

Teachers' Perception of the Role of Indigenous Languages for Culture Preservation and Improved Teaching and Learning in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study explored on the role of indigenous languages towards culture preservation and improved teaching and learning in Nigeria, using the descriptive survey design. The sample size was 266 out of 5,393 primary school teachers who were randomly selected from a selected state. The study used a questionnaire as source of data from the field. Data was analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations. A negative perception of teachers was indicated if the weighted mean was between 1.00 and 2.49 while a positive perception was indicated if it fell between 2.50 and 4.00. The study revealed that teachers considered indigenous languages as a powerful tool for culture preservation. They also held the view that indigenous languages support effective teaching and learning as when the indigenous languages are used in teaching and learning, learners are more likely to have a better and deeper understanding of what is taught than when foreign languages are used in the teaching and learning process. The study recommends that stakeholders need to encourage and support the usage of indigenous languages in Nigeria for the sake of culture preservation and effective learning in schools. Parents should strengthen the use of indigenous languages at home places for culture preservation and effective learning in schools to be realized. Finally, the government should put in place mechanisms that would enforce language policy guidelines that favor the use of indigenous languages in school settings.

Keywords: Indigenous language; Culture preservation; Improved teaching and learning; Mother tongue; Native language.

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Introduction

A majority of indigenous African languages are in danger of disappearing (United Nations, 2019; United Nations Scientific Cultural Organization,

UNESCO, 2022). After being dominated by foreign languages for a long time, African languages are gradually vanishing. UNESCO (2022) stated that the best way to keep a language alive is to use it

whether in a written or spoken form. As a result, when a language is preserved, the culture continues to exist. Loss of a language means loss of the cultural tradition. Children who have had contact with their mother language acquire cultural values that will teach them to uphold fundamental values of their society. Therefore, affording them the opportunity to receive instruction in a language they are familiar with can be of great benefit.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2020) called on states to implement efficient policies to protect indigenous languages and eliminate discrimination against indigenous peoples. Yet, indigenous languages still suffer from the impact of colonization and globalization. The native languages have been presented in a derogatory manner and children no longer speak them. In Nigeria, for instance, various activities both at home and in educational environments are carried out using a foreign language. Majority of Nigerians rarely express themselves or document their achievements in indigenous languages and English language has been emphasized at the expense of indigenous languages. Native languages have been neglected and are at the danger of going into extinction in favor of the English language (Kube, 2006; Lawal, 2005; and Osborn, 2010).

Moseley (2010) reported that indigenous languages daily lose their native speakers and there are no new speakers of these languages. This weakens the strength of their transmission, thus, declining and putting them in danger. When speakers of a language stop using it, the language is in danger. A language is considered endangered if it is not being passed down to the next generation (Krauss, 2007). On a global scale, it is predicted that 3,000 out of 6,000 languages currently spoken will disappear in the next century. Other 2,400 languages will approach extinction, leaving only 600 languages in the category of languages that are safe (Osborn, 2010).

The threat posed by foreign languages is apparent in Nigerian's educational programs where English is used as the language of instruction and learners are severely dealt with for speaking indigenous languages. The slogan "Vernacular speaking is prohibited" is frequently spoken and boldly written in many of elementary school walls. To overcome this challenge, the National Policy on Education recommends that languages of instruction in the

lower primary schools should be mother tongues or languages of immediate environments (Federal Ministry of Education, 2013). However, research confirms that this language policy is not yet implemented (Adedigba, 2016; Araromi, 2005; Musa & Osa-Omoregie, 2020). Due to lack of awareness of the crucial role mother tongues play in facilitating access to academic success and national development, the language policy is consistently abandoned and is seen as a problem that is too complex to solve. No wonder the quality of education continues to decline (Lawal, 2005). The tragic disappearance of African culture to the wholehearted embrace of foreign culture calls for thoughtfulness and deliberate action.

According to UNESCO (2019), **out of the 7,000 languages currently spoken in the world, 6,700 are indigenous** but only 4% of the world's population is fluent in these languages. Without taking appropriate action to address this problem, there would be a significant loss of indigenous languages. Although, the local communities in Nigeria speak a variety of indigenous languages, it is possible that some of these languages will eventually become extinct if nothing is done to preserve, revitalize and promote them. There is, therefore, a need to explore ways to avoid the possible loss of the indigenous languages. This study, therefore, investigated teachers' perception of the role of indigenous languages for culture preservation and improved teaching and learning in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Language and Culture

African indigenous languages carry their culture and history. Indigenous languages keep people connected to their culture which strengthens feelings of pride and self-worth. Language is necessary for transmission of cultural heritage from one generation to the next (Webb & Kembo-Sure, 2000). Language is important in maintaining wellbeing, self-esteem and sense of identity (United Nations, 2019, 2020). Since language and culture are intertwined, a child who has had exposure to his mother tongue learn cultural values that will help him or her to respect the fundamental principles of the society in which he or she lives (Adedigba, 2016; Benson, 2005; Kioko, 2015; Ogunnowo, 2006).

Various writers stressed the importance of language in maintaining culture (Austin and Simpson, 2007; Batibo, 2005; Moseley, 2010; Obiero, 2008; Osborn, 2010). The authors maintained that language is the

fundamental foundation upon which culture is created and passed down to future generations. Through native languages, people stay connected to their culture. This enhances their feelings of pride and worth. Austin and Simpson (2007) noted that African societies have from time immemorial developed rich cultures that passed down through language. Therefore, language is a crucial tool for ensuring the transmission of a people's experiences from one generation to the next.

Batibo (2005) noted that if indigenous people are to free themselves from perpetual servitude of foreign culture, there is need to change from unfavorable attitude toward indigenous languages. Language serves as the means of expression of a culture's ideas and customs that guide a society's way of life (Kube, 2006, Batibo, 2009). That means the preservation of culture depends largely on the promotion of indigenous languages. Ignoring indigenous languages can therefore damage people's confidence because it separates children from their culture (Adedigba, 2016).

Being able to communicate effectively in an individual's first or home language connects a person to his/her ethnic group and helps to shape the person's identity. Children who are not educated in their native tongue are separated from their culture and are denied the chance to be proud of their native heritage, which hinders their ability to identify with African culture and history (Nishanth, 2020; Obiero; 2008; Osborn, 2010). Therefore, learning through indigenous language provides children a valuable opportunity to comprehend their history and their indigenous heritage. Therefore, there is a strong connection between language and culture.

Research (Adedigba, 2016; Batibo, 2009; Moseley, 2010) shows that the use of indigenous languages promotes respect and understanding amongst people and aids the preservation of rich cultural and historic legacy that is present in every language spoken today. Languages helps people to maintain a connection to their cultural history and encourages cultural diversity. The use of a language, whether in written or in spoken form, is one of the best methods to keep it alive as it serves as a means of increasing linguistic awareness in various contexts (Adedigba, 2016; Batibo, 2005; Moseley, 2010; UNESCO, 2008).

Indigenous Language and Education

Since 1951, UNESCO has been paving a path to promote multilingual education based on mother tongues during the very first years of schooling. The middle of the 20th century saw a rise in support for this concept on a global scale. At a UNESCO meeting in 1951, linguists convened and recommended that children should start their schooling in their mother tongue. It was argued that when children are taught in a language they are unfamiliar with, it damages their emotional and intellectual development. Researchers like Fafunwa (1978) agreed with this notion and contended that if children were taught in the languages they are most comfortable with, they would acquire intended habits, attitudes and skills more effectively. He compared the mother tongue to the mother's milk, saying that it should be used to lay the foundation for instruction so as to encourage the growth of the child's intellectual curiosity, initiative and flexibility. He believed that the child could expand on what he had learned even in a different language. He considered the mother tongue to be the foundation for learning other languages. This is further supported by Araromi (2005) who claimed that if given proper encouragement, mother tongue learning will significantly improve children's performance in a wide range of school subjects as it enables students to generate and enthusiastically express new knowledge while asking and answering questions.

Research confirms that education through the mother tongue is a key factor for quality learning as it improves learning outcomes (Atetwe, 2013; Adedigba, 2016; Alimi, et al. 2020; Akintola & Adetunji, 2020). Well-documented empirical studies on mother tongue-based bilingual programs in developing countries such as Cameroon, Guinea, India, Mali, the Philippines, South Africa and Vietnam provide evidence for the numerous educational advantages in using indigenous language as a medium of instruction. The study of Modiano in the Mexican highlands of Chiapas in 1973 reported that native children scored better than monolingual Spanish speakers in the transfer of reading abilities from the L1 to the L2. The Ife six-year project by Fafunwa (1978), the Rivers' Readers project in Nigeria and Philippine, the Kom experimental mother tongue education project (Walter & Chuo, 2011) and a host of others projects on mother tongue and bilingual education reported that students who were

taught in mother tongue performed better than those who were taught in English (Fafunwa, 1978, Ndamba et al., 2007) even in English Language tests. Benson and Kosonen (2013) and Tupas and Martin (2017) demonstrated benefits of employing native languages other than English as the medium of instruction in schools. An investigation into the effect of mother language on primary students' reading and numeracy skills by Alimi et.al (2020) indicated that using mother tongues for instruction improved students' literacy and numeracy.

Starting from the first day of school, giving children the chance to learn in a language they can understand benefits the educational system as the likelihood of keeping children in school is high if they learn in their mother tongues (Adedigba, 2016). Additionally, instruction in mother tongues helps learners to understand and internalize concepts and encourages continuity in thought. When curriculum content is presented in a language that students are familiar with, a significant amount of time will be saved. Moreover, when children are taught in their mother tongues, they will have a clear understanding of the material and are better able to participate, indicate what they know and ask questions. According to UNESCO (2020), indigenous languages improve the standard of instruction at the elementary school level, which is why it is urgent to prevent their extinction.

Several scholars investigated related topics. For instance, Ball (2010) worked on the mother-tongue-based bilingual or multilingual education in early years. Adedigba and Abdullahi (2016) evaluated teachers' knowledge and use of mother tongues as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools. Musa and Balogun (2017) assessed the role of mother tongue language in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals in Nigeria and Alimi et.al (2020) studied the impact of mother tongues on primary school pupils' literacy and numeracy skills mastery. Findings of these studies confirmed that mother tongues played significant roles in education and development of children.

Studies of Araromi (2005), Austin and Simpson (2007), Ball (2010), Atetwe (2013) and Kioko (2015) confirmed endangerment of indigenous language, language decline and language death in Africa. This literature was still insufficient as there is still a sizable gap that has to be addressed through empirical research. Particularly in Kwara State,

Nigeria, where this study was conducted, there is no empirical evidence on teachers' view of the role of indigenous languages for the purpose of preserving culture and enhancing teaching and learning. This is a substantial gap that has to be addressed. Therefore, this study investigated teachers' perception of the role of indigenous languages for culture preservation and improved teaching and learning.

Methodology

Design

The study used the descriptive survey design which deals with present phenomena in terms of conditions, practices, views, beliefs, processes, relationships or trends (Siedlecki, 2020; Voxco, 2021). The design enabled the researchers to systematically collect data and describe the views of respondents.

Population and Sampling

The population comprised of all teachers in both public and private primary schools in Kwara Central Senatorial District, Kwara State, Nigeria. The study was conducted among 10 out of 376 schools in the district. The sample size was made up of 266 out of 5,393 primary school teachers (Kwara State Annual School Census Report, 2019). The respondents were sampled using the simple random sampling techniques. The respondents' ages ranged from 20 to 55.

Research Instruments

The used questionnaire instrument had two parts. The first part was titled 'Teachers' Perception of the Role of Indigenous Languages on Culture Preservation Questionnaire (TPRILCPQ) and the second one was Teachers' Perception of Renaissance of Indigenous Languages on Teaching and Learning Questionnaire (TPRILTLQ). TPRILCPQ was sectioned into A and B. Section A gathered information on demographic data of teachers while section B contained 15 items that elicit information on teachers' view on how indigenous languages can preserve culture. The second part TPRILTLQ was also a 15-item questionnaire. The instrument was structured in four Likert style of Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree.

Validity and Reliability

The instrument was validated for face validity by experts in linguistics and education. The reliability of the instrument was confirmed using test-re-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation. TPRILCPQ

yielded 0.82 while TPRILTLQ yielded 0.80. Therefore the instrument was considered reliable prior to data collection.

Statistical Treatment of Data

Data was analyzed using mean scores and standard deviations. For the two research questions, a weighted mean was used. A negative perception of teachers was indicated if the weighted mean was between 1.00 and 2.49 while a positive perception was indicated if it fell between 2.50 and 4.00.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers presented the letter of introduction from the Department to selected schools. The existing protocols in each of the selected schools was followed to relate with the teachers on the purpose and the conduct of the researchers. The time schedule for appointment in the schools did not affect teaching and learning. Voluntary participation of the respondents was encouraged as respondents were allowed to withdraw their participation at any point of the data collection period. Respondents were also assured that all the

information collected from them would be treated with utmost confidentiality.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the result of the study and discusses the findings in comparison with those from previous studies.

Research Question One: What is teachers' perception of the role of indigenous languages toward culture preservation?

Table 1 shows teachers' perception of renaissance of indigenous languages for culture preservation. The mean score for all the 15 items ranged between 2.50 and 4.00 which means that respondents agreed with all the items and therefore had a positive attitude toward the role of indigenous education toward culture preservation. For instance, they agreed that indigenous languages connect pupils with the practice of their community, connect them with their values and customs, motivate pupils to learn songs and stories in their native language, make children understand their history, serve as ties between children and their environment and make them appreciate their native way of dressing.

Table 1: Teachers' Perception of Renaissance of Indigenous Languages on Culture Preservation

SN		Mean	SD
	Revitalizing indigenous languages will:		
1	Indigenous languages connect pupils with the practice of their community	3.51	0.59
2	Indigenous languages connect them with their values and customs	3.50	0.52
3	Indigenous languages motivate the learning songs and stories in native language	3.55	0.61
4	Indigenous languages make children understand their history	3.44	0.65
5	Indigenous languages serve as ties between children and their environment	3.34	0.63
6	Indigenous languages make them appreciate their native way of dressing	3.38	0.64
7	Indigenous languages build pupils' strong and respectful relationships with culture	3.44	0.66
8	Indigenous languages make pupils get excited to explore their natural environment	3.32	0.62
9	Indigenous languages make children linguistically competent	3.33	0.70
10	Indigenous languages connect children to their elderly ones	3.29	0.65
11	Indigenous languages help children learn about local food and like them	3.35	0.69
12	Indigenous languages make children to respect elders	3.56	0.59
13	Indigenous languages make children love their community	3.44	3.57
14	Indigenous languages encourage interest in community development	3.45	0.62
15	Indigenous languages make children to be proud of their culture	3.50	0.65
	Weighted Mean	3.43	

They also agreed that indigenous languages build pupils' strong and respectful relationships to their culture, make pupils get excited to explore their natural environment, make children linguistically competent, connect children to their elderly ones, help children learn about local food and like them and help children learn about local food and like them. Finally, they agreed that the languages make

children to respect elders, make children love their community, encourage children to have interest in community development and make children to be proud of their culture. Therefore, teachers had positive attitudes toward the power of indigenous languages.

These findings corroborated Batibo (2005) who submitted that the transmission of cultural

knowledge in most African societies is done through various forms of oral folklore like narration of stories, fables, proverbs, idioms, sayings, riddles and songs, which are all delivered using indigenous languages. The study also is in support of the idea of Austin and Simpson (2007) that culture entails the beliefs and practices governing the life of a society for which a particular language is the vehicle of expression. Furthermore, the findings agree with Obiero (2008) and Osborn's (2010) assertion that indigenous languages give a good opportunity to better understand one's history and to gain an understanding of the indigenous heritage and culture. The results confirm previous studies' claim that the importance of indigenous languages cannot be undervalued as it facilitates the transmission of culture like a vehicle through which cultural experiences are accumulated, stored and passed on from one generation to another.

Research Question Two: What is teachers' perception of the role of indigenous languages toward improved teaching and learning?

Table 2 shows teachers' perception of the role of indigenous languages toward improved teaching and learning. The mean score for all the 15 items ranged between 2.50 and 4.00 which means that respondents agreed with all the items and therefore had a positive attitude toward the role of indigenous languages toward improved teaching and learning. For instance, they agreed that indigenous languages increase the rate of assimilation in pupils, sustain pupils' interest, make learning more meaningful to pupils, facilitate better pupils' participation during classroom teaching, increase school enrolment and encourage good interaction among pupils.

Table 2: Teachers' Perception of Role of Indigenous Languages in Improving Teaching and Learning

SN		Mean	SD
Using indigenous languages to teach			
1	Indigenous languages increase the rate of assimilation in pupils	3.54	0.62
2	Indigenous languages sustain pupils' interest	3.35	0.57
3	Indigenous languages make learning more meaningful to pupils	3.56	2.62
4	Indigenous languages facilitate better participation during classroom teaching	3.38	0.71
5	Indigenous languages increase school enrolment	3.18	0.70
6	Indigenous languages encourage good interaction among pupils	3.46	0.72
7	Indigenous language reduces drop-out.	3.33	0.78
8	Indigenous languages make learning permanent.	3.45	0.62
9	Indigenous languages encourage regular school attendance.	3.34	0.63
10	Indigenous languages support the development of reading skill.	3.36	0.63
11	Indigenous languages causes acquiring of appropriate habits, attitude and skills.	3.39	0.64
12	Indigenous languages encourage pupils' better attitude to learning.	3.27	0.69
13	Indigenous languages make the class teaching interesting	3.52	0.66
14	Indigenous languages allow parents' involvement in their children's education.	3.30	0.68
15	Indigenous languages give children a clear understanding of the content.	3.41	0.66
Weighted Mean		3.39	

They also agreed that indigenous languages reduces drop-out, make learning permanent in pupils, make learning permanent, encourage regular school attendance, support the development of reading skill, make children acquire a great deal of habits, attitude and skills better, encourage pupils' better attitude to learning, make the class teaching interesting, allow parents' involvement in their children's education and give children a clear understanding of the content. Therefore, teachers had positive attitudes toward the role of indigenous languages toward improved teaching and learning. The results are in line with Fafunwa (1978) and Obanya (2004) who concluded that mother tongues, if given the right impetus go a long way in enhancing

children's performance. Furthermore, the results are in consonance with Araromi (2005), Benson and Kosonen (2013) and Yiakoumetti (2012) who in their studies confirmed the power of indigenous languages towards effective learning. On the other hand, Fafunwa (1978) revealed that children who received basic education in their own language performed better than those educated in foreign languages. Therefore, the findings of this study are deeply grounded in the findings of previous studies.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It is concluded that teachers considered indigenous languages as a powerful tool for culture preservation. They also held the view that

indigenous languages support the effective teaching and learning as when the indigenous languages are used in teaching and learning, learners are more likely to have a better and deeper understanding of what is taught than when foreign languages are used in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, indigenous languages preserves culture and supports effective learning.

Based on these findings, the study recommend that stakeholders need to encourage and support the usage of indigenous languages in Nigeria for the sake of culture preservation and effective learning in schools. Parents and other adults in the country should strengthen the use of indigenous languages at home places for culture preservation and effective learning in schools to be realized. Finally, the government should put in place mechanisms that would enforce language policy guidelines that favor the use of indigenous languages in school settings.

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