

Development and Sustenance of Indigenous Languages in Nigeria: The Role of Ninlan and Its Library

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Abstract: Nigeria has over 400 indigenous languages, few are developed, some are developing while the majority are not developed. It has been a problem teaching and learning with foreign languages in Nigeria hence the idea of establishing a National Institute for Nigerian Languages to bridge the gap. The institute was established under an Act in 1992 by the Federal Government of Nigeria. Its major mandate is to produce researchers and teachers. The Institute is to serve as a center for the teaching, development, preservation, retrieval, transmission, and utilization of Indigenous Languages and culture to ensure sustenance. This paper is set out to investigate the journey so far, constraints and prospects. This paper will investigate these issues using library information and participatory observation research methods, the study will suggest how the institute library can help to advance and enhance indigenous languages development and sustenance. The study is significant as it will serve as a template for the institute and Federal Government to assess their efforts so far and find avenues for improvement.

Keywords: Development, Sustenance, Indigenous languages, Library

Introduction

National Institute for Nigeria Languages (NINLAN) is one of the strategies the Federal Government of Nigeria embarked upon to improve its educational status. Its establishment can be seen as part of the federal government commitment to build a solid foundation for the realization of the educational and cultural policies of the nation.

One of the major constraints on the implementation of the National Policy of Education 'is the shortage of teachers of Nigeria languages who will help in educating the people in their native languages'. It has been a problem teaching and learning in Nigeria with foreign languages. Even though Colleges of Education and Universities produce such teachers, the number available has continually remained inadequate. It is in an attempt to produce a radical solution to this problem that the federal government of Nigeria announced the establishment of NINLAN in 1992. From the act which was used to establish NINLAN, the main functions are:

- A. To encourage the learning of Nigeria languages in an environment which shall prepare the students;
 - to speak the language fluently and acquire proficiency in teaching of Nigeria languages;
 - to acquire competence in research for problems on teaching Nigeria languages at all levels of education in Nigeria;
 - to award certificates, diplomas and universities degree to qualified students;
 - to adopt the theories and practice of using Nigeria languages into classroom practices especially for secondary schools, colleges, and the teaching and learning for non-native speakers of the Nigeria languages and
 - to stimulate general concepts, practice, and interest in communicating in Nigeria languages.
- B. To develop appropriate curricula to suit the needs of the various users of the institute.
- C. To operate for the benefit of-
 - Primary and secondary school teachers of Nigeria languages.
 - Tertiary educational institutions teachers of Nigeria languages.
 - Government and non-government personnel who are interested in acquiring communication skills in Nigeria languages.
 - Serve as centre for the exchange of information in the study of Nigeria languages and research centre in teaching and learning of Nigeria languages.
 - Compile, assemble and publish the results of researches into Nigeria language studies and make popular those findings where their general recognition, in the opinion of the institute, is of importance to Nigeria languages among others. (NINLAN ACT/Report 1992:5-6)

The establishment of NINLAN brought about an increase in teaching, learning, and research in mostly the three major Nigeria languages.

Workshops and conferences are organized yearly on topical issues that are aimed at strengthening the development and sustenance of the indigenous languages as well as its use in teaching and learning. In 2018 to be precise the Minister of Science and Technology and Minister of Education made declarations that the only way the nation can grow in Science and Technology is to start teaching Science subjects including Mathematics in our indigenous languages. This cry made NINLAN extend its tentacles to National Certificate on Education. They will produce teachers in subjects with a bias on Nigeria languages e.g.

- Mathematics/ Nigeria language
- Biology / Nigeria language
- Business education / Nigeria language
- Early childhood education /Nigeria language
- Christian religious studies /Nigeria language e.t.c.

This programme will take off by 2019/2020 academic session and the certificate to be awarded will be NCE. The plan for the B.ED degrees and diplomas are still on the pipeline, once the approval is received from the regulating bodies the Institute will take off. The acculturation programme organized by NINLAN in three centers across the nation ensure that NCE language students in the three major Nigeria languages in line with indigenous languages provision in education actualizes the mandate as a prerequisite for the award of their certificate. The aim according to Ikonne U.H (2013) is to stimulate (adapt to the cultural norms of host community over their original culture) and integrate (adapt to the cultural norms of the host community over their own) in the culture and languages of the host community.

The conversion programme for university graduates who want to train in Nigeria languages to enable them to teach effectively in their subject area is another NINLAN project. This program is producing some postgraduates in Annang language of Akwa Ibom state and others. NINLAN is doing her best to actualize her mandate which is to bridge the gap that non-use of indigenous languages have created in the educational system of Nigeria but they need to do more. NINLAN library on its part has been making effort to collect, store, preserve and disseminate the indigenous languages materials – primers, textbooks, storybooks and research results that have been produced. To appreciate, this paper better, we will look into situations that will encourage and ensure the development and sustenance of these indigenous languages.

Development and Sustenance of Indigenous Languages

Taking a closer look into Nigeria's linguistic situation, one can observe that there are many languages spoken in the country and this has classified Nigeria as a multilingual and multicultural society. Indigenous languages are those languages spoken by a specific group of people who are born within that environment. It can also be referred to as mother tongue which implies the language, in which a person is born, grows, conduct his/her everyday activities and even dies with it. In Nigeria there are about 400 languages, these languages have received little or no attention due to the preference of foreign languages. This choice has been affecting our educational and social sectors. Today the issue is not just the non-use of the language but their extinction. Many of the languages are dying at an alarm state. Crystal, D (2000) is of the view that the death of any language occurs when there are no more speakers, even if the language is documented and preserved in various forms. According to UNESCO in Johnmary (2012), Igbo language which is a major language spoken by more than 20million people may likely go into extinction by 2025, currently, it is classified as an endangered language.

To access the degree of endangerment of a language, an expert group constituted by UNESCO (2013-2018) identified the following factors;

- Intergenerational language transmission;
- The absolute number of speakers;
- The proportion of speakers within the total population;
- Loss of existing language domain;
- Response to new domains and media;
- Materials for language education and literacy;
- Language attitudes and policies;
- Governmental and Institutional language attitudes, policies, including official language status and use;
- Community members' attitude towards their own language.

From research findings of linguists, the majority of the indigenous languages are endangered. One can be tempted to ask “can anything be done to resuscitate and sustain them from further loss or death?” To answer the question we shall look at the following:

Transmission for Posterity

Balogun (2013) states that language transmission resuscitate and sustain the indigenous languages but the Nigerian people do not take pride in promoting the indigenous languages at home or at school. Crystal (2000) said there should be a concern for the death of these languages for these reasons;

- Languages need diversity;
- Language is an expression of identity;
- Languages are sources of history;
- Languages enrich the knowledge of human being and
- Languages stimulate thoughts.

The other reason why we should care for our languages, develop and sustain them is that they are a distinctive feature of human beings. The absence of language marks the end of human existence and its function are crucial to the existence of human beings hence a language dies when there are no more speakers of that language. To sustain the languages, they should be used at home, in the communities, for teaching and learning, for literary works and in information communication technology.

Research and Documentation

According to Emenanjo . E. N (1999.88) the three major/ National languages (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) have developed standard orthography and tests.

- They serve as regional lingua franca;
- they are studied as subjects in schools;
- they are recognized outside the country and
- they are accepted as a pre-requisite for admission into the tertiary intuition in some field of study.

The developing languages (Edo, Efik, Fulfulde, Isoko, Igala, Izon, Kanuri, Nupe and Tiv) lack the distinctions of the developed languages. They have orthography and few texts but are not recognized nationwide as language for national issues. The rest of the languages are underdeveloped. They are only used among the communities for communication. While all languages are apparently equal, some are more equal than others. Research and documentation should be encouraged to fast track the development of these minor or non-major languages and concrete efforts made to sustain them.

The Role of NINLAN in Development and Sustenance of Indigenous Languages

As the highest institution for the Nigerian language studies and use, National Institute for Nigerian Languages (NINLAN) should;

- Create forums for education on current trends and work out the modalities for the documentation of Nigerian languages;
- Run workshops to demonstrate new technologies in addition to what is currently in practice;
- Set up working groups to develop different areas of Nigerian linguistics, NINLAN should organize workshops on different areas of linguistics and connect both the experts, field workers, and teachers. They should be able to draw up what can be considered as best practices for the linguistic discipline;
- advice government on language issues;
- streamline the tools for language description and documentation as well as supervise their projects;
- harmonize the orthography for Nigerian languages;
- provide a website that can host documentation efforts of Nigerian linguistics ;
- provide facilities for search engine for Nigerian languages;
- collaborate with Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN), Department of linguistic and Nigerian languages, Nigerian Educational Research Development Council (NERDC) and other professional

bodies to develop modalities that can be considered as best practices as it relates development and sustenance of the indigenous language;

- Partner with the media to introduce to the communities the existence and relevance of the orthography in their indigenous language and
- Create awareness on the Mother Language Day which is celebrated annually every 21st February of each year. The reason for this awareness is to make communities participate in the celebration also to enable them to know the usefulness of their languages. It will publicize the activities of NINLAN as well. (Udoh, I. (2017:16), Asuoha, J. (2017:43), Ikoro, F. (2017:245).

NINLAN Library in Development and Sustenance of Indigenous Languages

It is sad to note that most communities do not have their constitution written or documented in their native languages. Nelson Mandela once said in his speech; “if you talk to a man in a language he will understand, that goes to his head if you talk to him in his mothers' language that goes to his heart’. Our mother language should be part of our whole being, developing and sustaining it is a task for everyone. A good response to indigenous languages endangerment is the idea of creating new discipline within linguistics called language documentation. According to Nikolaus (1998:10) the aim of languages documentation is to provide a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices and the characteristics of a given speech community, which differs from language description. To him, languages description is aimed at the record of a language as a system of abstract elements, construction, and rules. Documentation and preservation of languages will not only help the languages from dying but they can help in the retention of their cultural diversity.

The library plays a key role in man’s ability to record his thought, experience, history, culture, and heritage in his language and to make it available to others. During the medieval era, libraries helped a lot in the preservation of knowledge. The written records were originally in different book forms like clay tablets, papyrus roll, and Parliament codex. Ojo-Igbinoba(1995) It is a key function for libraries to preserve knowledge in any format possible. Libraries engaged in collection and preservation of thought, ideas, history, culture and heritage that are recorded using the languages of a people to ensure that such records survive time and age and they are transferred from generation to generation. It is obvious that the library is a language bank.

NINLAN library has made several efforts to preserve some indigenous languages both in written and spoken form. The issue of translating, cataloging, storing and disseminating information in the languages is the bedrock of their services. The scope of NINLAN library collection covers every available work written in or about Nigerian languages. Indigenous languages that have written materials in the library are;

Abua	Gokana	Ika	Kaje	Oduval
Bekwara	Gure	Ikwo	Kambari	Tiv
Berom	Hausa	Isekiri	Kanuri	Urhobo
Bwatiye	Ibibio	Isoko	Manbila	Yaka
Ebira	Idoma	Izi	Mbembe	Yoruba
Edo	Igala	Izon (Ijaw)	Nembe	
Efik	Igede	Jibu	Nigeria Pidgin	
Fulfulde	Igbo	Junkun	Nupe	

(From NINLAN Accession register up to 2019)

The Suggested Role of NINLAN Library

There is a need to encourage indigenous language speakers to produce text in their native language. If textbook, primers, storybooks, operational manual, community constitutions, etc are written and published in indigenous languages and deposited in NINLAN library, it will go a long way in sustaining and ensuring language development in Nigeria. Technologies such as podcast can be used to preserve a spoken language, especially those of the old people who cannot read or write as well as rhymes, legendary tales and community traditions. According to Ikoro (2016: 89) the library can do the following in the development and sustenance of the languages;

- Identifying specific materials that will help the linguists and language developers in preparing orthographies, providing standardization and reference materials for the languages. When a language is standardized, it has achieved its first stage of development so it can be documented and preserved;

- Providing expert knowledge in the content of information resources in the indigenous languages and ability to critically evaluate and filter them before preservation;
- Engaging in active discussion with communities as it concerns the revitalization of historical documentary resources;
- Engaging in interlibrary loan and document delivery services to help language developers;
- Participating in knowledge preservation through ensuring the right of access to, and preservation of physical and digital contents of the languages;
- Participating in literacy and language awareness campaign with media among the communities of language speakers with the aim of sensitizing them on the need to transfer their languages and culture from generation to generation.

Constraints of Indigenous Languages

Lack of Use and Transmission of the Languages

Nigeria indigenous languages lack public image and acceptability. They are not used by their owners. These languages are threatened because parents prefer to communicate with their children in the English language than their mother tongue. Church pastors too prefer preaching in foreign languages to appear classy and well packaged. Ikoro (2017) It is imperative that Nigerians should pass on their languages to their children otherwise the languages will die. most school in Nigeria especially private schools'' prohibited the speaking of indigenous languages. The future generation is denied the opportunity to practice speaking their mother tongue.

Inadequate Vocabulary

Majority of the indigenous languages lack adequate vocabulary. In terms of use and translation, there are not enough words to describe or identify words in another language, teaching and learning become difficult when it concerns description and identification. Science and technology can hardly be captured by lexis and structure of these indigenous languages.

Threat of Extinction

The fate of a minor language is in the hands of the speakers. The death of any language occurs where there are no more speakers of the language, even if there are documented and preserved materials; they will no longer be useful. Most of the indigenous languages are threatened because the language owners have not taken pride in promoting them at school or at home.

Lack of Government Interest

The Nigeria government has little or no interest in the development of indigenous language, from the inception of National Policy on Education till date, not much has been done to enforce the policy and no money is voted for the development of this minor languages. NINLAN that was set up to handle the issues of these languages is continually underfunded. The facilities and structures needed for effective implementation of the programs are grossly inadequate and often not available. Their preference of English language as the Lingua Franca in the nation will continue to subdue the indigenous languages.

Emerging ideas of Science and Technology as well as their Terminologies

Without standardize orthography and adequate vocabularies, most of the indigenous languages cannot develop further than where they are now because globally they are not recognized or relevant. Terminologies in science and technology, information communication technology a generally new words that emerge every day in the medical field, etc are impoverishing the indigenous languages. It is based on these that the indigenous languages are criticized and seen as lacking the capacity to participate in the current trend of events.

Political and Tribal Issues

The growth and actualization of NINLAN mandate have been inhibited and truncated continually by the federal government that establishes her due to lack of funds and support. National University Commission (NUC) for personal interest, political and tribal reasons has vehemently refused to approve that the institution becomes degree awarding institution for the past twenty-six years. The committee that set up NINLAN recommended initial intake of 300 students per year for decree programmes this dream has not been actualized.[The act of NINLAN had a small error of referring 'senate' as 'Academic board'. It has been hell trying to amend the act for 26years.]

Prospects of Indigenous Languages

Language Research

The development and sustenance of indigenous languages depend so much on intensive language research. Research in the area of phonology, morphology, syntax, and grammar can enhance the use and ensure the sustenance. Research on how to develop the standard orthography of the minor language should be a task for NINLAN and other stakeholders if these indigenous languages will survive.

Revitalization of the Languages

Adzer, V.C.(2012:2) suggested revitalization of indigenous languages as a means to secure the sustainability of endangered languages. Programmes that will lead to the revitalization of the languages cannot be overemphasized e.g. the use of mother tongue or language of the immediate community in educating the pupils and students. Developing teaching and learning resources, workshops, seminars, and conferences and establishing an active learning and teaching centers to resuscitate the languages.

Documentation of the Languages

According to Ikoru, F (2017) to avert language loss, language shift, and language death, documentation is necessary. Documenting the languages will help develop and sustain them. Electronic documentation will preserve their quality and content for future study by linguistics. Publication of texts, primers, storybooks and community official documents are also required. Documentation of indigenous languages will entail cost effectiveness by the government. For our languages to be documented, an initial step towards analyzing and documenting them is the provision of standard orthography and the development of large vocabulary.

Establishment of Database

The establishment of a database for all Nigerian languages, the standardization, and harmonization of their orthographies, while developing tools that will ensure their use in Information Communication Technology (ICT) is recommended by Wamalma and Oluoch(2013). The achievement of these objectives requires commitment from the government as it will entail providing funds and encouraging linguistics to be involved.

Educating the Native Speaker

There is a need for rural people's enlightenment, literacy, and awareness of the status of their language. This step will help develop and sustain the languages and engender nationalism that will ensure the preservation of the languages. Making the languages subjects of study in Primary and Secondary schools will raise awareness on the importance of the languages. Using the languages for mass media and different areas of publicity can help sustain them. Establishing association with the aim of promoting the speaking of the languages can also help for instance NINLAN once established (Otu Suwakwa Igbo in 2010 i.e. Association for speaking Igbo). The aim is an emphasis on the Igbo language must be spoken by and to all within NINLAN and all Igbo communities.

Partnership with Stakeholders

The development and substance of indigenous languages is demanding, that is why stakeholders should team up to get effective result. an institutions like NERDC, LAN, Department of linguistics and Nigerian languages in various universities, National Museum and Archival centers and Community libraries should pull resources and ideas together to achieve the goals and objectives of NINLAN and the Federal Government.

Language Use

A language lives are as long as the speaker is using it. Indigenous people of Nigeria should discourage the unpatriotic attitude of the natives, church pastors, and private schools owners to move on with the language. The faith of any small language depends on the language owner. Speak your language and keep it alive.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the role of NINLAN and its library has been playing and can play in the development and sustenance of indigenous languages. It suggested what the library can do to solve the problems of lack of standard orthography, poor language transmission, low vocabulary, the threat of extinction, etc. The paper observed that NINLAN can handle constraints of the indigenous languages if it is supported holistically by government and stakeholders.

Recommendation

NINLAN and its library are financially handicapped to carry out their elaborate mandate. The government should release funds to sponsor the production of orthographies, vocabularies, and terminologies in science, information communication technology, mathematics and new areas of knowledge to accommodate the new scientific and technological concepts. The core program of the institute which is 4years degree program should be approved by the regulatory body (National University Commission NUC) to enable NINLAN to achieve its mandate as well as the federal government getting satisfaction on the reason why it established NINLAN.

NINLAN should partner regularly with media houses to air the activities of the institute and federal government, should once in a while give subvention that will take care of this program. The institute should organize more seminars, workshops, conference, competitions on indigenous languages. Language owner interested authors and NERDC should be encouraged to write books, primers, storybooks and community history in the languages. NINLAN libraries should be furnished with all the necessary facilities that can help in collection, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of indigenous languages information.

Modern technologies for language documentation, a podcast for oral languages storage should be provided and adequate staff employed for these duties. Librarians should once in a while be sponsored to move into the community to create awareness on their roles for indigenous languages development and sustenance then partner with the community leaders/ language developers to source the appropriate research materials for their work. Translation department in NINLAN should partner with the library to get most government materials on indigenous languages translated into the languages that are available so far in the library.

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