

## The Relevance of Language and Literature in National Integration and Development

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### Abstract

*Language is a means through which human beings express themselves, understand one another, execute programs and projects as well as create problems and equally solve them. The written form of language known as literature helps concretize these expressions and experiences. This study views language and literature as viable instruments for conflict resolution, promotion of unity and oneness among the people and the enhancement of national development at all levels; educationally, politically, economically, socially and culturally. The study employed the survey method and data was sourced through oral interview and written documents. The study posits that, harnessing the skills and resources of language and literature will enhance the proper organization of the human society, thus, eliminating conflicts and other associative prejudices. The study recommends that, individuals and the government should work harmoniously to develop the indigenous languages for onward integration and development of the nation.*

**Keywords:** language, literature, integration, development, conflict resolution

### 1.1 Introduction

The possession of language by man more than any other attribute, defines the human nature. "Language is at the centre of all things human". It is by means of language that people talk, think, read, write and listen. Language is part of the social structure of our communities; it forges the emotional bond between people; it's the vehicle for literature and poetry. "Language is not part of us; language defines us... it is difficult to imagine much significant social, intellectual or artistic activity taking place without the opportunities for communication offered by language" (O'Grady, Archibald and Katamba, 2011:1).

The integral nature of language in the life of man and his affairs point to the fact, that language represents the force with which the wheels of life are driven. "We live in a world of words" and by words man associates, creates, organizes, mobilizes and advances whatever course he sets his mind on. Thus, the basis for significant advancement in achieving unity and development in the human society is a viable language and vibrant literature. To emphasize the fact that language and its equivalence literature are viable tools in national integration and development is a restatement. Examples abound, of developed nations like Russia, China, Japan, USA etc., whose national language is one of their

very own indigenous language and by it the nation stands developed today.

It is regrettable that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has caught up with Nigeria still tagged an underdeveloped nation. It is surprising that the nation seems to have everything in place; the man power and natural resources yet no significant progress is recorded. It is sad to note that, citizens of the country have not helped themselves or have the leaders done any better. The country is over fifty years old yet there have been no significant changes in its social, political, educational and technological sectors. The little changes effected by well-meaning citizens are destroyed by corruption and the incessant communal, political and religious crisis that have bedevilled the country for so long.

It is common for a nation that has refused to develop to be saddled with disgruntled citizens who are ready to do whatever it takes to survive because they lack basic necessities of life. Nigeria has over 60% of such crop of citizens. In the midst of such, there cannot be peace or the thought for any reasonable development. It then calls for the nation to have a rethink, do a retracing of steps back to where we lost it. So that corrective measures can be employed to right the wrongs and thus, follow the right path. The nation has to decide with determination to shake off the tag 'underdeveloped nation' to seek to



attain the heights other developed nations have attained. This can only be achieved through persistently educating the citizens for a change of attitude about themselves and their nation. This is where the instrument of language and literature is most useful.

It is through language oral or written that citizens are taught to know, that the difference between developed and underdeveloped nations is not the age of the nation, not dependent on availability of natural resources, not how intellectually sound they are, not their race or colour but the difference is the attitude of the people, moulded for many years by education and culture which is transmitted through language. In other words, people's attitudes are moulded by teaching them the principles of life such as: ethics, integrity, responsibility, determination, love for work, respect for laws, regulations, life etc., when such are imbibed in the lives of citizens, which is possible majorly through language, unity and development can be achieved.

This paper is an attempt to reiterate the relevance of language and literature in achieving the kind of unity, cohesion and development that Nigeria seeks; and not just any language or literature, but the people's indigenous language and literature which are capable of expressing their culture, norms, values and beliefs and predisposes to them certain chances of interpretation. The fact about language and literature in nation building may be obvious but the centrality and relevance of its role may be lost to a people who have an alternative, (English in the case of Nigeria) but which obviously has not attained the nation any plausible height, hence, the need to advocate for the development of our indigenous languages for onward integration and development of the nation.

## **1.2 Conceptual Review**

### **1.2.1 Language**

Language is a "purely non- instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced vocal symbols" (Sapir, 1921: 8). It is a vehicle for cultural transmission. According to Engholm (1965: 15) "language is a key to the heart of a people, if we lose the key, we lose the people. If

we treasure the key and keep it safe, it will unlock the door to untold riches." These riches can be wealth, affluence, knowledge etc., thus, bringing about national development. Olaoye (2013: 748) sees language as "an index of identity which serves as a repository of a people's culture, industry and exploits". Language is the concrete act of speaking, writing and signing.

Language is the only creative property unique to human beings. It is the only road to thinking (Sapir, 1921) which makes human society possible. According to Akindele and Adegbite (2005), it is as a vehicle of culture that language functions as an instrument of human development. Thus, a discussion on national integration and development incorporate language and other cultural resources such as politics, social life, economics, education, science and technology, arts and music (literature). Indigenous languages are treasures of culture and self-identity (Olaoye 2013).

### **1.2.2 Literature**

Literature in a broad sense means compositions that tell stories, dramatize situations, express emotions and analyse and advocate ideas (Edgar and Henry, 1986). It deals with all forms of written productions and oral performances with artistic or intellectual value. It involves all forms of linguistic documentations and communicative artistic performances.

Literature and language are absolutely inseparable. They have a mother daughter relationship where language is the mother and literature is the female offspring. Literature, its existence and functionality therefore depends solidly on language. It uses language to make informative or educational documentations, to dramatize events/situations, express emotions or ideas etc.

### **1.2.3 National Integration**

National integration is the awareness of a common identity among the citizens of a country. It means that though we belong to different castes, religions, regions and speak different languages; we recognise the fact that we are all one. This is important in the building of a strong and prosperous nation. Alexandre, (1968) as cited in Bamgbose (1991:10) opines, "national



integration consist of creating or strengthening within the borders of a country a collective sentiment of belonging together irrespective of individual or subgroup differences". National integration therefore, is the unity and oneness desired and worked for by members of a community, who happens to be coexisting as a result of amalgamation.

#### **1.2.4 National development**

National development is a gradual and advanced improvement through progressive changes in the socio-political life of a nation. It is the growth of the nation in terms of internal cohesion, integration, unity, economic well-being, mass participation in the government and educational growth (Olaoye, 2013:748). Such development can be educational, social, political, cultural etc. National development can also be explained as the improvement of national institutions towards the standardization or the betterment of the citizen's life, situations or conditions.

According to Bamgbose (1991:36) "national development is usually described in terms of economic growth, attainment of economic targets, growth rate, increase in Gross National Products (GNP) or Gross Domestic Product (GDP), rise in per capita income, etc". Thus, national development involves a constant and consistent growth towards a complete transformation of every sector of the nation; the economy, social, political, science and technology and education in order to meet the nation's needs and demands.

#### **1.3 Methodology**

The study adopted the survey method. Data was sourced through interviews and most importantly documented sources. Respondents were randomly picked from Makurdi town and interviewed. This was for the purpose of eliciting their opinion on whether or not language and literature is relevant to national integration and development. Findings are explained below.

#### **1.4 Literature Review**

##### **1.4.1 The Relevance of Language to National Integration and Development**

Language as a human means of communication and interaction plays a significant

and pivotal role in national integration and development. As earlier noted, national integration and development are significant changes for the better in the lives of both the citizen and his nation. It is the awareness of a common identity among the citizens of a country that engineers them to work harmoniously with unity of purpose for the improvement of their status as well as that of the nation. It is a feat achieved by conscious determination and hard work through the instrumental help of language.

Language being a potent vehicle of transmitting culture, norms, values and beliefs from generation to generation remains a central factor in determining the overall status of a nation. It is a human element that fosters unity, understanding and development. It is through language that people socialise, foster emotional ties, organise their thoughts, share ideas and mobilise others to chart a course of action.

For any significant advancement to occur in any life or sector of the nation for instance, the economic sector of the nation depends on innovations which are conceived by man through the enabling presence of language. Without the possession of language, man will lack the ability to think and formulate new plans of action; have no means of disseminating neither this knowledge to others nor how to collaborate with them for better success.

Likewise, in the educational sector, knowledge is acquired and taught by means of language. Without language it will be near impossible to acquire knowledge and this will hamper progress and development. The innovations in science and technology whether encoded in complex mathematical symbols, abbreviated jargons, formulas or highly complex sentences depend on language to make sense.

It then holds that, the most basic and valuable possession of man is language because so much of human existence depends on it. With language, man has the capacity for dealing with changes in the environment, to organize his society and face other various emergencies of life. It is arguable that for any nation to make progress or thrive, its science and technology must be well developed. One of the means to



achieve this is through language, in which the concepts are expressed, and not just any language but that which is capable and acceptable by all in the administration and running of the nation's affairs (Yusuf, 2012:898).

In a country like Nigeria where there is high degree of linguistic diversity; there is always a need for the adoption of a linguistic strategy to enhance communicative interaction among the people as well as foster development. Such strategies include: linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism, vernacularization and internationalism.

Linguistic assimilation is the belief that everyone regardless of origin should learn the dominant language of the society. Examples can be cited of French in France, English in United States of America etc. Linguistic pluralism is the recognition of more than one language in a society. It can be total (absolute) or partial so that all or only some aspects of life can be conducted in each of the more than one language society. This kind of linguistic strategy takes place in countries like Belgium, Canada etc. Vernacularization is the restoration or elaboration of an indigenous language such as; Bahasa Indonesia in Indonesia, Hebrew in Israel etc. Internationalism on the other hand is the adoption of a non-indigenous language of wider communication as a national language. Examples are English in Nigeria and French in Côte-d'Ivoire etc.

Whichever of the above strategies a country adopts, the main essence is to bring the diverse ethnic groups together for the execution of national goals and objectives. However, taking a cue from what obtains in the developed nations like Russia, Japan, China, USA etc., where normal daily routines, including research and development are carried out in their own language as well as all their innovations and technological breakthroughs codified and encoded in their national language; it thus, suggests that, "a nation is best developed by the way the language that best portrays its ideology is used, that language serves as a medium for expression of the entity it represents" (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015:114).

Language is undoubtedly one of the most powerful tools God has given to man. With language man finds his identity, socialises, mobilize his thoughts and people around him to achieve set goals. These thoughts, ideas, experiences are preserved through literature both orally and written and bequeathed to the younger generation.

#### **1.4.2 The Relevance of Literature to National Integration and Development**

Literature encompasses all documented records ranging from compositions that tell stories, dramatize situations, express emotions, analyse and advocate ideas to more formal documented records. It involves all forms of linguistic documentations and communicative artistic performance. Literature as an equivalence of language is essentially important to national integration and development. It uses language to reflect or mirror the society, sometimes with humorous and satirical words, or expressions, actions or performances. This helps to reveal societal ills and enhances correction. Olaoye (2013:751) agrees that,

Literature through language warns people of dangerous and anti-social practices, ridicules people of mean and despicable character and criticizes people's evil deeds. Literature in form of good poetry, songs and music especially those philosophical ones which extol good virtues and deride ignoble courses or actions are capable of correcting societal ills.

Literature helps in developing a nation through information, education and the transfer of cherished cultural and traditional beliefs and philosophies from generation to generation. Literature helps us to grow both, personally and intellectually. It stretches our minds and develops our imaginations which by extension help in building our nation. It increases our understanding and enlarges our power of sympathy. It links us to the cultural and religious world of which we are a part.

Through our cumulative experiences in reading, literature shapes our goals and values by clarifying our own identities- both positively



through the acceptance of the admirable in human beings and negatively though the rejection of the sinister. It enables us to develop perspectives on events occurring both locally and globally, and thereby, gives us understanding and control. It is one of the shaping influences of life that makes us human (Edgar and Henry, 1986).

By Olaoye's submission, literature helps educate and form the character of people, thereby making them better citizens and better positioned to chat good courses in the society. In a similar vein, Edgar and Henry concur that, the enlightenment literature avails to people widens the scope of their perception and enables deeper understanding of events, a bases for national integration and development to thrive.

### **1.4.3 Resolving Conflicts for better integration Through Language**

Conflict is a clash or disagreement that is often violent between two opposing individuals or groups. Conflict is inevitable in a situation where diverse ethnic groups coexist. In such a situation, there is bound to be friction, suspicion, disharmony and clash of interest among members of the community. Language and literature can as well be used to resolve such conflicts between groups and bring about national integration, unity, harmony and development.

Language as attests by Jija, (2012:112) "has the characteristics of a double edged sword especially in circumstances of crisis. He quoted Orjime (2002:56) as observing that, the misappropriation of language is a sure way of bringing about disharmony and by extension, underdevelopment but when carefully and democratically used, language brings about cooperation which begets development.

Ironically, conflict brings people together and the resolution of the conflict is done through dialogue with the use of language. As the people interact to find basis for compromise, language is the means of interaction, and whatever resolutions arrived at, such, are maintained, sustained and disseminated to others through language. In essence, every developmental achievement by a people and their nation revolves round the use of language.

### **1.5 Findings**

Judging from the responses of respondents and documented sources consulted, it is clear that, human beings are associative, social and interactive animals and hence their being together becomes fruitless whenever there is no common understandable medium of association or interaction. In such cases there is no hope for meaningful growth and development since there is lack of exchange of ideas, knowledge etc. This can be biblically exemplified when God split the language of the builders of Babel into different tongues that were not mutually intelligible; that caused confusion and hence, an end to their wonderful project.

The Babel incident reveals clearly the power of common language and the danger of non-intelligible linguistic diversities. It is pertinent to note that linguistic uniformity is not only concerned with mere speech, it grows higher to embrace the spirit of mutual agreement and co-existence, unity and oneness. When the speakers of diverse languages are integrated by a common language and their hearts become glued and inseparable, the degree of their exploits becomes unimaginable.

It is true, that all development: social, economic, political, educational, science and technological are all initiated, executed, conveyed and achieved through language. When a viable language, well understood by the people is the means by which information about ideas, discoveries, strategies and innovations are disseminated, effective communication is achieved and plausible heights are attained in the nation's development.

It is also of immense importance for a nation to carry out its affairs and operations using its indigenous language for the enhancement of unity and development amongst its people; a language that is their very own with which they formulate their thoughts, understand most, and which best portrays their ideologies. Similarly, literature in its diverse forms unites minds and advances development. For instance, the film industry as a literary theatre is a source of income to all nations and helps to generate revenue to the government for the development of the nations, and Nigeria's Nollywood is no exception.



Through theatre, oral artistic performances and books, literature helps to bring the diverse ethnic groups together. Thus, we see most Nigerians if not all being interested in Nollywood actors and actresses, musicians, comedians and authors of recommendable works because of their tremendous contributions to the nation by their artistic oral and written exhibitions.

We know that education has its foundation on books (writings) and literature is the guarantee for such writing or documentation. Literature concretises the abstract knowledge, interprets our experiences and actions helping us to visualise them. A good piece of literature can be regarded as an authentic mirror image of the people and the society. Literature has thus contributed immensely to educational development in Nigeria and all nations of the world.

## Conclusion

Language is very important to human existence. It is at the heart of all things human. It is through language that integration among citizens is fostered and significant development achieved. There is therefore every need to harness the skills and resources of language and literature to enhance the proper organization of the human society, thus, eliminating conflicts and other associative prejudices.

This paper looks at the unifying, integrative and developmental roles language and literature play in a nation and thus, advances the proposition that, for Nigeria to achieve the integration and development she seeks, conscious and concerted efforts in developing our indigenous languages and promoting their literature must be employed. The onus therefore is on the government as a strategic national body to do the needful towards enhancing rapid development and standardisation of the indigenous languages.

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