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**Promoting Indigenous Language in Nigeria: Issues and Challenges for the Library and
Information Professionals**

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Abstract

The paper centered on issues and challenges associated with promoting of indigenous language by library and information science professionals. The desk research approach involving extensive review of literatures on indigenous language was adopted. The challenges to promoting of indigenous language include: multiplicity of indigenous language, non-proficiency in indigenous languages, non-documentation of indigenous language and the preference for English language. The way forward for sustainable promotion of indigenous languages highlighted in the paper are: grass root promotion of indigenous language, establishment of centre for Advancement of Indigenous Language in Nigeria. (AILV), promotion of books written in indigenous language, translation of literary works to audio content in indigenous language, inclusion of indigenous language as a compulsory course in library schools in Nigeria. The paper concludes that library and information science professional occupy a central position in the promotion of indigenous language in Nigeria.

Keywords: Indigenous Language, Library Professionals, Information Professionals, Nigeria,

Introduction

Language is tied to the culture of a group of people. No culture can thrive without language, just as no society can exist without language. In other words, language is the backbone of any society or group of persons. It is through the instrumentality of language that people communicate, interact and live together. Every activity in both developed and developing nation is absolutely tied to language. Therefore, language can be acknowledged as the key driver of meaningful development. Obviously, to participate effectively in the democratic process, there must be language in place, to make economic impact language is required, beside air which is a free gift of nature, language is another necessity of life. For instance, if education is a basic factor for development in any society, then language through which the education is passed to the people is as important as the education itself.

Languages, whether indigenous or foreign, are indispensable tools in the life of individuals because there is no aspect of human activities that can be successful without the effective use of language (Ayodele, 2013). Language plays a great role in culture and societal development because we use language everyday in many ways and to meet countless different needs. Language is an important tool in the society, because man needs it to share his ideas, experiences, emotions, and interact with other people in the society or in his environment (Ayeomoni, 2011). The repository of a people's identity and way of life is encapsulated in their language as well as transferred to other people and newer generations, via the means of language (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). It is a phenomenon that fosters communication and enhances national

development as it enables interactions for economic, educational, social, religious and political purposes (Benson, Okere & Nwauwa, 2016).

Understanding the Content and Context of Language

Language is an integral part of human behaviour and it serves as the primary means of interaction between people (Adedeji, 2014). It is so important to the growth and sociability of a people that it is among the very first forms of behaviours that we learn as children, and latter when we learn other skills and acquire more knowledge, much of this reaches us only through the medium of language (Jibir-Daura, 2014). Language according to Odegbenle (2013) is a form of communication which allow animal (both lower and higher) to engage in transaction and share thoughts, beliefs, notions, ideas, experiences and so on which are presumably known to both parties.

Languages is one of the indispensable resources of man, necessary for his day to day transaction and activities, language lives and dwells with the people, and the perception of the real world is construed by the language habit of the people or group of speakers (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). It is important to the meaningful existence of the human race. It is used by man as a means of social, cultural transmission as well as a means of knowledge advancement and educational development (Alhassan & Ali, 2015). It is the unique property of human beings and all the developments of man, be it intellectual, ethical, political, social or economic revolves entirely on the instrumentality of language (Ene, 2007).

Characteristically, language is species specific and species generic possession that is uniquely human, that is peculiar to human beings and it can be both an individual property (when it exists as knowledge) and a social property, when it manifests to perform its function (Adzer, 2012). Language according to Yusuf (2012) remains potentially a communicative medium capable of expressing issues and concepts as well as moods, feelings and attitudes. As rightly put by Ani (2012:110):

The appeal of language resides precisely in its capacity to meet the needs of man for self expression and for communication of experience in his day-to-day engagements with the world around him. Man needs language for the dissection and analysis of material reality and spiritual experience as well as for formulation of hypothetical statements, theories and belief as well as value systems. In other words, beyond facilitating communication of experience, a language must enhance man's cognitive abilities and functioning, if it is to be of permanent relevance or survive through the ages.

The functional characteristics of language according to Emeka -Nwobia (2015) are not just limited to communication or transfer of information. He further posits that language provides means of concealing information as well as unveiling hidden agendas and codes.

The Relevance of Language in National Development

The place of language in National Development was aptly underscored by Ayodele (2013:2) when he asserted that:

.... language is an important instrument for the development of human beings, as political animals. No meaningful development can take place in a human community without language. As an instrument of communication, language, makes it possible for the people in any environment to interact and co-exist, thus paving way for the continuity of the society. Human beings get equipped

for their maximum self realization and self development through the use of language.

Recognizing the place of language in development Olaifa (2014) submits that language in any human society is expected to be preserved and rated with the highest priority and attention from both the government and individuals. Uzochukwu (2001) submits that, we cannot achieve economic prosperity and technological breakthrough in foreign language. It serves as a catalyst in national development. It holds the power to maintain national and cultural identity (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). Language is needed for interaction in the society and to share ideas and experiences with others (Ayeomoni, 2011); and without language, there is bound to be problem in the society for thoughts, ideas, information, and the society would become incommunicado (Jibir-Daura, 2014). Language therefore, provides means of accessing our thoughts. It provides a means of showing social relations, coding and decoding, recoding and recording information (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). Ene (2007) submits that education through the indigenous languages in Nigeria will stimulate learners for productivity more than the foreign language, and make learning more functional.

Indigenous Language: A Conceptual Analysis

Local or indigenous language can be construed to mean a language spoken of belonging or connected with a particular place or area which one is talking about or with the place where one lives (Adedeji, 2014). Indigenous languages are the tribal, native or local language spoken. The language would be from a linguistically distinct community that has been settled in the area for many generations (Jibir-Daura, 2014). Language being a potent vehicle of transmitting culture, norms, values and beliefs from generation to generation remains a central factor in determining the overall status of a nation (Yusuf, 2012). Indigenous language refers to the

various native languages spoken in Nigerian. They are languages that are aboriginal to the people (Adeniyi & Bello, 2006).

A Call for Promoting Indigenous Language

Ene (2007) submits that instead of making a foreign language enjoy the status it is enjoying presently, indigenous language and courses in teacher education institutions should be planned to equip every teacher with the capacity of teaching in both foreign and indigenous languages. As noted by Olafia (2014) many societies are faced with the challenges of language loss, language shift or even language death and this to him, may be linked to the fact that a large percentage of the languages are still not properly documented. Akabogu & Mbah (2013) contends that the government should see the indigenous languages more clearly for what they had been all along viz, a veritable and practical means of communication, some of which could very easily be harnessed for effectively national integration which is a matter of paramount importance for a country still struggling to consolidate its independence. Similarly, Adzer (2012) avers that the government should give more attention to the development and promotion of indigenous languages than it is presently giving to English, French or other foreign languages being imposed on children to whom the mother tongue is alien. As noted by Jibir-Daura (2014), indigenous languages are not argued to be development's "saving grace", rather they are seen as a tool with which to facilitate positive transformation and advancement by creating not only

wider acceptance of existing diversity but also of facilitating a greater number of social opportunities to speakers of minority languages.

Justification for Promoting Indigenous Language

Adedeji (2014) citing Salawu (2014) notes that indigenous languages are not highly esteemed just like in Nigeria, where English and western education remain the vehicles of power and progress in life. This neglect for indigenous language must be arrested before it goes into extinction. Balogun (2013) contends that the loss of any language by a people is the loss of their root and the loss of their identity and when a language is lost, such a people who experience the loss continue to live in the shadow of other people's identity and culture. The survival of the language of a people is very vital to the people's survival on the whole (Adzer, 2012).

Dooga (2012) affirmed that the loss of a language includes the loss of a people's heritage, their culture, and it takes away an important part of a nation's history because as the language declines, so do the cultural mores of the people who speak it.

As noted by Ogunmodimu (2015:156):

Today, English has grown to become the official national language of Nigerian and continues to play important roles in the nation as the language of education, media, religion (especially the Pentecostal Christian Faith), and the language of politics, governance and law.

The use of indigenous language is central to the holistic development of any nation. It is imperative to take the linguistic features into account in order to ensure full participation all the citizenry in the developmental process (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). Benson, Okere & Nwauwa (2016) adduced reasons that underscore the need to promote indigenous language in Nigeria. It

includes: to stimulate the child's interest in learning; to avoid loss of identity and to retain our cultural values.

The Place of Library in Language Development

According to Olaifa (2014), the importance of libraries in language preservation and development is huge because libraries provides information in either written, electronic or audio visual form, which play a key role in creating literate environments and promoting literacy by offering relevant and attractive reading material for all. To a people, the value of language is so great that without a language a speech community ceases to exist (Adzer, 2012). Library can play a significant role in the documentation of indigenous language. Language documentation which is the recording in writing and audio-visual recording of grammar, vocabulary, and oral traditions (e.g. stories, songs, religions text) of endangered languages (Ani, 2012).

Challenges to Effective Promotion of Indigenous Language by Library and Information Science Professionals

Library and Information science professionals in Nigeria are likely to face the following challenges when promoting indigenous language. There will always be stumbling blocks that would tend to frustrate efforts at developing our indigenous language (Adzer, 2012).

1. ***Multiplicity of indigenous language:*** Nigerian is known for its multi-lingual make-up and this is a serious challenge to library and information professionals in promoting indigenous language. It has been acknowledged that there about 400 indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria with only few in written forms (Jibir-Daura, 2014). Benson, Okere & Nwauwa (2016) reasoned that the multi-ethnic, multi-lingual and multicultural nature of Nigerian nation is an impediment

to the extent the libraries can go in the promotion of indigenous languages as the question may arise of the indigenous language to choose out of the more than 500 languages.

2. ***Non-proficiency in indigenous language:*** It will not be out of place to assert that most librarians may not be proficient in the indigenous language of their area of domiciliation. In such situation, there is a limit to the extent they can go in the promotion of indigenous language.

3. ***Non-documentation of indigenous language:*** There is dearth of proper documentation of indigenous languages both in oral and written format. Librarians, no doubt preserved more of documented knowledge than undocumented knowledge. It is therefore, difficult for library and information professionals to promote indigenous language that has not been documented in printed form.

4. ***Preference for English Language:*** English language as noted by Yusuf (2012) has emerged as that privilege language without which the unity of Nigeria as a nation is most improbable, if not out rightly impossible, no doubt, majority of Nigerians go through the primary, secondary, post-secondary schools being taught in English language. In such, situation, promoting indigenous language before this set of people becomes problematic for library and information professionals because the people must first possess the fundamental knowledge of the local language and has interest before your promotion attracts them.

The Way Forward

In other for library and information professionals to promote indigenous language, the following must be recognized.

1. ***Grass root promotion of indigenous language:*** At this point, it is imperative that library and information professionals should be actively engaged in the promotion of indigenous language. This grassroots promotion of indigenous language can be achieved through various strategies such as organizing seminars for parents through which they can be sensitized on how to create the platform at home that will empower the Nigerian child with the interest and desire to learn indigenous language. If librarianship must remain relevant in this age of competition in the information industry, librarians must take library services beyond the conventional library practices.

2. ***Establishment of Centre for Advancement of Indigenous Languages in Nigeria (AILN):*** Library and information professionals can also play a significant role by partnering with Ministry of Education in the various states to establish Centre for Advancement of Indigenous Languages in Nigeria. This will go along way in promoting indigenous languages in the context of Nigerian environment. The public libraries in the various states can be used as venues for this venture. It would not only help in promoting indigenous language but as well promoting librarianship as a profession. However, various stakeholders in librarianship in Nigeria like Librarians Registration Council of Nigeria (LRCN), Nigerian Library Association (NLA), in collaboration with public libraries can work out the modalities for the sustainability of this venture.

3. ***Promoting books written in indigenous language:*** Librarians should help to promote books written in indigenous languages. Efforts should be made by library and information science professionals in ensuring that books written in the various indigenous languages are made accessible to the right people it was intended for. Librarians should go beyond waiting for

people to come to the library to utilize such books. It is important that library and information professionals deployed every marketing strategy to ensure that the indigenous books written in indigenous languages gets to the right users on time.

4. *Translation of literary works to audio content in indigenous language:* with the advent of information technology, many youths are more interested in digital information contents (DIC) than the analogue information contents (AIC). In line with this, library and information professionals can take proactive and pragmatic steps in translating literary works written in English to indigenous language either in written form or audio content. The audio content can be easily uploaded in various social media for the people to download to their devices and listen to at their own convenient. According to Benson, Okere & Nwauwa (2016), the school libraries with copyright permission from authors can help in the translation of literary works into our indigenous languages. They further posit that when this is done, the Nigerian child could now have access to such works and read it in the mother tongue.

5. *Inclusion of indigenous language as a compulsory course in library schools:* Instead of students taking pain to learn French in library schools, efforts should be made by stakeholders in librarianship such as the National Association of Library and Information Science Education (NALISE) to include Indigenous Language in the curriculum used in teaching the would-be-librarians in the library school. This step would help to reposition library and information science professionals with the fundamental understanding of at least one Nigerian indigenous language. In this way, it becomes easier for them to promote indigenous language.

Conclusion

Library and information science professionals occupy a central position in the promotion of indigenous language in Nigeria. There is no doubt that the suggestions outlined in this paper would make significant impact on the promotion of indigenous language.

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