

Role of Tertiary Education in Addressing Problem of Language Extinction in Nigeria

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Abstract. *This paper discussed the roles of tertiary institutions in addressing the problem of native language extinction in Nigeria. The paper used secondary data that were collected from print and online publications. Adopting content analysis and elimination methods that were used for data selection. The paper identified some of the roles of tertiary institutions to includes; teaching of the importance of local language preservation, establishment of more department for local languages, establishment of centre for studies of local language, research on language preservation, provision community service that are based public sensitization programme on local language preservation and provision of technical assistance to government on policy formulation. Based on this, the paper hereby recommended that the government should partner with tertiary institutions across the country on preservation of local languages in Nigeria. Government should direct all tertiary institutions in the country to come with programmes on local languages preservation. Government should provide both human and materials resources to all tertiary institutions to run and implement all programme designed for local language preservation from extinction in Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Language Extinction, Tertiary Education.*

Introduction

Nigeria is multilingual, though the exact number of local or indigenous languages spread over its about 250 ethnic groups is not known, but variously estimated at between 350 and 550. Nigeria has major and minor languages, intertwined by dialects. According to Ethnologue, an annual publication on the world's languages, Some 517 different languages are spoken in Nigeria. The country's multilingual diversity reflects in the heterogeneity of the languages spoken in most of the states, as only few states such as Kano, Anambra, Imo, Oyo, Osun and Ekiti are predominantly monolingual (Babalobi, 2020).

In 2006, UNESCO reportedly predicted the Igbo language spoken in the South-East Nigeria by over 20 million people may become extinct in the next 50 years. In 2017, Dahunsi Akinyemi, a language teacher and author of *Ede Yoruba ko Gbodo Ku (Yoruba Language Must Not Die)*, posited that the Yoruba language could die out in 20 years or less, lamenting that many Yoruba children cannot pronounce *Mo fe jeun'* (I want to eat) in their mother tongue. A study by Oti (2014) points to the extinction of Ishekiri language in the next 50 years, while the Linguistic Association of Nigeria reportedly said unless proactive steps were taken, more than 50 minority languages in the country might become extinct in a few years ((Babalobi, 2020).

The nine local languages that had become extinct as listed by the National Council for Arts and Culture are Ajawa spoken in present day Bauchi, Basa-Gumna of Niger State, Auyokawa used to be

spoken in Jigawa State, Gamo-Ningi, a Kainji dialect in Bauchi State, Homa of Adamawa State, Kubi of Bauchi State, Kpati formerly spoken in Taraba State, Odut used to be spoken in the Odukpani area of Cross River State, and Teshenawa formerly spoken in Jigawa State. Roger Blench in 'Atlas of Nigerian Languages', 2012 listed 12 languages (including two in the NCAC's list) as extinct. These are Ashaganna; Fali of Baissa spoken by a few individuals on the Falinga Plateau in southern Taraba State; Shirawa; Auyokawa; Kpati; Taura; Bassa-Kontagora (only 10 speakers of Bassa-Kontagora were alive in 1987; Lufu; Ajanci, a north Bauchi language; Akpondu, had no competent speakers in 1987; Buta-Ningi, an East Kainji language, had no remaining speakers in 1990; and Holma, had only four aged speakers in 1987 (Babalobi, 2020).

About 29 local languages in Nigeria are endangered, according to UNESCO Interactive Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger, that tracks all world languages based on five criteria: safe, vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, critically endangered, and extinct. Nigeria's 'Vulnerable' languages spoken by most children, but restricted to certain domains are Bade, Reshe, Gera, and Reshe languages. "Definitely endangered" -children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home are the Polci cluster, and Duguza languages. "Critically" endangered languages in Nigeria that the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the languages partially and infrequently are Akum, Bakpinka, Defaka, Dulbu, Gyem, Ilue, Jilbe, Kiong, Kudu-Camo, Luri, Mvanip, Sambe, Somyev, and Yangkam languages (Babalobi, 2020).

"Severely" endangered languages that are spoken by grandparents and older generations, while the parent generation may understand them, they do not speak them to children or among themselves include Gurdu-Mbaaru, Fyem, Geji cluster, Gura, Gurdu-Mbaaru, Hya, Kona, Ndunda and Ngwaba. Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba are the three major languages spoken predominantly in the North, South-East, and South-West respectively. Other major languages are Fulani/Fulfulde, Kanuri, Efik/Ibibio; Tiv, Ijaw, Edo, Ishekiri, Urhobo, Idoma, Igala, Isoko, Fulani, and Ikwere. Each of the major languages have distinctive dialects- Yoruba dialects include Ijesa, Ijebu, Egba, Awori, Ekiti, Ondo, Akoko, Ikale, Owo, and Oyo. The Igbo have an extreme dialect diversity ranging from the central/standard Igbo (Igbo Izugbe), to other forms- Owerri (Isuoma), Umuahia (Ohuhu) dialects, Awka, Anambra, Onicha, Udi, Nsukka, Orlu, and peripheral Igboland dialects such as Ikwerre Izzi-Ezaa-Ikwo and Ika and Ukuanni. Apart from these major local languages, there are three other languages widely spoken in Nigeria. These are English, Arabic, and *Pidgin*. Christians may also wish to add a spiritual language -speaking in tongues, a fad in Pentecostal churches. English was a left-over of British colonialism, Arabic was spread, particularly in the North through the Usman Dan Fodio Jihad of the 19th century. *Pidgin* is neither a local nor foreign language but emerged as an adulteration of English language by native speakers, while speaking in tongues is imported from the spirit realm (Babalobi, 2020).

English language majorly spoken throughout the South has achieved predominance as Nigeria's official national language. The relatively higher rate of illiteracy in the North has however hindered the onslaught of the English language as Hausa is still widely spoken in rural and urban communities, except the multilingual Sabo Gari areas. Many homes in Nigeria, particularly in the South, are English speaking. In almost all urban homes in the South, children and adults don't greet themselves in the native tongue. Good morning has replaced E kaaro in Yoruba, Ina Kwana in Hausa, and Ututu oma in Igbo. It is ridiculous that most new generation Yoruba children, particularly those in urban areas cannot phonetically pronounce their Yoruba names or states of origin correctly. Asking new generation children to speak the local dialect is stretching a joke too far. English language has its own advantages. Apart from being a global language, it is also unifying in a multilingual culture. However, no serious people or nation relegates its mother tongue in preference for a foreign language (Babalobi, 2020). Oti (2014) and Ogwudile, 2023 listed causes of local language regression in Nigeria to include mixed linguistic ecology of urban towns forcing residents of different linguistic background to speak a common language such as *Pidgin* or English, and inter lingual marriages forcing parents to speak a common language rather than indigenous languages to their children. The future of Nigeria's local languages lies with the speakers.

Language extinction is a social problem facing Nigeria that needs the involvement of all stakeholder to address (Tarugarira, 2009; Romain, 2007). Nigerian native languages are going into extinction (Ayeomoni, 2012; Fabunmi and Salawu, 2005; Owolabi 2006). The tertiary institutions are some of the critical stakeholder to look upon for solution to the national problem of language extinction. Tertiary institutions are established to help the communities, societies and states find solution to the socio-economic and political problems facing them. Tertiary institutions are designed and programmed to be problem solver in any country. Social and political problems like electoral violence and post-election violence are some of the issues tertiary institutions can help state solve (Ogunode, & Onakoya, 2024). Tertiary institutions are established to provide solutions to society's problems and challenges (Femi 2019). Tertiary institutions and research institutions are the last hope of the humanities when it comes to issues of finding solutions to problems that befall the entire society (Musa 2016; Abu 2022). It is based on this, that this paper is aimed to discuss the roles of tertiary institutions in addressing the problem of language extinction in Nigeria.

Literature Review

Concept of Tertiary Education

Tertiary institutions have been defined by many scholars. For instance, Ogunode, Edinoh and Okolie (2023) conceptualized tertiary education as a planned and organized educational system designed for the total development of man/woman and the total transformation of society through the utilization of teaching, research and provision of community service. Tertiary education can also be viewed as post-basic and secondary school education that embraces advanced teaching, research and community service. Tertiary institutions encompass diverse institutions of higher learning that extend beyond universities. Tertiary institutions are a micro section of the larger society (Ogunode & Ayeni, 2024). Tertiary institutions are an organized fraction of the whole society carved out for teaching programmes, research and provision of community service (Ogunode & Ayeni, 2023). The tertiary institutions can also be seen as a subset of the general society that is made of the collection of different people, different cultures, different lifestyles and different values (Ogunode & Odo, 2023).

Tertiary education or higher education according to Alemu (2018) covers a wider range of higher learning institutions including the university. These higher learning institutions could be organized in different ways, commonly within a university and in a separate institution as university and other tertiary learning institutions. Not only that, tertiary education is viewed by the National Policy on Education (2013) as the education given after Post Basic Education in institutions such as Universities and Inter-University Centres such as the Nigeria French Language Village, Nigeria Arabic Language Village, National Institute of Nigerian Languages, institutions such as

The goals of tertiary education (tertiary institutions) according to the FGN National Policy on Education (2013), shall be to: contribute to national development through high-level manpower training; provide accessible and affordable quality learning opportunities in formal and informal education in response to the needs and interests of all Nigerians; provide high-quality career counselling and lifelong learning programmes that prepare students with the knowledge and skills for self-reliance and the world of work; reduce skill shortages through the production of skilled manpower relevant to the needs of the labour market; promote and encourage scholarship, entrepreneurship and community service; forge and cement national unity; and promote national and international understanding and interaction. The other goals or objectives of tertiary institutions according to Ogunode, et al (2023) include; aiding the production of manpower; ensuring national unity; ensuring technological development; fostering national unity and international peace; increasing production through research; providing post-secondary school education; to prepare students with quality knowledge and reliable skills for independent living and the world of work. The cardinal programmes of tertiary institutions globally include; teaching programmes, research and provision of community service. Tertiary institutions are established to solve the societal problems. In addition to the foregoing roles of tertiary institutions, scholars have also argued that establishment of tertiary institution brings about socio-economic development to the host community (Ayeni & Ezirim, 2023).

Method

The objective of this article is to discuss the roles of tertiary institutions in addressing the problem of local language extinction in Nigeria. The researchers used secondary data. The researcher relies on published secondary data from reputable sources including review of published articles from reputable international journals such as CEON, Elsevier, Hindawi, JSTOR, IEEE, LearnTechlib SAGE, Nebraska and Springer amongst others. This work used Content Analysis and elimination method in the selection and analysis of papers, journal and abstract used for the article. The design adopted for this article was to show understanding of the roles of tertiary institutions in addressing the problem of native language extinction in Nigeria. This study employed content analysis method by selecting the relevant content of the various literatures related to this study; and the literature review enable the overall development of the study, which ordinarily centered on theoretical and conceptual exploration (Adapted from Ogunode & Ajape. 2021).

Result and Discussion

Role of Tertiary Education in addressing Problem of Language Extinction in Nigeria

There are many roles of tertiary institutions in addressing language extinction in Nigeria. Some of the roles includes; teach the importance of local language preservation, establishment of more department for local languages, establishment of centre for studies of local language, research on language preservation, provision community service that are based public sensitization programme on local language preservation and provision of technical assistance to government on policy formulation

Teaching the importance of local language speaking and preservation

Teaching is the number one cardinal programme of the tertiary institutions. Tertiary institutions through their academic staff can teach their students the importance and needs to be speaking their native language. Academic staff can help to solve the problem of language extinction in Nigeria by constantly encourage their students to speak their local languages. Lecturers can also use local language in lecture halls. Introducing the use of native languages in the classroom is another possible solution to preserving Nigerian languages. Nigeria has taken a step in the right direction with the introduction of the mother tongue in primary schools across Nigeria. The new National Language Policy now makes the mother tongues a compulsory medium of instruction from primary one to six (Odugu, 2011). Tertiary institutions can take advantages of teaching programme to address social problems facing the country (Tseveda, Terzungwe, Benjamin, & Ogunode, 2024).

Establishment of more local language academic programme

Tertiary institutions can mount more academic programme in local language such as Igbo language, Yoruba and Hausa language. Tertiary institutions has the power to mount new academic programme that to address the current problem been faced in the country (Ogunode, Tseveda, & Atim.2024). Establishment of department of local languages in the Nigerian tertiary institutions can help to reduce the problem of local language extinction in Nigeria.

Establishment of centre for studies of local language

Establishment of centre for the studies of indigenous language by all tertiary institutions in Nigeria is another way to addressing the problem indigenous language extinction. Tertiary institutions have the power to create centres for special studies to addressing social, economic and technological challenges facing the country. The establishment of Centre for studies of local language is expected to provide long term satisfaction (Ayeni, Doosuur, & Kefas, 2021). These centres are established to solve specific problem facing the societies such as this local language extinction in Nigeria (Ogunode, Ayeni, & Olorundare, 2024). In order to face the problems, these centres can organize conferences, seminars, meetings and symposium to discuss issues concerning native language extinction and ways to preserve them. Suggestions, ideas and recommendations from these meetings can be forwarded to policy makers and decision makers in both the federal and state ministries of education to make policies and formulate programmes that will help to reduce the challenges of

native language extinction in Nigeria. The establishments of the centre for languages studies are no doubt infrastructure. Thus it has been noted that, “it is the responsibility of government to provide those amenities that empower” (Ayeni, Sani, Idris, & Uzoigwe, 2019, p. 264).

Research on language preservation

Ogunode and Abubakar (2020) opined that research is the second cardinal programme of higher institutions. Research is very important to the development of the society. Research is conducted mostly in the higher institutions environment with the objectives to solve problems affecting the society. The academic staff is saddled with the responsibilities of carrying out researches in the universities. Conducting research is one criterion for measuring their performance (Ogunode, Jegede, Adah, Audu, & Ajape, 2021). Paul (2015) submitted that the conduct of research is one of the basic functions of tertiary institutions, which comprised Universities, Polytechnics, Monothechnics and Colleges of Education. The academic staffs of these institutions are compulsorily required to carry out research activities as their promotions are primarily based on their research outputs. Apart from the academic staff being promoted through research publications, research activities enhance their credibility, status, and also add value both to their immediate community and the larger global community. Yusuf (2012) and Ogunode, Ukozor, and Kware (2023) posited that the role of higher education research in national development cannot be overemphasized. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria through their researchers, academic staff and PhD and Master Students can engage in different researches to find solution to the problem of local language extinction in Nigeria. The above development can serve as effective communication that can enhance peacebuilding in the society (Ayeni, Sani, & Uzoigwe, 2019, p. 59). Globally, academic research has been accepted as a tool for solving societal problems like local language extinction in Nigeria. PhD and master students can investigate into various methods China, Russia, India and other countries are using to preserve their local language. Findings from such studies can help us develop language policy that will help to preserve the Nigerian local languages from going into extinction.

Provision of community service that are based on local language preservation

The tertiary institutions in Nigeria can help to addressing the problem of language extinction through their community service programme. Ogunode, Iyabode & Olatunde-Aiyedun (2022) observed that Community service of higher institutions is service provided by institutions to benefit the community people. Community service programmes are done near the area where the institutions are located so that the host community can enjoy the benefits of the institutions. Community service in higher institutions includes all kinds of services that are meant to improve the well-being of the people and society in general. It is an essential service designed by institutions to provide socio-economic development to the community. Community service is one of the roles tertiary institutions should play in contributing towards societal development via active community service provision. Tertiary institutions have a lot of roles to play to their host communities. The effective performances of the expected roles of tertiary institutions by the leadership of these institutions have the capacity to bring about national development (Asaju, & Ayeni, 2020). Tertiary institutions can pick up the problem of local language extinction as a community service programme and come up with strategies like public sensitizing programme, media campaign and sponsor programme that encourage parents to speak their native language to their children at home. If parents refuse to speak their native languages to their children, of course the next generation will not speak it to their offspring, leading to extinction of these local languages within the next two to three generations. Tertiary institutions can raise awareness on the importance of language preservation and advocate for the support and use of local languages in media. Tertiary institutions can promote the use of multilingualism in cyberspace. Tertiary institutions should raise the awareness on the importance of language and Cultural revitalization. Tertiary institutions should create a framework for language revitalization in their host communities that will enable people learn about these languages in a digital format with the creation of online educational resources for history preservation and even correct pronunciations of words in these languages. This will result in better communication in these language which would

help make the language stronger. Tertiary institutions can use their community service programmes to solve some of the challenges facing the country via mass sensitisation (Ogunode, & Onakoya.2024)

Provision of technical assistance to government on policy formulation

Tertiary institutions in Nigeria has many professors with specialization on language. The tertiary institutions are made up of embodiment of knowledge and intellects. Tertiary institutions in Nigeria has professionals and specialist on language that can help the government formulate policies and programme that can help to preserve and sustain the local languages in Nigeria. The tertiary institutions have a special role of providing technical assistance to policy making in the federal ministry of education. Tertiary institutions can technically help policy making in Nigeria to formulate policies in regard the following; creating recorded and printed resources for all native language. Recorded and printed documentation are essential for preserving languages' sound and context. Teaching and taking language classes. Using digital and social media outlets. Parent speaking native language to their children. Technical assistance from the professors and scholars from the various tertiary institutions to the institutions of government across the country can help to addressing pressing social problem confronting the country (Ogunode, Ayeni, & Ogwuche, 2024).

The UN and others agree there are better ways to preserve a country's mainstream languages as well as lesser-used dialects according to (CCAlanguagesolution 2022), the ways includes.

Creating recorded and printed resources

Recorded and printed documentation are essential for preserving languages' sound and context. Linguists, anthropologists, and committed citizens work to interview, record, and document languages to preserve them via durable, physical media. These resources are published and preserved in libraries, academic institutions, museums, and cultural centers.

Two world-class examples of this include:

1. National Geographic's enduring voice program
2. The living tongue institute for endangered language
3. Teaching and taking language classes

Both teaching and participating in language classes are excellent ways to keep a language alive. Typically, elders volunteer or are paid small stipends to lead classes for a community. Speaking a language—even if only in a classroom or occasional conversational setting—is enough to give stronger and greater value to its words and nuanced meanings, some of which may not translate directly in any other language.

Using digital and social media outlets

On one hand, it can seem like digital and social media outlets are major players in drowning out languages – particularly since English is these outlets' dominant language. On the other hand, those who wish to preserve indigenous languages have realized these are major modes of information sharing. Therefore, they utilize social media channels, YouTube, and other platforms to create courses, share expressions or sayings that are fading from the repertoire, record Karaoke versions of traditional songs with printed lyrics, and to affordably maintain a preservable record—audio, video, and text—of the target language.

Insist on speaking your native language

Perhaps one of the most important things groups, families, and individuals can do is insist on speaking their native language, resisting the urge to succumb to a dominant group's language (CCAlanguagesolution 2022).

Findings

The study revealed that teaching of the importance of local language preservation, establishment of more department for local languages, establishment of centre for studies of local language, research

on language preservation, provision community service that are based public sensitization programme on local language preservation and provision of technical assistance to government on policy formulation are the roles of tertiary institutions in addressing the problems of language extinction in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper discussed the roles of tertiary institutions in addressing the problem of native language extinction in Nigeria. The paper identified some of the roles of tertiary institutions to includes; teaching of the importance of local language preservation, establishment of more department for local languages, establishment of centre for studies of local language, research on language preservation, provision community service that are based public sensitization programme on local language preservation and provision of technical assistance to government on policy formulation.

Based on this, the paper hereby recommended that the government should partner with tertiary institutions across the country on preservation of local languages in Nigeria. Government should direct all tertiary institutions in the country to come with programmes on local languages preservation. Government should provide both human and materials resources to all tertiary institutions to run and implement all programme designed for local language preservation from extinction in Nigeria.

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