues, indigenous languages as meant in this study means the same.
3 The four language families or phyla are:
   i. The Afro-Asiatic family, formally called Hamito-Semitic. Spoken in North Africa and part of East Africa. It is divided into Semitic. The Chadic Arabic belongs to the Semitic, while Hausa is the largest member of the Chadic branch.
   ii. The Nilo-Saharan family. Spoken in the Central and East Africa. Kanuri in Borno state Zaria in Sokoto state represent different branches of the family.
   iii. The Niger-Kordofanian family. It is spoken in West, Central and South Africa, including most of the Nigerian languages.
   iv. The Khoisan family. It is spoken in the South-Western corner of Africa, in and around Namibia.
4 See for details, Ogunwale (2012). The Nigerian Local Languages Factor as a paradox in the process of Nation Building.
5 As note 4 above.
6 See Klaus (2003) under reference