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Revitalisation of Language, Literature and Cultural Education for Youth Empowerment and National Development in Nigeria

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Abstract:

Employing language, literature and cultural education as lenses in viewing issues of youth empowerment and national development, this paper is almost a departure from the conventional sociopolitical and economic engagements of the topic. The paper is a sociolinguistic approach to ascertaining and solving the problems surrounding youth empowerment and national development in Nigeria. Language, literature and cultural education are viable tools of youth empowerment from childhood. The trio, in this paper, is situated in the postmodernist world and struggle of the youths vis-à-vis their generational conflicts with government and the society at large. This paper identifies consequences of continual neglect and inactivity of youths to the nation. It proffers proper nurturing in language, literature and cultural education, gainful employment and inclusion in government as several ways of empowering the youths and developing the nation.

Keywords: Revitalization, youth empowerment, national development

1. Introduction

Regardless the rate of unemployment and hostile economic environment in Nigeria; education is still viewed as the number one resource for youth empowerment globally. Language, literature and culture are the vehicles through which education is gotten.

It is no longer news that countries like China, India, France and Japan among others that employed their indigenous languages to teach virtually all aspects of human endeavors to their citizens, have experienced tremendous scientific, cultural, economic, social and educational growth and development in virtually all the sections of their economy and civilization. Of course, such languages were developed gradually to contain vocabularies and registers in various disciplines of study. Oriental countries specifically developed their languages to contain scientific and technological terminologies, in order to step knowledge down to the grassroots. Igboanusi (2017) asserts the importance of communicating scientific concepts in the indigenous major languages in Nigeria.

In the case of national development in Japan, pre-world-war Japan was a closed society to the west, and pretty much the rest of the world. The era of the Tokugawa Shogunate brought much innovations through language development and acceptance of western cultures and influences that cause Japan to open up to the west as we have it today. The Japanese way of life and language that are considerably found in global pop-culture nowadays, are as a result of the language and cultural accommodations and tolerance introduced in antebellum Japan and lasted to the Meiji Restoration of 1868. One of the very first things the Japanese did as a strong comeback after the second world war, was to render the information about their products (including exports) in Japanese language, despite the growing western consumer markets. This, as a way of familiarizing the world with the Japanese language by imposition, contributed immensely to the global socio-economic and cultural acceptance of the Japanese today (Asia for Educators, 2020, Yekini, 2006)

Most people have not been to Japan, yet they eat Sushi and drink Sake. According to Yutaka Kikuta, the Ambassador Extraordinaire and Plenipotentiary of Japan to Nigeria, there is even a trendy Sushi spot in Abuja, Nigeria, where Nigerians regale themselves from time to time. People world over, love Japanese Manga, Animé and patronize their technologies. It is an old practice of people to promote their language and culture via trade and religious routes (Kikuta, 2019).

In the same vein, the Indians are regarded as some of the best mathematicians and information technologists in the world. They are a leading country in medicine, pharmaceuticals, telecommunications and media technology. Most Nigerians who were privileged to be taught by Indian math teachers, would testify of their unique grasp of mathematical concepts and their ability to impart such knowledge. Their Hindi video clips and skits on telecommunications and media on YouTube alone numbers in thousands, seldom are they in British or American English. The foundation of this scientific dexterity was laid in the use of both Hindi and English as official languages and languages of instruction. Quite recently, the Indian government revised its language-education policy to include teaching students in their mother tongues. This is a year after NASA funded the learning of the Hindi language internationally to teach science and technology (Press Trust of India, 2019, Anand, 2020).

Such are the benefits of developing an indigenous language, literature and culture to a world class status. Nigeria would do well to borrow a leaf from the Japanese and the Indians. While it may be easier for the Japanese and the Indians to choose which mother tongue to develop for youth empowerment and national development, the language politics and conflicts among the indigenous languages in Nigeria may make it herculean to select a sole language for national development. Choosing which mother tongue to develop into an official language for national development, among myriads of languages in Nigeria would prove arduous. Which language acquiesces to being subservient unto another? Which people rescinds their linguistic sovereignty for another to prosper or grow? This selection process is one of the problems of revitalization of language, literature and culture in a multi-ethnic society. Yet, the goal is achievable with careful considerations and sacrifices.

This paper looks at the implications of revalorization of these socio-linguistic tripod stands: language, literature and culture. The paper tends to draw attention to necessary steps to developing this trio for youth empowerment and national development in Nigeria.

1.1. Definition of Concepts

1.1.1. Revitalization

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Thesaurus gave the synonyms of the word revitalize as revive, reactivate, rekindle, renew, renovate, resurrect, resuscitate, retrieve and revivify. All these synonyms project the intentions of the word revitalize as used in the context of this paper.

Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary also defines revitalization as 'to impart new life or vigor to restore to an active or fresh condition'.

1.1.2. Language

According to Amberg & Vause (2009):

Language is foremost a means of communication [which] reflects both the individual characteristics of a person, as well as the beliefs and practices of his or her community. It comprises of signs and codes understandable and interpretable by those within a given community. It is a rule-based system of signs.

The Encyclopedia Britannica (2020) defines language as:

a system of conventional spoken, manual (signed), or written symbols by means of which human beings, as members of a social group and participants in its culture, express themselves. The functions of language include communication, the expression of identity, play, imaginative expression, and emotional release.

Chomsky (1957) conceives language as 'a set (finite or infinite) of sentences, each finite in length and constructed out of a finite set of elements' (p. 13)

1.1.3. Literature

For the context of this paper, African literature is defined, and not literature from a global perspective. On Achebe's perception of African literature, Eme & Mbagwu (2011) quotes:

You cannot cram African literature in a small, neat definition. I do not see African literature in a small, neat definition. I do not see African literature as one unit but as associated units. In fact, the sum total of all the national and ethnic literatures of Africa. (p. 114)

African literature has also been seen as 'literary works of the African continent. [It] consists of a body of work in different languages and various genres, ranging from oral literature to literature written in colonial languages (French, Portuguese, and English)' (The Columbia Electronic Encyclopedia, 2012).

1.1.4. Youth

Henze (2015) defines youth as 'a period of life in-between childhood and adulthood. It is described as a time of experimenting with roles and identities, still void of the burden of social norms and obligations, yet slowly preparing the youngsters for their lives as full members of the social collective'. (p. 5)

1.2. Empowerment

Page & Czuba (1999) conceive empowerment as:

A multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power in people for use in their own lives, their communities and in their society, by acting on issues they define as important.

1.2.1. Youth Empowerment

Commonwealth secretariat (2007) defines youth empowerment as 'creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, other than at the direction of others'

Jimba (2006) defines it as:

Different ways the youth can be facilitated to cause changes in their lifestyle. [It is] a way of inculcating into the youths the spirit of transformation of ideas into creativeness... a means of exposing the youths into skills or training that makes them productive. (p. 51)

1.2.2. National Development

John Vaizey in Bawa (2020) posits that 'National development is the total effect of all citizens, forces and addition to stock of physical, human resources, knowledge and skills'

Bluemington (2018) defines national development as:

The change in growth and development, which includes social, cultural and economic change. It is the ability of a country to improve the social welfare of the people. It would be the expansion and growth of people in a defined territory or government.

1.3. Current Deplorable State of Language, Literature and Culture among Nigerian Youths

Igboanusi interrogates the use of only English language as the language of instruction, in the wake of the mass failures in secondary school final examinations. The abysmal performance of youths in these examinations and as undergraduates necessitate a total revitalization and revamping of all the apparatuses of language education in the nation. Since English as a language of instruction has direct impact on the overall performance of the youths, it is logical to blame the language for their educational failures (Igboanusi, 2008, Bamgbose, 2006).

As the principal language of education in Nigeria, failure in the English language automatically renders a Nigerian youth employable. It is common knowledge that a large number of graduates and NYSC members cannot even write job application letters. There are Corps members who cannot speak English language without daunting grammatical errors.

Presently, there are teachers of indigenous languages such as Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba who cannot fluently speak these mother tongues without a mixture of the English language. Late Bola Ige once called the language proficiency of an average Nigerian youth an 'Amulu-mala'-a mediocre hybrid of the English language and the indigenous languages. I read editorials nowadays with growing trepidation for the low level of mastery in the language of instruction. We now have postgraduates in the nation who cannot express themselves adequately in English, their language of research. At this juncture in the language education in Nigeria, it is not farfetched to recommend that English literature should be made compulsory at all level. Literature naturally affords an increased level of proficiency in the English language.

The situation is so bad that higher institutions such as the University of Ibadan now conduct use of English tests for postgraduates before admittance regardless of the candidates' performance in English language in their Ordinary level results.

1.4. Multidisciplinary Approach to the Relevance of Language, Literature and Culture

Language, literature and culture can be powerful and influential in the teaching and learning of concepts in the various disciplines. It is expected that papers written under the subthemes of the conference should be able to discover points of intersection with language, literature and culture. This is not to say that presenters' musings are limited only to points of interaction of language with their discipline, au contraire, presenters should be able to perceive possible multidisciplinary approaches to negotiating and engaging their chosen subthemes.

1.5. School of Arts and Social Studies

Religion has given some of the most powerful vocabularies to language. Papers from Islamic Religious Studies (IRS) and Christian Religious Studies (CRS) could look at the influence of religion on the choice of words and use of language. Questions on how spirituality and morality influence man in his choice of words in daily speech and communications could be engaged in this discipline. Insights on the existence of heavenly or divine language that are higher than that of mortal men could be explored. A clear perspective of man's use of language when he is before God and when he is before men, could be explored in papers from departments of religion. Identification of the religious functions of language could also be made.

In language and translation theories, Steiner (1973) alludes the origin of translation and interpretation of languages to the Biblical Tower of Babel, where God confused the tongue of men. Language is as old as man. Yet, since Babel language has been a powerful tool in uniting or scattering human beings. Does it now follow that God understands all languages since the incident at Babel?

The approach of religion to language may not necessarily be philosophical. Engagement of language from religious perspective could be in the area of Discourse Analysis and pragmatics. Researchers from the I.R.S and C.R.S departments could look at the impacts of language on religious tolerance, peaceful coexistence and harmony for youth empowerment and national development. The epistemology of religious violence based on unguarded utterances of religious leaders could be engaged. Efforts at ensuring a more positive and progressive use of language in achieving peaceful coexistence and religious tolerance could be researched. For instance, the impacts of religious pronouncements and influence of speeches by religious leaders on youth empowerment and national development could be identified. Research on the use of religious language to influence youths to violence and anarchy, thereby truncating youth empowerment and national development could be carried out.

Religious studies would be more interesting when literary texts portraying or treating religious themes are used in classes of religion. Nigerian literary works of prose, drama and poetry are replete with religious themes and illustrations on faith. Teachers from the departments of religion could navigate literature into their instruction and research.

Equally, papers from geography could look at geographical location of people and its influence on engendering various dialects. Research into how geography contributes to the creation of dialects and indigenous language how language has impacted the geographical locations. Development politics, lifestyle and social life of a people can influence their language urban language is difference from the rural varieties, use of slangs by city dwellers and effect of language on commerce, society, education culture and traditions of a people falls smack on the threshold of social studies and sociology.

Researchers from political science department in collaboration with those from the English department could jointly look at the conference theme from the perspective of Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics. Analysis of the speech of government officials and politicians is an angle from which insights could be gotten into the realities of youth empowerment and national development. The government through its officials and politicians make speeches and declarations bordering on promises to empower the youth and build the nation on day to day basis, yet actualities are antithetical to these promises and shattered dreams of the youth. Discourse Analysis and Pragmatics as an approach to ascertain government's intents in its utterances are also ways of engaging the theme of the conference from the angle of language.

1.6. School of General Education and Early Childhood Care and Education

Parents and caregivers should create bonds with children right from when they are toddlers. This bond in turn lays the foundation for the development of children's cognitive skills and their empowerment as youth later in life. Youths empowerment begin from birth. It is seen in the engendering and transformative power of lullabies sung for children in order to induce sleep or soothe them. Magaji asserts that Hausa lullabies create bonds between babies and their mothers or caregivers. They give a sense of love and care to babies that eventually help in laying the foundation for proper and healthy development of their psyche and personality. In all, language and literature impacts child development which culminate into youth empowerment psychosocially. The use of language in the early childhood care and education of the child cannot be overstressed in his development of a personality later in life (Magaji, 2018)

School curriculum in America starts to feature literature from fourth grade (primary four). This is to foster higher level thinking skills. The curriculum is intentionally developed to enable effective intellectual ruminations in children, using approaches of children literature (Minardi, 1994). The quality of books that our children read is very paramount to their thought process and cognitive skills. A well-educated youth is an empowered youth. Literature is key to the critical thinking and evaluation process of the youth. Through literature, they are able to gather enough information from both real and fictitious characters. They are able to learn coping skills and important foresights about life and living.

World Bank reported in 2018 that only about 20% of Nigerian children can read after primary school. The report tagged 'Learning to Realize Education's Promise' was launched in conjunction with the Nigerian government. This underscore one of the multiple sources of youth disenfranchisement in Nigeria, which begs the question on how a nation with this abysmal level of literacy at primary level can develop into a world-class country.

As many of us who participates in what Onukaogu (2018) calls 'Literacy Orchestra' in Nigerian schools, we need to be aware of the impact of language and literature in the general affairs or mankind. Literary stalwarts like professor Toyin Jegede have employed literature in English to empower primary and secondary school pupils and students from as far back as 2001 (Onukaogu, 2018). Like her American counterpart Minardi (1994), Jegede uses literature to instill critical and creative thinking. On the importance of the teacher in instruction, Onukaogu (2018) asserts:

Unless a teacher is adequately and effectively and effectively empowered on how to empower the learner how to use literacy, it will be extremely difficult for the learner to get the enablement for using literacy across the school curriculum. (p. 4)

So, Jegede enabled teachers of primary and secondary schools to encourage learning via storytelling and retelling. This way youths are empowered from their childhood through literature and the use of language. Samuel Clemens (aka Mark Twain) once said that 'Good friends, good books and a sleepy conscience: this is the ideal life.' (Goodreads, 2020). Nicholson also submits that 'We read to know we're not alone.' (Goodreads, 2020). In order to be mentally prepared for empowerment, the youth need to cultivate the habit of reading strategically as a pivot to their psychosocial development and eventual empowerment. The youth cannot be empowered without their being exposed to critical thinking via qualitative literatures.

1.7. School of Sciences

The dearth of indigenous language vocabularies in Physical Health Education (PHE) and the biological and medical sciences has necessitated the development of terminology planning for health discourse. Language and literature as tools of youth empowerment and national development veer also towards developing indigenous Nigerian languages towards awareness creation in the biological and medical sciences. This aspect of literature and the medical sciences has necessitated medical doctors to employ the services of theatre artists and dramatists. Doctors now dramatize their concepts before their patients to increase their understanding or perception of otherwise tricky medical concepts or situations. There are growing multidisciplinary collaborations between the humanities and the sciences currently.

The medical Humanities has the works of Nigerian physician-writers such as Wale Okediran, Tony Marinho, Tolu Ajayi, James Ene Henshaw, Anezi Okoro and Femi Olugbile. These works portrayed the theme of medical malpractice without necessarily being medical texts. It is their literary approach to medical issues as themes of the everyday life of the Nigerian society that inspired professor Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale to develop a curriculum for literature and medicine under the course title 'Special Topics in literature', the rest is history (Omobowale, 2018).

Language and literature can be developed into helping at the grassroots to access information about public health. Igboanusi (2017) avers 'provision of vital information in communities in languages they understand will be helpful in preventing potential disasters which will promote intense poverty'. (p. 18). Igboanusi submits that the use of indigenous language to communicate to the grassroots in times of crisis or special needs, require the development of vocabularies and terminologies in various disciplines, as pertinent to the needs. For instance, his research in the development of vocabularies for the creation of awareness of HIV/AIDS disease in Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, as major indigenous languages, proves that local words could be invented to explain salient points in the indigenous languages

Omoniyi (2014) also speaks of the necessity of developing an indigenous 'language capital'. Indigenous languages need to be developed to a level where they can be used effectively to educate people at the grassroots on otherwise difficult areas such as medicine, technology and the sciences, case in point HIV/AIDS and Covid-19 pandemic.

1.8. School of Vocational Education

Papers in vocational education can look at the functionality of language in vocations such as catering, hotel management, creative and fine arts, business and agricultural education. Such papers could interrogate how language work for the betterment of practicing these vocations.

Yekini (2004) describes the importance of the French language to catering and hotel management vocations. He explains that registers in both vocations are replete with French words. In catering, there are words like 'à la carte', 'hors d'oeuvre', la patisserie, even the word 'menu' is in French. In hotel management words like lingerie, Chef, Maître de, among many others are French words. Also, many artistic concepts and art terms are donated to the fine arts by the French. Words like Avant-Garde, oeuvre, Trompe l'Oeil, En Plein Air, Catalogue Raisonné, Vernissage, and Mise-en-Scène among many others. (Gottesman, 2016). In the same vein, employing indigenous languages in cataloguing artistic artifacts and artworks could help in easy curation and narration during exhibitions. Moreover, cultural education as one of the objectives of fine arts, could easily be a means of youth empowerment and national development.

Paper presenters in the vocations can find interconnectivity and a common nexus with language and literature more readily in the use of special registers in business education. The use of specialized language in business management can be a point of research for Business education department. On the functionality of language in business education, Yekini identified the use of the French language in business partnerships with the neighboring francophone countries, and the world at large (Yekini, 2011)

The effects of English language proficiency and mastery on the general performance of students in the vocations can be another research topic. Students in the schools of vocations and the sciences are usually known to undermine the importance of English as a language of instruction and research. Understanding and unravelling this mentality about language-education in the vocations could be a good point of engaging the conference theme.

2. Implications of Neglecting Youth Empowerment and National Development

Failure to empower the youth can cause youths' disenchantment and malcontent towards the government that can lead to outbursts and protests like #End SARS. The youths are the most dynamic and powerful critical mass in every society. They are expected to be nation builders, leaders of tomorrow, among other clichés. Their energy and creativity if not properly channeled could lead to systemic anarchy and societal breakdowns, such as seen in the rise of the Yahoo-yahoo syndicate fraud, the One-million-boys bandits, and the 'Badoo' cult gangs.

In recent times, empowerment of youths has gone beyond just giving them education and certificates, without viable and lucrative vocations to boot. Increasingly, the harsh realities of life have exposed both curriculum education and certificates as inadequate for the survival and thriving of the youth.

Increasingly, youths are taking to learning vocations which they once scorned and denigrated. Among postgraduates, nowadays, it is a common sight to find female-youths with sewing machines, baking pans and make-up kits, as most of them have taken to tailoring, catering and cosmetology among other vocations for survival. The males have turned Disc Jockeys (D.J), Master of Ceremonies (M.C.) and sales representatives, in order to cope with the economic demands of the society.

Again, most migrant youths or would-be migrants unto greener pastures in other countries, discover that the visa application forms include sections on their vocations and dexterity in these vocations. Therefore, many have taken to learning these skills in order to survive outside their climes, where their certificates are pretty much irrelevant for survival.

Youths gladly jump at the opportunity of risking their lives and crossing the Mediterranean or the Trans-Sahara trade routes in search of El-dorado and their land of promise. Many have fallen victims to cruel slavery, to prostitution, trafficking and many have eventually lost their lives in the bid to escape from the economic lockdown and lack of opportunities in Nigeria. Recent negative incidents of Nigerian illegal migrants in the Maghreb (Libya) are testament to these hardships and perils youths undergo in their bid to better their lot abroad (VOA, 2017).

Youths can either be a problem or a solution to Nigeria. A Yoruba proverb says that 'Omo ti a o ko, ni yio gbe ile ti ako ta' [an untrained child will sell whatever heritage we possess] (Translation mine). Experts world over see youths as an impressive force of wealth creation in any generation, right from the 'Baby boomers' to the 'Millennials', youths are vital aspect of the economy and wealth creation of any nation, Yet, there is an increasing yearning of the youths for inclusion in government and decision making in the nation. The rate of poverty and lack of job and opportunities also are sources of angsts and concerns among the youth. On October 20, 2020, the presidency responded to the outcry of Nigerian youths by assuring compliance with their demands from government (Marzullo, 2019, Adedokun, 2014, Ailemen, 2020)

Nigeria is one of the fewest countries with increasing geriatric rule. Gerontocracy has deprived Nigerian youths of bringing their talents, creativity and imagination to the governing table. Government's attempt at including youths in the government under the 'Not Too Young to Run Movement' has been circumvented by inadequate funding and high cost of nomination forms into the possible positions. The slogan inadvertently became 'Too-Poor-To-Run for the youths who cannot afford the exorbitant fees of the nomination forms (Ajodo-Adebanjoko, 2019)

3. Youth Empowerment and National Development Via Nollywood, Music Industry and Social Media

The power and reach of drama as a genre of literature is evident in the Nigerian Nollywood, which is one of the fastest growing Movie Industries, and third largest in the world. Aside giving inspiration to the youths through highly didactic and informative movies, it also provides gainful employments for them. The advocacy of Nollywood on the plight of Nigerian youths is evident in the seasonal movie 'Lazy Nigerian Youths'. So many of Nigerian youths have become successful stand-up comedians, sitcom gurus and prolific graphic artists who churn out video clips and skits on a regular basis (Nnabuko & Anatsui, 2012, Nollywood picturestv, 2018).

Language is essentially about communication. Modern communications are mostly about telecommunications. The best practices of social media are linked to social interactions and communications that have led to the birth and rise of great social media influencers, who empower the youth through motivational talks and showbiz. Yemi Alade, Tiwa Savage, Don Jazzy, Wizkid, Davido, Gloria Olorunfemi (aka Maraji) on Instagram, Demola Adetona (@DemolaExpose) on twitter, Chidi Okereke (@chydee) have made themselves into bonafide social media influencers in Nigeria, who make a fortune from their arts. They have taken to empowering the youth through the use of language in their music and arts.

The youth in the nation reacted negatively to being called 'Lazy Nigerian Youths' and hash tag 'Lazy Nigerian Youths' went viral and became a social media revolt against President Muhammadu Buhari's pronouncement in his speech of the Commonwealth Business Forum in Westminster, on April 19, 2018.

The youth's revolt against being tagged indolent sparked many social media responses. The Yahoo-yahoo or yahoo+ phenomenon among the youth testifies to the extent the youths are ready to go to ensure survival. The cybercrimes, advance fee frauds (419) and alleged ritual murders attached to the activities of the yahoo-yahoo group of jobless youths living in unexplained opulence and wealth, points to the failings of the society and government in empowering the youths.

Obianuju Catherine Udeh (aka D.J. Switch) is one of these social media influencers. Her fame increased with her live Instagram broadcast of the Lekki toll-gate shootings on 20th October, 2020 (Areo, 2020).

Youths' agitations and conflicts with government such as the #EndSARS protests has ascended into the social media space, and the use of language in protest of government's apparent insensitivity to their plights has birthed slogans and slangs such as 'Off your mic' and '#Sorosoke' among catchy others employed in the youths' generational fights. This postmodernist manipulation and use of language is what Ayeleru (2019) conceives as '... evidence of the dynamic nature of language. It demonstrates how language impacts on human culture.' (p. 47)

These agitations of the youth due to lack of empowerment is not strange to Protest literature, which showcases the place of literature in agitations and contentions due to oppression and injustice. Literary stalwarts like Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, Sembene Ousmane and Festus Iyayi depicted situations of societal upheavals due to sociopolitical injustices. Their literature, though fictitious, have their base on social realities. Already, poems, drama skits and prose are being written on the #EndSARS protests. The use of Marxism as a theoretical framework in the analysis of literary works in protest literature, would avail much for paper presenters from this perspective.

The ongoing generational conflicts in Nigeria could easily deteriorate into a national with that could eventually halt the forward movement of the nation. The government too needs to '#Sorosoke' and speak up about the protracted cases of corruption, mismanagement, police brutality, gross excesses of politicians, unemployment, insecurity and economic crisis in the nation. This they should do, rather than 'offing their mics' at every turn of corrupt practices. The government needs to address youths' agitations and concerns, as true solutions to the ongoing protests.

The social media influencers have taken to empowering the youth via the use of music. By infusing inspirational registers, vocabularies and fads that resonates easily with the youths into their songs, music stars are able to influence the youths and motivate them to express their angsts against society and government. During the #EndSARS protests, some of these musicians stood in solidarity with the cause of the youths. Popular music stars like Davido, Wizkid and Burna Boy had altercations with the government in regards to the agitations of the youths against police brutality (Sodomsy, 2020).

4. Language Conflicts, Politics and Revitalization

Igboanusi (2016) posits that 'language is an instrument of identity (personal identity) group identity, ethnic identity, and national identity'. The loss of mastery in language use among the youth is tantamount to loss of identity. Revitalizing language is synonymous to revitalizing the identities of Nigerian youths, many of whose identities have disappeared under the raging currents of the streams of pop-culture and modernism. The loss of language is also the loss of culture, since language is tied to culture. In the case of the Igbo language, the conflicts among Igbo dialects in the choice of standard Igbo has led to internal linguistic wrangling which in turn fragments the dialects. Uwalaka in Igboanusi (2017) fingers the meddling of the Christian missionaries during their writing of the Igbo language as largely responsible for the less developed state of the Igbo language, in comparison to Yoruba and Hausa languages.

Igboanusi identifies Igbo literature as literature in the Igbo language and Igbo English, written in order to project the Igbo culture and world view globally. The tremendous influence of the English language on the writing of the Igbo tradition in Nigerian literature gave birth to the Igbo English, which is an ethnic brand of Nigerian English.

Revitalizing the Igbo language or the Igbo English in literature for youth empowerment and national development, would include the understanding of the dialectal conflicts in the Igbo language. It would include the reorientation of the Igbo youth on their cultural and linguistic values and duties.

Ayeleru (2019) also submits that 'The colonial French administration did not allow Africans to participate in the management of their countries, and the teaching of national languages was prohibited in their schools' (p. 48)

European languages were forced on the Africans, and the use of national languages forbidden. The French insultingly reduced the African languages to the level of 'vernacular,' which are inferior and substandard to the French language. Africans cherish and preserve European languages at the detriment of their mother tongues. They have ceased from speaking indigenous languages to their children at home (Ayeleru, 2019).

Two of the roles of literature is to reform society and re-interpret cultures. In the attempts at revitalizing cultural education among the youths and nationally, the place of literature becomes very prominent and indispensable. Through the novels, plays and poems of literary giants like Achebe, Soyinka, Okigbo, Ofeimun and Imam, among others, cultural education has been ensured from generations to generations. Cultures are being re-interpreted in the face of modernization and 21st century civilization. Authors have lent their voices to reshaping cultures and educating the Nigerian populace, especially the youths (Ayeleru, 2019).

The politics of language education comes powerfully into play when we talk of language education policies and revitalizing language for national development. The politics of language education cannot be disregarded when talking about language revitalization. According to Yekini (2006):

Which of the variety of the languages spoken within a tribe would be singled out for supremacy are others, and by which process would this be done; electoral or selectional? The battle for superiority and ascendancy into such prestigious level of recognition of a language within a tribe, will almost be frenzied if not chaotic. This alone on a microcosmic scale would be tedious, speak less of a macrocosmic scale of inter-tribal or inter-national nature. (p. 236)

The need to revitalize language brings to mind the question of which language to revitalize for national development. Some would argue that the English language is the language of colonization, therefore it does not merit revitalizing in Nigeria, especially at the detriment of the indigenous languages. Yet, English is the language of instruction and research in Nigeria (Yekini, 2006).

Igboanusi (2017) recounting an example of language conflicts, narrated a case of meddling with the script of the Naira (Nigerian currency) from 2004 to 2009 by the governors of the Central Bank of Nigeria Professor Chukwuma Soludo and erstwhile Emir Sanusi Lamido Sanusi. He recounted how the Ajami script was removed from the Naira in favor of the scripts of the indigenous languages. Ajami script was later restored on the Naira.

In the bid to develop Nigeria, the politics of language and the attendant conflicts cannot be ignored. For a successful Language revitalization attempts towards youth empowerment and national development, geopolitical linguistic power play must be put into consideration. The English language position of official language today is further assured by the avoidance of the conflicts and politics involved in selecting any indigenous language to this position.

Politics and conflicting ideologies have negatively impacted the otherwise brilliant educational policies of instructing the child in his or her mother tongue or language of immediate community from the first three years of primary education, until introduction of the English language from the fourth year (Igboanusi, 2017).

5. Revitalization of Language, Literature, and Cultural Education for Youth Empowerment and National Development

Language, literature and cultural education cannot be overemphasized as powerful resources and recourse to youth empowerment and national development. The Nigerian government should explore and exploit our rich and renown literary effusion, in the linguistic and cultural education of our youth. For Nigeria to take its place among world ranked nations, the indigenous languages need to be elevated to languages of scientific and technological education. This would be possible through careful and deliberate language planning and development. Literature is the bedrock of the teaching and learning of the thoughts and the civilization of a people.

Much of what we are as Nigerians are in our literature. Our stories from different authors across the nation meld into a tapestry of our rich and diverse heritage. I remember as a child, growing up, that my voice of education came from the different story-telling from older generations both physically under the moonlight, or via diverse media such as the television, radio and print. Without any tribal preferences or sentiments, as a youngster, *Magana Jarice* of Abubakar Imam, *Ogboju ode ninu Igbo Irunmole* of D.O. Fagunwa, and *Things Fall Apart* of Chinua Achebe, were all my voice of education. Achebe once said that the novelist is a teacher who has the responsibility to shape the social and moral values of his society (Miller, 1981). Indeed, growing up, my mental empowerment and unbiased world outlook came from the teachings of these literary juggernauts.

There is this popular saying that 'An idle hand is the devil's workshop. If Nigerian youths are not gainfully employed, they are bound to get into mischiefs and fall into bad companies such as the 'Yahoo-yahoo' boys, the 'Million boys' gangs and 'Badoo' cults. The #EndSARS protest is also a fallout of the economic hardships during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Lack of jobs always make the youths easy prey and recruits for hooliganism, banditry and terrorism, among other heinous crimes.

Female youth empowerment connects to literary theories such as feminism, womanism and intersectionality among others. In these theories, female youths are inspired and educated on standing for their rights and values. Feminism generally teaches girls and women to be self-reliant and assertive. It teaches female youth emancipation from the ills of the society such as prostitution, rape, girls and women trafficking, abuse and all forms of female molestation and oppression.

Literary works of prose, drama and poetry abound with illustrations and portrayals of these social evils, and ways of combating them. Wumi Raji's 'Another Life' depicts aspects of these female oppression. Raji's perspectives on domination are attempts at reducing the popularity of patriarchal hegemony and influence reconstructions of masculinity from being hegemonic to being complementary of women for the survival of human society (Osanyemi, 2018). Therefore, youth empowerment and national development is by nurture and not nature. Since whatever we become, we learn.

The 'Ise I'ogun ise' and the 'Omoluwabi' didactics embedded in the Yoruba folktales and the stories of the adventures of tortoise told by moonlight in the clearing of our fathers' compound, form an indispensable part of our voice of education. Oral literature is an important aspect of child development, youth empowerment and national development. The stories told by our forebears, handed down to us by our parents, are replete with lessons of morality, patriotism, industry culture, empathy and self-worth which should be characteristic of the citizens of any nation bidding for development (Adegbite & Adegbite, 2008).

As virtues gradually became values, and subsequently degenerate into vices, it becomes evident that the place of oral literature of storytelling and retelling are hardly ever in practice these days. The era of 'Tales by Moonlight' and 'Magana jarice' is finally gone, and we are worse for it as a society. The high level of crass immorality, indolence, callousness and loss of identity in the youths nowadays are testament to how much society has abandoned this oral tradition and its didactics. This is also testament of how far society has fallen. There is a general disregard for culture and patriotism in favor of modernization, technology and pop-culture in the current generation of youth (Ogundokun, 2018).

In recent times, Professor Toyin Falola in the bid to revitalize cultural education has been attempting to separate the Yoruba cultural practice from its Christian demonization (Alaroye, 2020). Religion in the lives of youth plays an impactful role on their cultural acquisitions and practices. For instance, it is no longer fashionable among the youths to be acolytes to 'uncivilized' cultures such as following masquerades or donning the costumes. Neither is it common to engage in the village festivals, whose origins are termed idolatrous. The question truly lies in which aspects of cultural education should be given to the youths in order to empower them for national development. Are there truly unpleasant or unprogressive aspects of culture?

In contemporary and modern times, youths tend towards technology and social media at the detriment of cultural values and practice, which are generally perceived to be primitive or local.

Ayeleru (2019) sees culture as 'an attribute of man, and it is numerous and diverse'. (p. 47). He goes on to assert that no culture is superior to the other. Layiwola in Ayeleru (2019) defines culture in relation to civilization thus:

When we talk of people's culture or their civilization (as both terms are synonymous, one being an index of the other), we always imply two facets of the same things their material, visible culture and the immaterial or intangible heritage. When I relate that culture and civilization are mutually referential, I mean that there can be no civilization without a culture and that the fact that people of the fact that they possess a civilization that would have grown from the culture ... one material aspect of culture is the language. (p. 47)

From the above definition, it begs the question to interrogate why the youths in Nigeria, in recent times, associate civilization with western culture, and not their own indigenous Nigerian culture. Youths who see their indigenous culture as backward, cannot claim to be civilized. The mentality of cherishing and valuing western culture above indigenous ones is anti-developmental and unprogressive. Our ceremonies, businesses, leisure, education and devotions are dominated by western culture. In our mode of dressing, greetings and human socio-cultural interactions, it is obvious that majority of the youths (and adults) have abandoned their voice of cultural education. If indeed there was any beforehand.

Revitalizing cultural education to empower the youth and develop the nation will involve re-educating the youth on the importance of their indigenous culture. Citing the assimilation policy of the French as attempts at subverting African culture, Ayeleru (2019) recognizes the struggle of literary practitioners such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Birago Diop, Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe and Cyprian Ekwensi, in the protection of African culture.

Literature has always been a literary receptacle, custodian and vehicle of culture. Perhaps, one of the most probable reasons why youths are estranged from their culture is because they do not read books that teach their culture, neither do they have time for its morality in stories and folktales.

Revitalizing cultural education for youth empowerment and the development of patriotic and proud Nigerian youths would require the combination of language, literature and culture, in the re-education and re-orientation of the Nigerian youths.

6. Recommendations

Groucho Marx's most famous quote on reading 'I find television very educating. Every time somebody turns on the set I go into the other room and read a book.' points to reading as one of the recommendations necessary for revitalizing language, literature and cultural education for youth empowerment and national development. Elevating the reading culture over the watching culture is an important step towards the revitalization of the trio. Youths nowadays favors watching screens than turning the pages of books.

The birth of television is usually considered as the death of reading. Language proficiency is hinged on acquisition of vocabularies. In the 70s and 80s students became good in language use because they read more. Print media leaves a lot to the imagination, thereby allowing for the development of the cognitive ability of the reader. Audiovisual medium does not. Television and movies take away the imagination and leave nothing unexplained. The cognitive ability of the student is hampered and he or she becomes lazy because all is already explained. I remember how readers' vocabulary arsenal and

descriptive power are developed in the era of James Hadley Chase and Pacesetters novels. Nowadays, print media is quickly being replaced by electronic copies of the same book which people are not patient enough to read online.

Revaluation of the indigenous languages among the youth is essential to revitalization of language, literature and cultural education in order to empower them and develop the nations. Youths need a re-education about their maternal languages and their values. Communities and peoples need to organize language immersion programs for their Eurocentric youths, and enlighten them on their cultural and traditional values and the power and beauty of the indigenous languages. Parents need to go back to the use of oral literature of storytelling and of folktales to motivate and inspire the youths.

Another possible way of revitalizing the trio is for government and stakeholders to emphasize and implement policies on language education as stipulated in the standards of the tertiary institutions. Often times, it is discovered that the problems lie with supervision, monitoring and implementation of the policies.

Another recommendation is to fully digitalize learning in the country. Nations across the globe have upgraded to full implementation of e-education and e-learning. For the youths to be truly empowered and the nation developed, we cannot shy away from the technological realities of the 21st century. Telecommunications and social media are gradually being accepted as dependable means of education. Even social media communications are being accepted as formal academic references in research and academic writings. This area also provides lucrative occupation of the youth in gainful employments in the digital technology industries.

Finally, the government should provide jobs and enabling environment for self-reliance and industry among the youths. The cliché of the youth being the leaders of tomorrow, could be actualize through government centering its focus and machineries on the empowerment of the youth and national development. Infrastructural development and economic growth are essential ingredients necessary for youth empowerment. Most of the youths now risk their lives in search of greener pastures abroad. Many of them usually end up contributing significantly to the growth of their host nations, if they do not end up dead in the Atlantic Ocean or Mediterranean Sea.

7. Conclusion

If government could muster the political will to work around and work out the exigencies of language politics and conflicts surrounding the choice of mother tongues as language of instruction, and invest in careful language planning and development, no doubt, the aforementioned recommendations will avail much towards empowering the youths and developing the nation.

Indeed, language is an indispensable tool towards building a formidable army of productive youths, who in turn would develop the nation. The force of creativity and the sheer strength of industry and innovation reside with the youths. Teachers and stakeholders in youth empowerment need to tap into the almost limitless and unstoppable resource of the youths and direct these towards developing the nation in all sectors.

Regardless the attendant problems of youth such as occasional recklessness, over-confidence and stubbornness, yet the teeming mass in this age bracket are the needed human capital in moving the nation forward. Indifference of the youth towards proper language acquisition and mastery, towards the benefits and the world of literature and the resident knowledge and wisdom in cultural education, has led them to espouse modernization and technology, at the detriment of the trio. Yet, proper educational incentives and well-drawn and implemented curriculum on language, literature and cultural education will surely bring about not just empowered youths, but also a developed nation.

Therefore, I urge as many as are concerned to begin the journey towards the realization of the recommendations in this paper, and contribute thereby their quota towards youth empowerment and national development.

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