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The National Language Policy and the Demands of Indigenous Language Literacy in Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper examines the Nigerian National Language Policy and its impact so far on indigenous languages. Using the critical stage language acquisition hypothesis, the paper observes that children are exposed to indigenous languages at a much later age than the national language policy demands, thereby resulting in children's incompetence in their mother tongue or indigenous language of their immediate environment. A child brought up under a condition where acquiring an indigenous language is an exception to a rule – cannot transmit the indigenous language to the next generation. That is a critical source of indigenous language endangerment, attrition, shift, and ultimately, death. Our paper, divided into five parts, examines the concept of language policy and planning, a short history of the government's interest in indigenous languages, the question of indigenous language death, and the importance of indigenous languages as national languages. The fifth part of this paper examines what it means to develop indigenous language literacy. Under this last part, we examine eight demands namely numeracy, robust learning resources, motivation, and the mass media. Other demands are information communication technology (ICT), the role of linguists and language teachers, the gatekeepers and regulators of language, and a group of three important factors, namely the non-governmental organizations, the diaspora, and lifelong learning strategies. This study adds to the pool of resources on ways to revitalize an endangered language – a burning issue in the local and international spheres.

Keywords: Language Policy, Indigenous Languages, Language Endangerment

I. Introduction

By language, we mean the verbal structures we use to convey meaning. We can also describelanguage as the various communication forms like listening, speaking, reading, writing andvisual communications such as the sign language. Language may be used to describe a specificcode especially verbal or code used by a particular group of speakers. That is why today we use the term "Igbo language", "Yoruba language", "English language", etc. Language literacy is the development of a learner's ability to understand and use both spoken and written language as an integral part of learning in all areas: communication, sharing and expressing feelings, and giving and obtaining information. This also involves the ability to understand ideas and develop thoughts. This paper examines the demands of literacy in an indigenous language, taking our bearing from theories of language, language policy and planning, and other burning issues on indigenous language literacy. In the end, we proffer strategies for improving indigenous language literacy in a language like Igbo.

Theoretical Framework

We find the Critical Stage Hypothesis very relevant in our discussion in this paper. A critical stage is a threshold in first language acquisition that forecloses the ease and success of acquiring language like the native speaker. A critical stage in language acquisition does not preclude a learning disability; it implies that the ability of a person to acquire a first language and use it like a native speaker is highly limited at this stage. The critical stage is like a language acquisition border, a

crossover that determines a person's ease and ability to acquire a language and use it as a native speaker. A child that does not acquire a native language before this stage will not be able to acquire it as naturally as a mother tongue learner, and will not be able to use it with the grammatical, phonological and lexical competencies of a mother tongue speaker, Thus, the critical stage is a maturation stage in the human lifespan during which the sensitive part of the brain: the left hemisphere is more open to language acquisition than any time later. Although there is much debate on the specific age that may be ascribed to this period, the ability to acquire language is biologically linked to age. This theory was first introduced in the works of neurolinguists Wilder Penfield and Lamar Roberts (1959) and was adopted by Erich Lenneberg (1960) who proffers the critical age to be around age 13. Noam Chomsky advanced this study by postulating theLanguage Acquisition Device (LAD). The critical age hypothesis postulates that the age of language acquisition is an important factor in ultimate competence. The older one gets, the lower the odds of reaching fluency like the native speaker.In this paper, we find the critical age hypothesis crucial in our discussion of mother tongue and indigenous language development: a child who is not adequately exposed to a mother tongue will not be able to use the language like a native speaker. Similarly, the child will not be able to use English as a native speaker. The hypothesis is significant in the prospect of survival, endangerment or death, of an indigenous language.

Language Policy and Planning

Policy is a plan of action that concisely expresses the aims, ideas, and objectives of a recognized body, whether a political party, business company, government or a multinational company. To this end, language policy is a formal decision often by the government over language matters, ranging from recognition of a particular language a national, regional or official language to offering the necessary support to enable the fruition of the policy. When a government takes a genuine interest in languages spoken within its borders and influences the way the language is used, rules are drawn, and the desired goals are achieved. Crystal (1990) views language policy as a systematic effort to resolve the communicative problems of a region, which can be highly facilitated through the collation and study of the various dialects within that language, as well as the collection and study of different languages within the said region. It is important to note that although a policy does not necessarily seek the death of a language or dialect, such policy or even the behaviours of speakers of a language could result in language attrition, language shift and ultimately, language death.

Nigeria has well over 500 languages spoken within its borders, and being once a British colony adopted the language of the colonists as its official language. Arising from a necessity to build up a cohesive government within the Nigerian borders, the colonists prescribed English as an official language. This was not a policy per se rather it was a convenient strategy, albeit an ad ho one, to create an interactive communicative homogeneity that would make administration much easier. However, British strategies - what we may loosely call the British language policy in Nigeria are not the same in the two geographical regions of northern and southern Nigeria.

Language policy is a deliberate activity which is done through legislation to cultivate the necessary linguistic skills that would meet national priorities on the one hand, and establish the rights of groups to maintain their languages, on the other hand. A government policy on language is often followed by instrumental supports enabled by the government across the various levels and arms of the bureaucracy: local government, state, and federal levels, as well as the various institutions that must give the policy the necessary life and legitimacy, namely, the educational, religious, judicious, legislative, social and economic, to mention a few. Against this background, an inclusive language policy seeks to understand the available languages and dialects to determine how best to use each for a specified function.

To plan a language refers to deliberate efforts to influence the linguistic behaviour of speakers within a region in matters of language acquisition, structure, and variety that are deemed appropriate within a speech community. Also known as language engineering, language planning may be undertaken by the central government, state government, non-governmental agencies, or even individuals. The three major dimensions of language planning are (a) corpus planning (b) status planning and (c) language acquisition planning. Corpus planning focuses on linguistic norms such as codification, grammar and spelling. In corpus planning, there is sometimes a regulatory body that creates standards in spelling, grammar, and lexicography or the creation of dictionaries and reading materials in literature. The interest of status planning on the other hand is on the choice of language or dialect to be made, and the political implications of choices made. Finally, language

acquisition planning describes the efforts to influence the way language is learned, such as concentrating on an endangered language to ensure its survival. Language planning considers both the instrumental and symbolic roles of language among language users.

The National Policy on Education recognizes the importance of language as a means of promoting social interaction and national cohesion and preserving cultures. The policy recommends that every child shall learn the language of the immediate environment; and that in the interest of national unity, every child shall learn any of the three Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Further, the policy states that it is desirable for every Nigerian to speak French for a smooth interaction with our neighbours hence French shall be compulsory in primary and junior secondary schools.

A Short History of Government's Interest in Nigerian Languages

The 1882 Education Ordinance was promulgated by the British administrators for the Gold Coast (Ghana) and Lagos (Nigeria) colonies of Britain. The next twelve years witnessed the establishment of Accra, Ghana as its headquarters. In the British 1882 Education Ordinance, English was made the language of instruction in schools. This was however disputed seriously during the nationalist movement, as an example from a newspaper tabloid, Lagos Times of August 9th 1882 indicated. However, not everyone liked the prospect of products from such a "'vernacularized" model of education in an era when the elites thought that such a system of education was unsatisfactory to the needs of modelling after the English administrators of the time. Nevertheless, the 1887 Education Ordinance recognized the use of Nigerian languages in schools. In the year 1947, Sir Richard's constitution emphasized the official status of the English language in Nigeria. Seven years later in 1954, the constitution recognized once again the official cum national status of the English language and this time, the domestic statuses of regional languages. Meanwhile, the Hausa language was encouraged and promoted as lingua franca in northern Nigeria, resulting in a language shift amongst other language groups in that region. The British administrators who used indirect rule in the northern region did not encourage the use of the English language amongst the people in the northern region, unlike in the southern region where the use of English was encouraged. Generally, knowing the local language was viewed as important to understanding the way of life of the locals, but in the north, it was viewed as paramount for British administrators themselves to study the Hausa language for effective administration, otherwise called indirect rule. Many writers have observed that the multiplicity of regional languages in southern Nigeria was because the south refused to do what the northern region did: promote only one language (in this case, Hausa) and provide the necessary grounds for language shift, and consequently, language death for many of these languages (Shaibu, 2013). The result of this was that the Hausa language has remained a regional language, mother tongue, and lingua franca for most of the northern region whereas the multiplicity of languages has persisted in the south. It is believed that the southern region has complicated the plurilingual challenge, by joining the linguistic minorities in the Middle Belt to argue that English rather than one indigenous language should remain the nation's official language.

The role of English as a linguistically unifying force among the numerous ethnic groups in Nigeria cannot be ignored. Indeed the most available means for interaction and communication amongst otherwise linguistically diverse groups is English and the pidgin. In the works of Jowitt (1991) the writer identified five shared roles of the English language and indigenous languages in Nigeria namely, official, educational, mass media religious observance, and interpersonal relations. English remains the language of the elite and is seen as the only means of achieving social mobility. Speaking about the role of English in his country South Africa, Kamwanagamalu (2003) states that the language "qualifies as the language of learning, without which one can do nothing, cannot get a job, and cannot succeed in life" (Kamwanagamalu, 2003: 236). However, it has been observed that very few nations can advance technologically to a first-class rank if it depends on a foreign language. Countries like Japan, China, Israel and England are where they are probably because of their highly advanced literacy policy which encouraged the development of their indigenous languages. Therefore, the need for a homegrown policy that fosters the survival, growth and development of our indigenous languages, cannot be overemphasized.

In March 1977, a Federal Government white paper titled "National Policy on Education" (NPE) was developed from the 1969 National Curriculum Conference. NPE served as a guide for all the levels of education in the country hence it was termed the first formal document on language and education produced by the Federal Republic of

Nigeria. The NPE has undergone several editions since its first publication: 1981; 1998; 2004; and 2013 editions. This policy stipulated the vital role of indigenous languages and the importance of studying them in schools, with an instruction that one out of these three Nigerian languages should be given prominence in schools: Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, as well as an indigenous language of an environment where a child is being raised. Throughout the history of language development in Nigeria, beginning from 1882 until 1977, different terminologies were used to define the various interests of government in education and language: Ordinance, Code, Policy, and Planning. Meanwhile, linguists have continued to criticize the 1977 language policy, with the claims that neither does Nigeria have a well-articulated and explicit national language policy, nor is this policy contained in a single document (Emenanjo, 1998; Mba, 2012). For example, the claim of unavailability of enough teachers notwithstanding, a government that positions itself strategically in the globalized network system cannot do without a properly guided language policy and planning, supervised by experts, with the needs of most speakers put into consideration.

If Nigeria has over 500 languages spoken within its borders, then, Nigeria has the potential of training over 500 groups of language educators to initiate the literacy of speakers within the borders. For now, the policy does not support this. Contrariwise, for Nigeria to choose only three out of these 500 languages has been described as morally insensitive to natural law and justice, and evidence of linguicism in broad daylight. As questions continue to be asked: why should Nigeria force speakers outside the "big three" to learn any of these three languages at the expense of their respective languages, however tiny the minority languages may be?

The Ife Project in Nigeria as well as the Mother Tongue project in Niger Republic demonstrated the importance of adopting the mother tongue in the education system of Nigeria. The Ife Primary Education Research Project, also known as the Six-Year Primary Project, was a significant initiative in Nigeria during the 1960s. Its objective was to improve primary education by using the mother tongue (Yoruba) as the medium of instruction. Historically, Nigeria's primary education system primarily used English, but this approach faced challenges such as low student retention rates and limited understanding due to language barriers. The Ife project involved planning, organizing, and implementing mother-tongue education, aiming to enhance students' understanding, cognitive development, and overall learning experience. Despite challenges, the project contributed to discussions about language policy, education, and cultural identity in Nigeria, emphasizing context-specific approaches to teaching and learning.

As the Ife experiment proved, those who had their primary education in their mother tongue (MT; and by this, we mean the language of a child's immediate environment) performed better in school than those who were taught in English. The MT learners achieved numeracy, technical skills, manipulative ability, manual dexterity and mechanical comprehension faster than their counterparts, and proved to be more resourceful over the years than the other group. Similarly, the MT group proved to exhibit more maturity and tolerance and tended to integrate easily with people.

Indigenous Language Death

Languages die, not because all the speakers have been killed through genocide, but rather because speakers have been absorbed by a dominant language or cultural group. David Crystal (2000) puts it nicely in the following words below:

To say that a language is dead is like saying that a person is dead. It could be no
other way - for languages have no existence without people (Crystal, 2000: 1).

A language may begin to die in the face of coercion (whether covert or overt) upon speakers of that language to drop their language and learn or use another until there is no living speaker of such a language. Under this context, we can rightly say that language dies because the government of the day has decided it should. A good example is the Hawaiian language which was generally spoken in Hawaii until 1898 when the United States annexed the Islands. Before this time, Hawaiian had been adopted into a written form and was used as the official language of government. After 1898, there were fewer native speakers until the 1980s when a group of professors at the University of Hawaii started the reclamation and revival efforts. Consequently, a preschool was set up where elderly Hawaiian speakers taught the language to the children. On a slow, incremental basis, new grades were added each year until the project achieved an education system, from preschool to high school where Hawaiian is the primary language of instruction. As rightly pointed out by Ibekwe (2006) the consequence of the use of English amongst Igbo people implies the loss of indigenous and native

language skills, with a paradoxical lack of full mastery of English. On the other hand, people who seek to retain and recover their language, are also seeking, according to Zuckerman and others (2014) to recover, improve and empower their cultural autonomy, spiritual and intellectual sovereignty, and overall well-being. To these writers, there are several benefits associated with language recovery which include historical justice, diversity, and employability. Although the last of the above three benefits, employability, may be said to be more readily enjoyed by English and French language majors (those who studied English and French) rather than those who studied Nigerian languages in the tertiary, we can rightly assert that graduates in Igbo and other Nigerian languages who have successfully acquired the necessary literacy in an indigenous language, are also gainfully employed in the different works of life, as stability or crisis in Nigerian economy including job recruitment, allows. Despite the acclaimed importance of French as a general studies course in Nigerian tertiary education (Ezeodili and Ezeafulukwe, 2016) a critic like H.Q. Evans (1972) had earlier questioned the necessity of studying the language as a compulsory subject in Nigerian education. According to Evans (1972), French is not necessary for everybody because it belongs to some regions of West Africa who use it, temporarily as their official language. While we find ourselves under this situation of persistent European linguistic imperialism in Nigeria, another curious development has emerged: the recent inclusion of Arabic language as à OST course, whether compulsory or optional in Nigerian tertiary education (Blueprint, 2017 and BBC, 2018). Running almost concurrently was the alleged mandatory testing in Arabic language literacy as a condition for recruitment in the Nigerian military and paramilitary, which received such public opprobrium that eventually necessitated an explanation from the JAMB and National Universities Commission (Vanguard 2018; Daily Post, 2018; Premium Times, 2018 and News Flash, 2018).

Concerned about these recent developments, questions that face Nigerians are: how many *foreign languages* should this country use the tax-payers money to encourage, and to what extent does the acquisition of these languages add value to the already existing National Language Policy especially the question of indigenous language development?

To H.G. Evans (1972), Arabic may be necessary for the Moslem areas but not for everybody in Nigeria. When this inexplicable decision is considered against the backdrop of the recent Iranian policy that bans the teaching of English in primary schools across Iran (BBC News, 2018), suspicions are rife that there might be a salient plan to systematically build up the literacy level of Arabic language while de-emphasizing the use of European languages like English and French in Nigeria. In the end, our indigenous languages suffer, and our country vacillates from one imperialist power to another.

In a democratic dispensation, a policy is not a decree hence it must bear the interest of the people in mind. Because of the emotive position of language amongst speakers, a policy should seek to use language for integration, not disintegration; inclusion, not exclusion, in the interest of positivenationhood that upholds the dignity of the citizens. It is expected at this stage in our history that our heavy dependence on foreign languages should be waning; unfortunately, we are accentuating the foreign language burden and shoving our indigenous languages into dormancy, attrition and death. A dying language is a moribund or dormant language; it is a language which is no longer being learned as a mother tongue by children. This is the obvious situation in many Nigerian families including the Igbo.

Importance of Indigenous Languagesas National Languages

An indigenous language, otherwise called autochthonous language is a native language of the indigenous people of that region. By implication, such a language must have people that use it as their mother tongue within that region. Although all indigenous languages may not have the status of a national language, it is from indigenous languages that a country selects its national languages. This was the situation with the 1981 Nigerian National Policy on language and education, which stipulated the teaching and learning of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba out of over 520 indigenous languages in Nigeria, many of which are dying on a regular and steady basis. The vulnerability of most indigenous languages to the threats posed by a foreign language has been documented in the literature (Alebiosu, 2016 and Aito, 2005). What has not often been given full attention, in the case of Nigerian languages, are the systematic complicities of speakers of these languages in facilitating the death of their languages. Indeed, it is often stated that these speakers do not use their languages as often as required hence the need for closer attention to the

discreet attitudes of speakers that precipitate language shift. Suffice us to note however, that the ability of a language to withstand the tensions of imperialism and language shift or language death is predicated upon deliberate actions and policies, as well as the people's attitude to their language - an attitude that may lead to the "natural loss" of language as an *organic* structure.

Language is an organic structure, and may sometimes go the way of many organic structures: death. To use the term organic (O'Conner and Kellerman, 2016) means that a language does not exist outside of human speakers; important roles of the human speakers lie in the development, preservation and transmission of this language to the next generation. Only humans, not animals, can construct language hence it is claimed that the ability to acquire, learn and use language is wired into the human DNA. Developing a language includes responding to the needs of the times in areas of vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar even as linguists recognize that there is an underlying structure to language that does not change. Importantly, an organic structure is characterized by flexibility and the ability to adapt well to changes. Writing on language as an organic species, Michael Krauss (1992) describes language endangerment as comparable to the endangerment of biological species in the natural world. An endangered language is a language that faces imminent death.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People including language rights took effect on September 13, 2017. Political, economic and cultural circumstances could lead to language death, which can occur more quickly than previously thought. It is only in the past few years that attention has been focused on the study of contracting or dying languages. It is claimed that UNESCO predicts that by 2025, the Igbo language will be dead. A dead language means a language that has lost all of its native speakers. A native speaker is a person who uses à particular language as a first language, in which case their linguistic competence is unquestionable. The implication of the language death of Igbo by the year 2025 is that there will likely be no younger ones who acquire the Igbo language as their first language. Translated in another way, by 2025, all children born of Igbo parentage would start their first words in English while still at home. Then they wouldenter the preprimary schools where every verbal exchange would be in English. Ultimately, by 2025 Igbo children wouldgrow up as adults who have lived in Igbo land, but who are grappling and stumbling with the grammar, phonetics and vocabulary of Igbo, right on Igbo soil.

Thus, the present generation of Igbo speakers are still alive and can speak, read, and write Igbo like competent owners of the language, they might well be the last native usersof Igbo since younger ones are acquiring English (even if not competent in the language) as their first language instead of Igbo. To reverse the trend,there is a moral obligation to transmit this language to every Igbo child and to facilitate its growth beyond the borders of Igbo land.

A language that has survived several centuries must have speakers that add value to it: children and adults who use it in their daily communication. A resilient language is a language that adds value to speakers of a language hence they desire to learn it; or must have speakers who are coerced by policies and incentives to learn and use the language. Very importantly in this millennium, for a language to survive, it should not only have vibrant native speakers of all ages; the native speakers must also be literate in their language. Native speakers often acquire the language as their *mother tongue* and as their *firstlanguage.* The imminent endangerment and subsequent death of language begins when children are no longer acquiring a particular language as native speakers, hence the submission of Michael Krauss that "*...languages no longer being learned as mother-tongue by children are beyond mere endangerment, for, unless the course is somehow dramatically reversed, they are already doomed to extinction, like species lacking reproductive capacity" (Krauss, 1992:4).*

The Demands of Indigenous Language Literacy

Indigenous language literacy as used here captures the strategies employed in the revival, revitalization and reversal of a language. In an attempt to capture the three sub-categories they find most interesting, Paulson and others (1998; 2010) have used the term regenesis to describe the efforts to revive, revitalize, and reverse a threatened language. Literacy is the ability to read and use written information. It includes the capacity to contextualize writing acceptably, paying close attention to the rules of a language. Indeed, speaking and writing a language does not make us literate, rather we should be able to synthesize our thoughts meaningfully in that language, hence we use the term functional literacy. Functional literacy combines the following traditional literacy skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing and critical thinking. Functional literacy affords humans the

ability to communicate effectively with one another through the integration of traditional skills. It involves the ability to identify, understand, interpret and create. It also involves the capacity to communicate and compute with the aid of various types of written and printed materials. Indigenous language literacy as used here captures the strategies employed in the revival, revitalization and reversal of language. Literacy is a continuous learning process, which on an incremental basis enables humans to develop their potential to fully participate within their immediate community and beyond. An inability to possess these skills is illiteracy, otherwise called *analphabetism*. Though this terminology sounds simplistic to qualify this morbid deficit, analphabetism is used nevertheless to describe the inability to identify, understand, interpret create and recreate. Analphabetism also captures the inability to use printed and written materials to communicate and compute in various contexts.

Indeed, literacy possesses the multiplier effect that empowers people and enables their full participation in ways that not only improve their livelihoods but also contribute to the development of their society. A literate person assists in greater ways in the labour market, improved health and nutrition both for adults and children, reduction of poverty, and expansion of life opportunities. That is why literacy has gone beyond its traditional definition, to include the capacity to identify, understand, interpret, create and communicate in an ever-increasing globalized world where information is rich and ever-changing. With over 750 million adults and youth still shrouded by analphabetism, a large percentage of the world a grossly excluded from full participation in both their immediate communities and the global community. As part of the global agenda to fight illiteracy, UNESCO adopts certain strategies to advance lifelong learning in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. These include building a strong foundation in early childhood, providing quality basic education for all children, scaling up functional literacy levels for youth and adults who lack basic literacy skills, and developing literate environments.With the right learning environment, every human can learn or acquire several languages exposed to them. Below, we examine the strategies that may be applied to indigenous language literacy in general and Igbo literacy in particular.

Numeracy

Numeracy involves the application of mathematical skills to critically absorb, use and evaluate information. This involves the use of basic number skills, spatial and graphical concepts, as well as the use of measurement and problem-solving instruments. When extracting mathematical information from written text, numeracy and literacy must be involved. To meet the general demands of day-to-day life at home, work and in the general society, numeracy skills are involved. Numeracy skill thus includes the ability to express ideas and situations through the use of numerical and mathematical information. The term mathematical literacy may also be used to describe numeracy and literacy. To effectively function fully in modern life, the ability to reason with numbers and other mathematical concepts and apply these in a range of contexts to solve a variety of problems is of paramount importance. It is the general belief that indigenous languages cannot express abstract ideas hence they are said to be incomplete and therefore inappropriate to be used as languages of instruction in school. However, every language has the capacity for growth, with the determination of its owners. An incomplete language is a language that is not creative and imaginative, and that cannot be used 1o explore the environment and the world around. It is doubtful how many Igbo adults that can count the Igbo numerals up to one hundred, without faltering. The inability of children and adults to apply mathematical skills in their language is a pointer to the realities of language attrition and death

Robust Learning Resources

A brief visit to publishing houses in Nigeria will shock a concerned indigenous language enthusiast. For example, most famous publishing houses no longer accept to publish books in Igbo, Yorubaand many other Nigerian languages because, according to them, nobody buys them. This directly affects the quality of libraries in institutions that teach indigenous languages. The reading culture among adults and children is abysmally low, especially in this era of ICT. For Igbo, Yoruba and many indigenous language learners, the situation is critical. Whereas pre-nursery and kindergarten books on the English language contain attractive prints and pictures that encourage a reading culture, reading materials in indigenous languages sometimes appear hastily put together and of very poor quality, sometimes due to poor funding. At the tertiary level, students who are asked to read books and turn in their assignments are also expected to look away from their cellphones to read a few novelettes within the semester. It is often a difficult option. Although the challenges of regaining a

reading culture amongst today's learners are indeed onerous, these challenges appear more critical for indigenous language learners. Thus, few publishers are willing to take the chance of producing works that would hardly be patronized unless a writer is ready to bear the full cost of such publication. This poor interest is also a challenge to publishing dictionaries and books onmetalanguage in these languages.

Motivation

To a very large extent, the survival or death of a people's indigenous language is in their hands. Motivation is the push, the drive, and the reason for people's actions. It is an incentive, whether financial, moral, coercive, or intrinsic desire that inspires a person to move forward. Not all incentives are physically or materially quantifiable hence we say that a moral or intrinsic push is not measurable on a short-term scale. The story trailing the revival of Hebrew as a national and official language of Israel is clear evidence of conviction, dexterity and sacrifice amongst the people; originated by Eleazer Ben Yahudaand who raised his children to become the first native speakers of Hebrew. This was after over 1,700 years of Israel's exile from their homeland. The incentive to revive Hebrew was borne out of patriotism and nationalism by the Jewish returnees (including Yahuda himself after over a thousand years of dispersal all over the world. Only when the owners of the language, not outsiders appreciate the moral and intrinsic incentives that accrue in salvaging their language from imminent death would a language project witness full-scale progress. It is hoped that sufficient focus will be put on the danger currently facing Igbo (especially) and other indigenous Nigerian languages to stem the tide of critical endangerment facing them, because if the Igbo as a group continues to treat the issue of their endangered language with levity, that macabre prediction of UNESCO may likely become a reality much earlier than predicted.

The Mass Media

The people's reading culture is poor not only in Igbo books but in newspapers. During her tenure as Director General of the Igbo Language Development Center in Imo State, the lead author started publishing a newspaper called *Igbo Ekulie*. Interestingly, despite the beautiful headlines and attractive pictures, very few Igbo people were willing to buy a copy. In the end, the Centre devised a strategy of distributing the newspapers free of charge to all the government ministries, and parastatals as well as to private bureaus in the state. Free copies were also distributed to vendors who gave them out to their customers as incentives after purchasing three or more English newspapers. In the end, the project could not be sustained due to lack of funding. Indeed the Igbo people's interest in Igbo newspapers has never been very encouraging in history despite their wide readership of newspapers published in English. Radio and TV programmes have been more successful than newspapers, and although radio and TV support listening skills and improve speaking ability, they are not adequate instructional materials for the skills of reading and writing a language.

There is also the need to mention the prevalence of supplementary-reading materials such as brochures, pamphlets, billboards, posters and fliers, all of which are printed in English even though most of them are being addressed to Igbo audiences, Brochures of cultural events like funerals, new yam festivals, coronations - all are written in English in Igbo region, for an audience that is largely Igbo. I have often heard the explanation that these brochures including funeral orations are published in English to "accommodate" guests who are non-Igbo.

ICT

Internet technology and the use of computers are very important areas that must be incorporated into the learning experience if an indigenous language will stand the test of time in the fast-moving global world. This is very easy to achieve if a language teacher is also ICT compliant and if there are adequate provisions for this in a classroom situation. The use ofaudio-visuals and PowerPoint technology in the teaching of Nigerian languages should be encouraged among teachers, right from a child's early years. Especially for more mature classes, the internet is a fertile ground for sourcing ideas, doing homework and developing new concepts in these languages. The recent introduction of Igbo BBC, Yoruba BBC etc. is a commendable effort; however, patronage is still very low, and at a stage, there were appeals for the target audience to tune into the website toincrease clientele-traffic and prevent a shutdown by the sponsors. If carefully handled, the youths' addiction to the internet could be transformed into a pleasant learning forum where students would apply discourse in Igbo and other Nigerian languages to a wide range of skills.

Linguists and Language Teachers

The role of linguistics in the entire language planning and execution cannot be overemphasized. As the scientific study of language, linguisticsis the storehouse that generates the knowledge base, which is transferred as an instrument for the indigenous language educator, government and stakeholders. A linguist studies every aspect of language, ranging from vocabulary to grammar to phonology. A certificate or degree in language education (Igbo/Education or Yoruba/Education, for instance) often requires that a student also offer several courses in the department of linguistics. Courses like psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, dialectology, sociolinguistics, and comparative linguistics, to mention a few, shall be of immense helpwhen the language student eventually takes over the classroom after studies. For instance, a good understanding of psycholinguistics enables a teacher tobetter understand the psychological and neurobiological factors that enable first language acquisition, the concept of critical age hypothesis, and communication disorders resulting from brain damage(aphasia). Similarly, an indigenous language teacher who has undergone sufficient training in psycholinguistics understands how very important it is for a child to start its first speech in the mother tongue, how bilingualism involving a child's mother tongue and a second language is crucial for a child's socio-economic survival, how poor attention of stakeholders to the critical stage of language acquisition impedes competence in a child's mother tongue, etc.

An indigenous language teacher is also expected to have appreciable training in applied linguistics, to be exposed to theories of second language acquisition, to better come to grips with the challenges of Igbo as a second language to non-Igbo learners as well as to Igbo learners - adult and children alike. It is interesting to note that amongst all skills known to humans, language is one of the few skills for which humans already possess the inborn equipment or capacity to acquire or learn. With the right learning environment, every human can learn or acquire several languages exposed to them. Most importantly, an Igbo teacher is expected to be as competent as the native speaker, to possess impeccable knowledge in all aspects of Igbo: grammar, literature, and culture; and to be involved in regular learning through seminars, workshops and self-motivated studies, for efficiency and currency.

The Gate-Keepers and Regulators of Language

A general understanding of the gatekeeper is a person that controls access to something. In the late 20th century, this word came to be used for persons who determine what type of information should be disseminated by a mass medium. Sometimes people regard the job of the gatekeeper as too stifling to the individual right to freedom of expression and freedom to disseminate information for public consumption. We findGilmetdinova's (2016) use of the term “gatekeeper” to be more appropriate for the present paper. the writers used this term to qualify the actions of statutory officials (in this case, school principals) in the implementation chain of Russia's language policy. According to the author, some drivers of the choices made by the gatekeepers, to enhance or to hinder language development, are influenced by their understanding of the benefits of multilingualism as well by as their understanding of the importance of mother tongue education.

Gatekeepers of indigenous languages are persons whose actions enhance or stifle indigenous language literacy, and these include private and publicschool proprietors and principals, vice-chancellors, and chief executives in the mass media, to mention a few. The consciousness of creating the critical mass for the survival of an indigenous language lies heavily in their hands. Indigenous language gatekeepers also include traditional rulers, women leaders, president-generals, the clergy, and persons in designated authorities who must self-elect to be practical vanguards of indigenous language literacy. The gatekeeper is not necessarily a professional linguist or language educator. The gatekeeper ensures that technical as well as human instruments are utilized, even improvised, throughout the language literacy programme, starting from a child's infancy to adulthood. In this case, a child's parents are gatekeepers of the language and determine a child's early acquisition milestones even before school years.

Similar to the job of language gatekeepers is the job of the indigenous language regulator. Also called a language academy, the language regulator is a body that regulates a language to ensure that it conforms to an acceptable standard. For now, the only notable regulator in Igbo has remainedthe Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC) established by Dr. Frederick C. Ogbaluin 1948 and functional until he died in 1990. SPILC facilitated the creation of standard Igbo (*Igbo Izugbe*), the reformation of autography in the 1950s, and the awareness of this language within and outside Igboland (Ogbonnaya, 2017). These efforts helped to arouse a wide level of consciousness

about Igbo as a major linguistic group in Nigeria. F.C. Ogbalu organized seminars in Igbo, led delegations to tertiary institutions for the establishment of Igbo departments, ensured the inclusion of Igbo as a WASCE subject in 1978, as well as developed uniform numeracy, technical and scientific terms at the time. During the years of SPILC, there were vibrant publications, refresher courses were conducted for teachers, and institutes in Igbo studies were established while an Igbo dictionary was compiled. The towering presence of SPILC in the affairs of Igbo literacy goes further to demonstrate that the development and revival of the language does not rest on the hands of the federal, state, or local government for that matter.

Sometimes, though, the presence or absence of language regulators may not necessarily be an important determinant in language survival or death. For instance, neither English nor Hausa has a language regulator or academy, yet, one occupies the status of official language in Nigeria while the other is a lingua franca in the northern region and some West African states, respectively. For a threatened language, the need for language regulators is a necessity.

It is unlikely to find an Igbo or Yoruba traditional group that writes minutes of their meetings in these languages; it is also unlikely that there are Igbo or Yorubareleases on notice boards in the palaces of any traditional ruler; it is unlikely also, to find family members who still write letters to one another in indigenous languages in Nigeria. What we continue to witness so far, is the clichéd lamentation about the endangerment and imminent death of these languages - lamentations which are also ironically delivered in English.

NGOs, Diasporas, and Lifelong Learning

These are three more interventions and strategies which add value to indigenous language education and literacy. First, there are not many NGOs whose focus is exclusively on indigenous language literacy. Rather, what we have is a proliferation of cultural associations, festivals and political groups whose interests, though commendable, are limited to the preservation of dying aspects of indigenous cultures. However, a few like the Igbo Development Foundation for Peace, Language and Culture, as well as the Yoruba Academy, an NGO that advocates for safeguarding the Yoruba language, customs, and traditions through collaborations with the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and media empowerment to propagate the richness of the Yoruba languagehave shown promises to fill this gap, but only time will tell. Equally, a fewIgbo and Yoruba diaspora groups have shown remarkable interest in thedevelopment of these languages; unfortunately, their efforts need the integration of qualified manpower and professional expertise.

Finally, literacy is a lifelong exercise that involves continuing education even in the dim years; every Igbo adult is hereby advised to seek Igbo language literacy and to practice writing Igbo. It has been observed that there are often spurts of renewed interest in the revival of indigenous languages amongst educated elites whose disciplinary orientations are in other areas outside of language and linguistics. After retirement, many have settled into a pastime of compiling dictionaries, proverbs, and short stories, setting up local and international NGOs, and organizing yearly presentations “on”but rarely “in” the languages. As we commend these interests, it is necessary to observe, that most of these adult presentations are targeted at adults; the children (including the children of these adult writers/presenters) who must sustain this language to the next generation are often left out. Unfortunately, a language that remains with adults dies with adults.

II. Conclusion

A language policy is a systematic effort facilitated by a government or an organized statutory body to resolve the communicative problems of a region. Nigerian indigenous languages as national languages as specified in the National Language Policy are under increased marginalization as years go by. This paper has attempted to revisit the burning issues of indigenous language literacy, beginning with a cursory survey of the Nigerian language policy and planning, a short history of government interest in indigenous language education, the concept of language death, the importance of indigenous languages as national languages, and finally, the critical areas of intervention that advance indigenous language literacy, otherwise called the demands of indigenous language literacy. Demands include the strategies employed in the revival, revitalization and reversal of a language. Discussed under five rubrics, demands include numeracy, robust learning resources, motivation and the mass media. Other important strategies or demands of indigenous language literacy are ICT, the role of linguists and language teachers, the role of the gatekeepers and regulators, and the tripartite factors of NGOs, the Diasporas, and Lifelong learning experiences.

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