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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Cultural Heritage*

Reconstructing culture and building societal values in the global era: The imperative of mother-tongue in elementary schools curriculum in Africa

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ABSTRACT

Every tribe has a unique culture of which language is a distinctive feature. The relationship between language and culture is fundamental, as a native language provides access to understanding a community's way of life. Language is a key connector for people, regardless of status or background, and an essential part of cultural identity. In Africa, indigenous languages, or mother tongues, play a crucial role in preserving culture, fostering social engagement, upholding societal values, and promoting national unity. However, colonial influence has led to the adoption of foreign languages like English and French as official languages in many African countries, overshadowing native languages. This shift has caused African youths, particularly in Anglophone and Francophone countries, to lose interest in their native languages, preferring foreign languages and Western lifestyles instead. This trend is exacerbated in schools, where English or French is the primary mode of communication. Adopting a critical analysis, the paper laid much emphasis on reconstructing culture and building societal values in the global era. Findings reveal that language and culture are correlated, and the African continent is faced with the problem of code-switching or mixing of languages. The paper, therefore, advocates for the inclusion of mother tongues in elementary school curricula to address the decline in interest in native languages and the rising issue of code-switching or mixing of languages.

KEYWORDS: Africa, culture, elementary school curriculum, language, mother tongue, societal values

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Introduction

In Africa, while English has been embraced by numerous nations, particularly those formerly under British rule, indigenous or local languages continue to be utilized for communication. Nevertheless, due to colonial legacies, many English-speaking African nations have marginalized their local languages, significantly shaping the media's choice of language for conveying information to the African populace (Adedeji, 2015).

Language, a communicative tool, has been in existence right from the origin of man, though its origin has been a matter of great controversy. Many theories of the origin of language are mere speculations because many have come up with self-opinionated theories of its origin, and none has survived the test of time (Nwala, 2015). Language is a social commodity and without it, humans, animals and every other form of living thing would not coexist peacefully. This is as a result of the power of language is a unifying factor in the world over; it is the socializing seed of the world, a solemn mechanism that transverses and transforms the society; thus, its importance, especially to the human race, can never be over emphasised. Language defines the social behaviour of the society, and with language, one can trace or identify a particular group of people. The realm of literature abounds with numerous interpretations of language. These varying perspectives converge on the fundamental understanding that language serves as a structured and methodical tool for communication. Characterized by its organization, intricacy, evolution, and adherence to grammar, language encompasses symbols, signs, and vocal expressions that are arbitrarily constructed and conventionally employed to convey ideas, sentiments, and concepts (Anyanwu, 2002).

Non-Africans are proud of their national languages as they communicate with them fluently, their national language surpasses other alien languages. No matter how exposed a Chinese man is, he writes and communicates in Chinese language with his fellowmen. The same goes with an Indian man (writing and speaking Hindu language), an Englishman (communicating in English) and Frenchman (communicating in French). But when an African man makes mistake either in writing or speaking English or French language, his fellowmen make gist of him. This is an indication of Neo-colonial mentality as Africans still see themselves as inferior to their colonial masters. Some Africans, especially the youths only communicate in either English or French language. While some individuals engage in code-switching or code-mixing, which involves the blending of two or more languages during speech. For example, Yoruba-English language (Nigeria): *Mi ò like bí friend ẹ ẹ ń treat mi* (I don't like the way your friend treats me). Another example is Ngemba-French language (Cameroon): *Bonjour mbhunmayi* (Good morning my person). As such, the affected African youths know little or nothing of their native languages let alone their cultural values.

Hymes (1971) characterizes code-switching as the common practice of using two or more languages, dialects, or speech styles interchangeably. Meanwhile, Bokamba (1989) delineates both terms as such: Code-switching involves blending words, phrases, and sentences from different grammatical systems within the same speech context, whereas code mixing entails incorporating various linguistic elements, including affixes, individual words, phrases, and clauses, in collaborative communication, requiring participants to reconcile what they hear with their understanding to interpret intentions. Further, some of the factors responsible for the downplay of native language (mother tongue) in Africa are: Colonialism, religion, environment, parental and societal influences. Not only have the government and schools failed in prioritizing native languages (mother tongue) but also in promoting African cultural values to be enviable by all. There is need to work on the mentality of African youths in their prime to preserve African native languages and heritage by introducing them to the right knowledge production and application of their mother tongue (Daudu, Osimen & Shuaibu, 2023). The foundations of African children matter a lot when it comes to teaching and learning and as such, the elementary schools in Africa have a dominant role to play in reconstructing and building African values in the Global era.

Literature Review

Language is a vital factor in building societal values; a prominent factor in a nation's development. It is the index of a people's culture (Omo-Ojugo, 1991); culture itself is transmitted through language (Hymes, 1964). In civilized worlds, language is the foundation that brings and binds people together. Language is a powerful means of socialisation and forms the culture of a group of people. A feeling of belonging and a sense of brotherhood are nurtured and brought about through language (Ogbodo, 2002). Language, much like culture, serves as

both a reflection and a vehicle for transmitting cultural elements, and societal values significantly influence this cultural coding process.

The concept of culture is ubiquitous, extending beyond elite or refined circles such as opera houses and universities (Hudson, 2001). While anthropologists may interpret the term differently, it consistently denotes shared characteristics within a community, particularly those that differentiate it from others. Essentially, culture embodies the way of life of a group, deeply ingrained in their language. Hence, culture can be regarded as a form of knowledge acquired through observation or direct teaching from others within the community. Given its acquisition from those around us, it implies a shared understanding among individuals who have acquired it similarly. This form of knowledge significantly influences communication, especially in language usage (Chukwudi, Osimen, Dele-Dada, & Ahmed, 2024). In essence, the semantic structure of a language is intertwined with the cultural background of its speakers (Hudson, 2001).

To explore further, culture, when distilled to its core, encompasses the myriad methods and traditions through which individuals navigate their existence and interpret their surroundings. These surroundings encompass a complex amalgamation of spiritual, material, intellectual, emotional, and environmental facets, as well as reactions to natural phenomena. Each collective and community possesses distinct cultural frameworks that mold their lifestyles and societal norms (Akanle, 2012). When referring to “culture,” we often encompass intellectual and creative expressions, including literature, music, drama, and visual arts. Another usage of “culture” is to denote the beliefs and customs of another society, particularly when these are perceived as closely intertwined with tradition or religion.

Culture is an integral aspect of every society, including our own, influencing norms and providing insight into the reasons behind them. This comprehensive perspective on culture, as outlined in the definition adopted at the World Conference on Cultural Policies in Mexico in 1982, suggests that culture serves as a foundation for the majority of development strategies across various societal frameworks. It advocates for a deeper focus on cultural dimensions in development efforts, highlighting the significance of leveraging diverse African cultures for culturally driven development initiatives. Additionally, it emphasizes the importance of promoting media campaigns aimed at restoring, preserving, and enhancing positive African cultural values (Agba, 2012). According to Aret Adams (1999), culture can be conceived as “the totality of the way of life evolved by a people in their attempt to meet the challenges of living in their environment which gives meaning to their social, political, economic aesthetic and religious norms and modes of organisation ... distinguishing them from their neighbours”. In his work, *Cultural Forces in World Politics*, Ali A. Mazrui (1990), identifies seven functions of culture in any given society. The first function is its provision of lenses of perception and cognition. The second function of culture as identified by Mazrui is that culture provides motives for human action and serves as an instrument for control of social change; thirdly, culture serves as a criterion of evaluation. Through culture we can make moral judgement about human actions, indicating right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable, and good or bad. Meaning that what is praiseworthy or condemnable, is a determinate of culture. fourth, culture serves as a means or basis of identity.

Culture is a means through which people project to the world who they are, and where they came from. Fifthly, culture is a mode of communication. Apart from language which is a part of culture, and a very viable means of communication, other elements of culture that could serve as modes of communication comprise music, mode of dressing, and ideas that people generate. Sixthly, culture is the basis of social stratification. Our status, image, and what we become in society is a function of our cultural background. Mazrui (1990) points out in his seventh point that, culture serves as a system of production and consumption. This function of culture is germane because social and political arrangements are largely determined by the system of production in the society.

In addition, culture serves as the basis of a society’s values. Values are the standard of judgment in human society, they are closely connected to what an individual, groups, and communities accept as guiding principles of life. Values, more often than not are the product of experiences that inform the influence of people and the prevailing conditions in the society one finds one’s self. All human actions are determined by value, thus, interactions with the environment are value-laden. Values come into play whenever people make decisions, make choices, or express preferences. The sustainable human values such as truth, justice, and peace necessary for national development and a sustainable economy are fast eroding the national polity, and this

has very severe practical implications for the development of African cultures. Therefore, there's a need for the reconstruction of culture and societal values in Africa (Alofun, 2013).

In Nigeria and other multilingual nations, especially African nations, language situations, and cultural activities have become complex, thereby making people acquire non-native languages first and end up not knowing their mother tongue. Cultural values are depleting, thus, parents, no longer, teach the children the indigenous languages, nor ask them to speak the few ones that were taught. We claim that it is vernacular; thus, losing the beauty of our language, and neglecting our cultural dressing. We rather suit up in three-piece clothes in the tropical climate and sweat profusely like the proverbial 'Christmas Goat'. We appreciate foreign food, ceremonies, and patronage more than our cultural items/elements, many Africans possess a colonial mindset, which sees everything African as bad or evil, but anything "oyinbo" as good.

We are not canvassing that African countries should not interact with other nations of the world, because as Bodunrin (1991) avers, "closed societies - societies which have very little contact with the outside world - are usually very traditional, and as such, they are usually quite stable in their beliefs and do not develop philosophy!" but, that we should not throw away our *cultural particulars*, as Kwasi Wiredu calls them, for the aspect of culture give meaning to our existence, and doing away with them implies that we are living an unauthentic life. The influence of cultural power can have negative repercussions when individuals who adopt American language, accents, attire, or preferences in entertainment evoke resentment among those who do not share these cultural inclinations (Omo-Ojugo (2004).

Considering the roles of culture in the society highlighted above, and the values of many Africans concerning African culture, there is no gainsaying that a reconstruction of African cultures is expedient. African societies now entertain values that do not emerge from their culture, and the strange cultures imbibed have become clogged to their developmental strides. According to Aluko (2000), the challenge to traditional African culture sprang from its exposure to the beliefs and practices of other people. Practices such as colonialism, capitalism, and the wave of globalisation; and as he posits, "all these interminglings present us with reasons for reflection and causes on how our culture can sustain the society and cope with the challenges of the future". However, as Ali Abdi expressed, this springboard for development in Africa has been de-cultured through the weapon of globalisation:

In Africa, particularly during the mid-19th century to the mid-20th century, the expansive forces of globalization emerged, largely driven by Europe's political, economic, educational, and cultural motives. This era saw the introduction of unprecedented forms of globalization, which significantly impacted African cultures, knowledge systems, perspectives, and native educational structures. Many indigenous elements were either completely eradicated or pushed to the margins, rendering them non-functional. As a result of these unequal encounters, both during colonial and postcolonial periods, forms of 'social development' emerged that largely disregarded cultural components. This contributed to further underdevelopment and weakened institutional frameworks in Africa. (Abdi, 2010: 2)

Due to globalization, the foundational principles and mechanisms of African development have largely been situated within frameworks reminiscent of ongoing colonization efforts. In Africa, nominal democracies were introduced without sufficient comprehension or opportunity for the populace to assess and understand their strengths and weaknesses (Ihonvbere, 1996). The enforcement of Western liberalism as a governing system, integral to globalization, reinforces the dominance of Western ideals over nations with diverse historical backgrounds, governance systems, and cultural norms. This imposition has resulted in negative consequences and outcomes for these countries (Fukuyama, 1993; Abdi, 2010).

It is to mitigate the challenges posed to the development of African culture that this study attempts a reconstruction of our culture, and social values vis-à-vis the introduction of mother tongue as a means of instruction and learning, into the curriculum of elementary schools in Africa. The term "mother tongue" signifies the native language acquired during childhood and retained by the individual into adulthood, maintaining comprehension of the language. Mother tongue is pivotal in framing the thinking and emotions of people which result in societal values. UNESCO (2013) recognises that education in one's mother language not only enhances the quality of education but also presents cultural identity and fosters inclusivity. This emphasises the importance of mother tongue as a tool for reconstructing one's culture and in turn, building societal values in the global era. There is no doubt that the significance of the knowledge of the mother would minimize knowledge

gap, accelerate learning, and enhance comprehension in primary education, especially in rural areas (Osimen, Fulani, Chidozie, & Dada, 2024). This will further translate to society's values being moved to a higher level in the global era.

Further, UNESCO plays an essential role by offering normative frameworks for language policy and education, thereby disseminating best practices in bilingual and multilingual education, as well as mother tongue instructions. Collaborating closely with member states, UNESCO actively endeavours to infuse multilingual education into curricular structures and educational systems (Elvis, 2023); but is this really in place presently? This is a question of concern in our present day and time. The mother tongue education and usage should not be left out, as it would usher in values for our culture, as well as societal values. Recent initiatives that have successfully propagated mother tongue-based education have been witnessed in nations such as Djibouti, Gabon, Guinea, Haiti, and Kenya (Elvis, 2023).

The engagement of the mother tongue in education has educational, cultural, cognitive, and social advantages for students. Thus, the recognition and practical usage of the mother tongue in the elementary curriculum is crucial for effective learning, cultural preservation, the building of societal values, identity, and development. According to Hymes, (1964), multilingual education founded on the mother tongue empowers all learners to become active participants in society, promoting mutual understanding, respect, and the preservation of the rich tapestry of culture and tradition heritage inherent in each language across the globe. This implies that mother tongue is rooted in a person's native language. It further explains that it does not only provide benefits for learners but also contributes to the wider goals of promoting understanding, respect, and the preservation of cultural and traditional heritage across the world's languages, recognising the inherent value of linguistic diversity in shaping individuals and societies.

With over 500 Indigenous languages in Nigeria, it may be challenging to implement a mother tongue in elementary schools, but it would no doubt, be of immense benefit to carefully plan and strategize by developing a practical local curriculum with mother tongue instruction incorporated in the early years of education; collaborating with linguistics experts and educators from various regions; Teachers should be trained with resources being made available; local community members input and support should be engaged; and there should be a robust monitoring and evaluation system put in place to measure outcomes of the impact of the mother tongue.

Methodology

This study utilizes conceptual analysis and critical analysis as its methodologies. Conceptual analysis is essential for providing a clear understanding of the fundamental concepts and terms central to our discourse on reconstructing culture and fostering societal values in the globalized era. Meanwhile, critical analysis is vital for assessing the effectiveness of incorporating mother-tongue instruction into elementary school curricula in Africa as opposed to the use of foreign languages for knowledge dissemination.

Relevance of Mother Tongue

The importance of utilizing the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in the education system, particularly at the primary level, cannot be emphasized enough. Research conducted by psychologists has indicated that children are highly adept at acquiring languages, whereas adults often struggle with language learning (Omo-Ojugo, 1989). Aigbmian (2002) underscores the significance of employing the child's mother tongue, particularly in the teaching of science subjects. He notes that:

In secondary schools, English language serves as the official medium of instruction, despite it being a second language for many students. Those whose mother tongue differs from English often struggle to fully grasp the meaning of concepts. Challenges arise from linguistic interference and a limited understanding of certain experiences when studying in a second language. (Aigbomiann 2002, cited in Omo-Ojugo, 1991)

It is crucial to emphasize that, the philosophy and aspirations of the government will be imparted to the pupils in Nigerian languages via the school system. A well-developed curriculum would enable teachers to

put across to the pupil in their languages, the relevance and concepts of science, Mathematics, and other areas of study. The greater the proficiency a child achieves in their mother tongue, the more effortless it becomes for them to acquire additional languages and reach proficiency in them.

Omo-Ojugo (1991) further asserts that the mother tongue serves as a means of identification within the child's community and fosters the development of social values. From an educational perspective, research by UNESCO (2013) suggests that children learn more rapidly when instructed in their mother tongue compared to an unfamiliar linguistic medium. Culturally, the mother tongue is where the child absorbs the norms, customs, and way of life of their people, constituting their cultural heritage. Proficiency in the mother tongue enables an understanding of the intricate traditional ideas and beliefs, as well as an appreciation of the richness of traditional art (Jean Ure, 1981). Ultimately, this contributes to the construction and reinforcement of societal norms and values.

In other words, our cultural and economic well-being is improved through the indigenous languages. Our indigenous languages further underscore cultural heritage just as linguists, journalists, philosophers, archaeologists, psychologists, sociologists, and politicians view language as a channel for prosperity, wisdom, and humanity. Growth and cultural values can be improved by employing indigenous languages (Abasilim, Gberebie, & Osibanjo, 2019). Studies have shown that the most prosperous nations of the world are nations that encourage the use of their indigenous languages as official languages.

When individuals share a common language and understand each other's languages, there tends to be an enhanced level of social cooperation, integration, and appreciation among them. In addition to fostering social cohesion, the use of the mother tongue serves as a psychological, sociological, cultural, and cognitive resource for a child's development, while also contributing to the cultivation and enhancement of societal values. Omo-Ojugo (1991) draws attention to the significance of the mother tongue in education by referencing the historical practices of developed nations, which prioritized education in their native languages during their early stages of nation-building. For instance, in Europe, education shifted to vernacular languages during the Middle Ages, and contemporary Russia follows a similar pattern (Omo-Ojugo, 1991).

According to Besa (2013), the implementation of Mother Tongue Based Language (MTBL) education in the Philippines' basic education system was driven by the positive impact of multilingualism among learners. As previously noted in this research, the most successful nations in the world are those that promote the use of their native languages as official languages. However, it is disheartening to observe that this is not the case in Africa, specifically in Nigeria. English serves as the medium of instruction even in pre-primary education in Nigeria. The government lacks control over the language used as the medium of instruction at this level since most pre-primary schools are privately owned.

The National Policy on Education (NPE) has underscored the government's acknowledgment of language's significance in fostering social interaction, national unity, and cultural preservation (Espiritu, 2012). The policy advocates for each child to acquire proficiency in the language spoken in their immediate surroundings (Thomas and Collier in 2013, as cited in Obod, Satri, Asmoni, and Andiani, 2019). However, the crucial question remains: "Is this implementation adequately monitored?" Nigeria's National Policy on Education acknowledges the importance of both the mother tongue and English language in primary education, recognizing the mother tongue's relevance and suitability for childhood development (Omo-Ojugo, 2005). Nevertheless, government directives regarding language use in primary education lack clarity. For instance, the policy doesn't specify the number of languages to be incorporated into primary school education or identify other Indigenous languages that pupils should learn from the primary level onwards, nor does it address this issue at the secondary level. This oversight is crucial and warrants critical examination to promote the reconstruction of culture and societal values.

Moreover, the National Policy on Education can be considered a dynamic document, even though it lacks specific provisions on how to develop a child's mother tongue for use as a medium of instruction in primary education. This can be seen as a starting point for further refinement and accurate implementation. At the secondary level, the policy mandates the inclusion of two languages: the indigenous language of the student's region, alongside one of the three main Nigerian languages (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba). However, the National Policy on Education does not address the role of languages in higher education in Nigeria. This study does not delve into the secondary and higher levels of education because it focuses on primary education, which is considered the foundation upon which the curriculum is built.

Implications of Neglect of Mother Tongue in Africa

Is it morally acceptable for an individual to forsake their native language in favor of another's? This seems akin to a grave act of disloyalty, evoking a sense of guilt. Yet, I see no alternative. I have been endowed with this language, and I am determined to employ it. (Achebe, 1964)

Chinua Achebe's rhetoric question above vividly describes what this section of the paper intends. To be addressed differently, are there any repercussions for the neglect of the mother tongue? The emergence of culture in homo sapiens is significantly attributed to their physical characteristics, including large and complex brains, an upright posture, dexterous hands capable of manipulating objects, and a vocal tract capable of producing and communicating a diverse array of sounds. These uniquely human physical attributes are thought to have started evolving in the African ancestors of humans over four million years ago. No society exists without culture, this is because culture is at the heart of every human civilisation and development, for any meaningful human development to take place, it must take place within a cultural context, and to a large extent, the degree of development in any society is a function of the degree of how dynamic the culture of that society is (Aluko, 2002).

Culture developed together with humans, and what this means is that culture is intrinsically connected to human biology, since it evolved as a result of man adapting to the problem of survival, and since these problems vary in nature, therefore, the culture of people varies. Language serves as an integral component of culture, functioning as a means of communication in both abstract and tangible forms (Gberevbie, Oyeyemi, & Nchekwube, 2014). Cultures exist because individuals possess the ability to communicate and comprehend symbols, which serve as a form of language. Symbols facilitate the development of intricate thoughts and the exchange of these thoughts among individuals. Language, as a form of symbolic communication, empowers people to generate, elucidate, and document novel ideas and information. The neglect of the mother tongue could lead to communication challenges, lack of integration, loss of culture and identity, loss of economic advantages, misappropriate cognitive development, and denial of enhanced information processing (Daudu, Osimen, & Ameh, 2024).

If a people should change their language for a foreign one for any reason, some essential aspects of and understanding of the culture could be lost, and this could be gleaned from our children who are schooled in the colonialist language, comparing them to children who do not undergo the formal classroom schooling, their perception of the local language is more vibrant than those schooled on foreign languages, hence, the neglect of mother tongue could lead to *communication challenges*.

Lack of integration: When people speak in their mother tongue they feel more knitted to their communities because language plays a pivotal role in promoting inclusiveness and cohesion (UNESCO, 2003). However, when the mother tongue is neglected at the expense of a foreign language, inclusiveness and cohesiveness/integration that speaking the same language provides, is lacking.

The neglect of the mother tongue leads to *loss of culture and identity*: neglecting one's mother tongue is an express pathway to the extinction of a people's cultural heritage and identity. According to a study by UNESCO, language is a fundamental aspect of identity, its loss can lead to a loss of cultural identity. Language as a vehicle of culture is a people's collective memory of their values and social perception (UNESCO, 2003; 2011). The extinction of any language is an irreversible loss of the heritage of all people. A neglected/relegated mother tongue (language) dies with the people's collected wisdom, perception about politics, their philosophy and ideology, surviving in the planet and doing so successfully. (Wurm, 2001; Ndhlovu, 2008). The revitalisation of African languages through its inclusiveness in the school's curriculum would enable the citizens to advance into the traditional wisdom and culture that these languages are imbued with and enables them to retain their multilingual identity. For the ability to communicate in different languages is in itself an opulent source of human enhancement, it benefits the individuals, organisations, and the society at large (Eucharria, 2019). Thus, the neglect of mother tongue could lead to extinction of a language and cultural heritage.

Neglect of mother tongue result in *loss of economic advantages*: The multilingual landscape of Africa presents a veritable economic opportunities, fluency in both the foreign language and mother tongue allows for a better communication within African's diverse communities and to potentially access wider job markets across the globe. Being multilingual can be viewed as a type of human capital, as it can provide individuals with the chance to secure higher income and achieve desirable employment positions in the global arena. Considering the

idea that “Language is power,” it becomes evident that language possesses the ability to transcend visible social and economic barriers (Chumbow, 2017). However, if the mother tongue is ignored, as we see in the present dispensation when a Yoruba girl or boy tells you that s/he does not understand the mother tongue, the economic advantages that could be derived from being multilingual is absent.

The neglect of mother tongue as a means of instruction could lead to *Misappropriate Cognitive Development*: There is a high indication of a corollary effect between fluency in one’s mother tongue and cognitive development, particularly in children. Bialystok (2009) discovered that being bilingual improves executive function, that is, the brain’s ability to direct attention, plan, solve problems, multitask, and be creative. This translates into improved academic performance and overall cognitive flexibility. But, when the mother tongue is neglected, a child is academically nurtured on a foreign language, there would be misappropriate cognitive development, while multilingualism enhances creativity, breaks cultural stereotypes, encourages vibrant and varied thinking, and can help develop innovative products and services (Jones, 2013).

Neglect of the mother tongue forecloses the door to *enhanced information processing*. Bilingual individuals possess enhanced capabilities for processing information compared to monolinguals. Their proficiency in two language systems enables them to adapt the functional strategies of one language to another as required (Chibaka, 2018). The selection of language and its utilization play a central role in an individual’s self-identification concerning their natural and social surroundings, as well as their perception of the universe they inhabit. Unlike biological nationality, which one cannot choose, language choice and usage profoundly influence one’s self-concept and societal interactions. It then becomes problematic when a people superimpose their culture on others, or when a people abandon their culture, their identity, in favour of another culture (wa Thiong’o 1994). “Differences in language often reflect and are reflected in the differences of world-view and that these can exercise the most profound constraints on inter-cultural communication” (Wiredu, 1996:58).

Writing on language and African realities, Ngugi wa Thiong’o polarises the discourse on two paradigms. An imperialist/colonialist or neo-colonialist on one hand, and the resistance tradition on the other. The imperialist tradition in Africa, wa Thiong’o argued, is maintained by the international bourgeoisie using the multinationals, and the political class. He noted:

The oppressed and exploited individuals across the globe maintain their resistance, aspiring for freedom from oppression. However, imperialism’s most potent weapon against this collective resistance is the cultural bomb. This bomb’s effect is to erode a people’s faith in their identity, language, and heritage. For instance, during the colonization of West Africa, imperialists imposed their language for educational purposes instead of utilizing the native language, as evident in the current phenomenon of the “japa syndrome.” The cultural bomb undermines their sense of history, portraying their past as devoid of achievement and prompting a desire to distance themselves from it. It leads them to align with decadent and reactionary forces, hindering their progress and vitality (Thiong’o, 1994).

The Correlation between Language and Culture

The relationship between language and culture is of utmost significance, as evidenced in literature. Language serves as the verbal manifestation of culture, employed to uphold and convey cultural connections and ties (Ghafoori and Saghar, 2021). It is the primary tool through which humans engage in social interactions, intricately intertwined with various aspects of communication (Harutyunyan, 2011). The experiences of individuals within a community are both shaped and articulated through language, which serves to express and embody cultural realities. Additionally, language, functioning as a system of symbols, signs, and vocal expressions, is arbitrarily created and conventionally utilized to articulate ideas, thoughts, and emotions (Anyanwu, 2002), thereby inherently reflecting cultural values. According to Kramsch (1998) as cited in Harutyunyan (2011), language serves as a symbol of cultural reality. This implies that the language used within a society is an integral component of its culture, and the lexical distinctions made by each language reflect the culturally significant attributes of objects, institutions, and activities within that society. Harutyunyan (2011) suggests that language functions as a repository of culture, serving as a conduit for transmitting the treasures of national culture across generations. Ultimately, language functions as a tool of culture, shaping the identity of its native speakers and

serving as a reflection of cultural values and norms.

Culture represents the way of life within a community. Within a society, culture encompasses the knowledge and beliefs necessary for individuals to operate in a manner accepted by its members (Ghafoori and Saghar, 2021). Similarly, Harutyunyan (2011) suggests that culture embodies the practical knowledge required for everyday tasks, reflecting shared characteristics among members of a community. The relationship between language and culture can manifest in various ways, from social structures influencing linguistic patterns and behaviors to linguistic structures shaping social structures or worldviews. Different languages' grammatical patterns can impact people's habits and thought processes. According to Whorf (1956) as cited in Ghafoori and Saghar (2021), differences in linguistic structures between languages are mirrored in the habitual thought and behavior of their speakers. Whorf (1956) argued that culture and language are intricately linked. The idea that a language's structure influences its speakers' perception of the world is associated with linguist Sapir and his student Whorf, a concept that has gained prominence in recent times (Fuller and Wardhaugh, 2014, as cited in Ghafoori and Saghar, 2021).

According to Musafar (2021), the language spoken within a society serves as a reflection of the culture of that society. This implies that understanding a particular culture is synonymous with understanding its language because both elements are manifestations of mental realities. Therefore, describing a language equates to describing the culture it represents. There exists a prevailing notion in literature that suggests a nation's language is the key to unlocking its cultural knowledge. Culture serves as a crucial tool that encapsulates the intricate system of classifying experiences. The lexicon of a nation's language, developed and utilized throughout its history, comprises a catalogue of events, lifestyles, cultural practices, civilization, thoughts, and aspirations of that nation (Musafar, 2021).

Undoubtedly, there exists a close connection between language and culture, with each exerting influence on the other. Sapir (1949) observed that language represents an ancient inheritance of humanity, being the first aspect of culture to attain a sophisticated form. He asserted that the refinement of language is essential for the overall development of culture. Thus, language is inherently intertwined with culture, and vice versa. Both components are intertwined and becomes impossible to be separated. They influence and shape each other in significant ways such as language, being a reflection of culture, embodying the beliefs, values, customs and traditions of a particular culture. The vocabulary/words in language which serves as the core of any existing language reflect the cultural experiences and perspectives of its speakers.

As the cultures of different groups of people are distinct, so are their concepts and phenomenon different and unique. It is language that provides a means to express these different concepts, and from time to time, there is usually a change in these grammars and vocabularies in the languages that help to accommodate the phenomenon. This is possible because of the flexible nature of language. Language and culture are tightly connected, as they serve as a primary vehicle for expressing cultural identity, values, and practices. The understanding of the relationship between language and culture can be perceived as a tool for language education, especially at the elementary level, which this article focuses on. Language is inextricably linked with culture. Thus, maintaining culture requires both cultural and linguistic unity since language stands as the foremost cultural asset and plays a pivotal role in preserving, perpetuating, and safeguarding culture (Ghamari, 2002, as cited in Musafar, 2021).

Conclusion

Africa possesses a wealth of cultural diversity, with its numerous indigenous languages serving as vehicles for communicating cultural values and heritage. Understanding one's language equates to understanding one's culture. While there may be potential advantages to adopting code-switching or code-mixing in Africa, it becomes futile when the youths, who are the future leaders, diminish the significance of their mother tongue, which symbolizes their sense of belonging and identity. Addressing the root of the issue is imperative, and implementing and enforcing the use of the mother tongue in elementary school curricula presents a practical solution to the problem. As such, a redefinition of Africans in the 21st century is necessary (Osimen, Daudu & Awogu-Maduagwu, 2023).

Recommendations

Considering the findings above, the following recommendations were put forth:

The family is the smallest unit of socialisation, it is within the family that the child is first exposed to the world. The child gets to learn the norms, values, and culture of the people within the family, thus for the preservation of the culture and language, the parents and elders should communicate with their children in their mother tongue. Charity, it is said begins at home!

Emphasis on primary school curriculum - Curriculum writers should improve the primary school curriculum to include using the mother tongue language as a medium of instruction, and policy makers should make sure that this is implemented by the appropriate body. Teachers should demonstrate open-mindedness and patience in embracing the adoption of the mother tongue-based instruction format.

African youths are the signpost of the continent because of their teeming population, their high mobility, and their prominence on the internet, which is the mirror of the global world, they should be trained in the acquisition of native intelligence, their level of former education notwithstanding, there should be a change in the mindset of African youths that presupposes that everything about African culture is inferior to Western culture and that the pathway to civilisation is to jettison anything traditional, and pattern their life according to foreign sensitivity.

African political players should live by example, the majority of African politicians and political office holders have never presented anything African as worthy, and many of them patronise foreign/western countries for the education of their children, therefore they are mostly not concerned about the curriculum of the elementary schools in their jurisdiction. Thus, it is suggested that children of civil servants, politicians, and other political office holders be mandated to school in their respective countries and desist from sending their children abroad for schooling.

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