



## Mainstreaming Language and the Arts in the Nigerian Educational System: The Importance of Being Relevant

**Barclays Foubiri AYAKOROMA**

*Executive Secretary/CEO, National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) Abuja-FCT, Nigeria/Visiting Associate Professor, Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria*

**\*Corresponding Author:** *Barclays Foubiri AYAKOROMA, Executive Secretary/CEO, National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) Abuja-FCT, Nigeria/Visiting Associate Professor, Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria*

**Abstract:** *Language and the arts are components of culture, which are integral factors in forging national integration, building peace and resolving conflicts in a complex country like Nigeria. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) 2005 Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions sees cultural diversity, as an “indispensable for peace and security at the local, national and international levels.” This underpins the thinking that, there is “strength in cultural diversity”. Ideally, educational programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine the individual’s inclination. The National Policy on Education (NPE) states the importance government attaches to language, as a means of promoting social interaction, national cohesion, and preservation of cultures. The policy stipulates compulsory learning of the language of the immediate environment for every child. In the interest of national unity, every child is also required to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. This paper examines the situation and amplifies the need for the Nigerian Government to mainstream the country’s indigenous languages and the arts in order to impart relevant education to the youth, because as aspects of cultural heritage, they have the prospects of changing its development strategies. It makes salient recommendations, stressing that, it can be realised, if there is political will on the part of government, and patriotic zeal, on the part of the citizens, towards safeguarding the indigenous language and the arts through their reinvigorated use and appreciation.*

**Keywords:** *Mainstreaming, Language, Arts, Educational System, and Relevant*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

A discourse on theme, “*Language and the Arts for Relevant Education*”, will essentially capture the need for us to harness our indigenous languages and the arts in order to impart relevant education to our youth. This implies that, currently, language and the arts, as being taught in our schools, cannot give students the relevant education that would equip them to become the kind of citizens desired to develop our nation. My discourse will naturally highlight aspects of the mandate of the National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) since the focus is on language and the arts.

The *National Policy on Education* captures the need for functional education for the promotion of a progressive, united Nigeria. To this end, school programmes need to be relevant, practical and comprehensive; while interest and ability should determine the individual’s direction in the education system. Furthermore, the policy is based on the development of the individual into a sound and effective citizen and the full integration of that individual into the community. One of its goals is the inculcation of the right type of values and attitudes for the survival of the individual and the Nigerian society. The question here is: How can we achieve this goal when language and the arts are employed to impart knowledge on these individuals? This has informed the title of this paper, “*Mainstreaming Language and the Arts in the Nigerian Educational System: The Importance of being Relevant.*”

Let us start by defining three key words in the topic, namely, *mainstreaming, language and arts*, and how they could be made relevant in the Nigerian educational system. I will start with an overview of

mainstreaming, which I have adapted from the concept of *gender mainstreaming*. An understanding of these terms is pertinent, as they form the backdrop of my presentation.

## **2. MAINSTREAMING DEFINED**

In 1997, the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations approved activities for *mainstreaming a gender perspective into all policies and programmes* of the United Nations. It will be recalled that at the 4<sup>th</sup> World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, China, in 1995, States Parties had unanimously agreed that it was essential,

to design, implement and monitor, with the full participation of women, effective, efficient and mutually reinforcing gender-sensitive policies and programmes, including development policies and programmes at all levels, to foster the empowerment and advancement of women.

This was based on the realisation that a gender perspective had not been fully integrated into the mainstream of United Nations activities, to promote a coordinated and coherent policy of gender mainstreaming by further clarifying the concept of mainstreaming and the central principles associated with it, as well as making recommendations to stakeholders. There is no doubt that the Beijing Conference had also informed the new agitations for women empowerment in Nigeria, which, under the Transformation Agenda of former President Goodluck Jonathan, had come to be dubbed, “35 per cent affirmative action.”

Basically, “mainstreaming a gender perspective” is the process of assessing the implications for women (and men) of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. This, according to the United Nations, is a strategy for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres, so that women and men benefit equally; and so that, inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality.

The core principles in mainstreaming a gender perspective in programmes and activities include:

- a) Defining all issues in such a manner that gender differences can be examined;
- b) Translating gender mainstreaming into practice system-wide and at the highest levels;
- c) Constantly monitoring level of accountability for outcomes;
- d) Making efforts to broaden women’s participation at all levels of decision-making;
- e) Institutionalising, through concrete steps, mechanisms and processes in all parts of the United Nations system;
- f) Not replacing the need for targeted, women-specific policies and programmes or positive legislation, nor substituting gender units or focal points; and
- g) Knowing that political will and the allocation of adequate human and financial resources, from all available funding sources, are important for the successful translation of the concept into practice.

In the light of the above, my position in this paper is that instead of taking a peripheral position, language and the arts should form the centrepiece of our educational system. But first, like a mason laying a foundation, let us set up the other pedestals: language and the arts, in our discourse, to see how they could be given relevance in the Nigerian educational system.

## **3. LANGUAGE AND THE ARTS**

Language and the Arts are components of culture, which are integral factors in forging national integration, building peace and resolving conflict in this very complex, diverse country. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) 2005 Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, cultural diversity, “is indispensable for peace and security at the local, national and international levels.” This underpins the thinking that there is strength in our cultural diversity.

Culture is a way of life, which defines a people, their language, arts, religion, politics, production and reproductive organisations, and so on. It is the totality of human organisations, as they battle to control their physical and social environment. Man, as a social being, cannot live outside his society and the order governing the conduct of affairs. Thus, cultures emerge as shared historical experiences of a given society, which is continuous and ever changing and developing. They do not exist in isolation as human groups relate to one another; hence, there is borrowing and fusion. This explains the saying that, *culture is dynamic*. Cultures cut across identities and boundaries, because of the historical relations between groups in terms of trade and intertribal marriages and diplomacy, which lead to borrowing in terms of language, religion, arts, dresses, and so on.

Language, as a component of culture, is a means of communication. It is a human and non-instructive way of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of voluntarily produced symbols. It is the central feature of the culture of any community and a reflection of the thoughts, feelings, values, beliefs and the experiences of a community of speakers. In other words, it is a human and non-instinctive medium of communication acquired through social interaction in early childhood. This means that language is not in-born and therefore must be learnt. As a system of communication, in speech and writing, the effective study and use of the language of a people is needed for their all-round development, be it social, cultural or economic.

Furthermore, language ensures certain amount of uniformity, thereby facilitating interpersonal cognitive communication, without which shared values and traditions would be impossible and the very fabric of community and national integration could be hindered. It helps to sustain peace in given communities. Contacts and influences through inter-ethnic communication also improve relationships and harmonious co-existence. Somehow, linguistic borrowing can take place even amidst growing hostility between different ethnic groups; but when a whole language is borrowed, it goes a long way to enhance understanding and cement relationships, hence, fostering national integration.

The arts, on the other hand, entail using one's creative imagination to produce things of aesthetic significance or beauty. They constitute a process, whereby the creator draws from real life to recreate the impressions he/she had about certain people or situations. The arts are categorised into the performing arts (drama, music, and dance), visual arts (painting, sculpture, and graphics, among others), and the literary arts (prose, poetry, and drama). As Oscar Brockett rightly points out, each art form uses different means and, consequently, each can best deal with a particular aspect of human experience (11). In other words, the arts portray man's attempts at expressing his emotions and to achieve beauty by the arrangement of words, tones, body movements, gestures, lines, colours, mass, and so on. These artistic devices can be expressed singly or in combination, thus, resulting in literature, music, dance and fine arts (that is, drawings, painting, architecture, costuming and sculpture). Experience has also shown that the joy of an artist is to see his work being appreciated by the audience, spectator or the public. Put the case of a little child, who has done a drawing, and wants you to appreciate that work of art. You will not have peace until you have a good word to say about that piece.

The arts play significant roles in all cultures and societies. They are not only integral parts in all aspects of culture, but permeate all the activities of traditional societies. Apart from accompanying events, ceremonies and festivals, the arts have been effective media for expressing emotions, ideas, and topical issues. They transmit cultural heritage from generation to generation, thereby ensuring continuity. They enforce and propagate social norms and values, thus, educating the masses through entertainment. Thus, one major fundamental of the arts is that they create awareness, interest and sensitivity towards one's culture and other cultures, thereby fostering integration and developing positive attitudes across cultures. They emphasise the cultural, social and ethical values in man and his environment, and train individuals to apprehend and value the qualitative dimensions to life, all of which are integral parts needed for national integration and peaceful co-existence.

#### **4. LANGUAGE, ARTS, AND THE NATIONAL POLICY ON EDUCATION**

It will be more appropriate if I briefly examine the place of Language and the Arts in the *National Policy on Education (NPE)*, before looking at the current state. In other words, it will provide the backdrop for us to examine the *appearance* versus *reality*. The *Policy* states the importance government attaches to language, as a means of promoting social interaction, national

cohesion, and preservation of cultures. It is therefore compulsory for every child to learn the language of his/her immediate environment. Also, in the interest of national unity, every child is required to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (*NPE* 10). Let me quickly note that the emphasis here is in learning the languages, not such languages as media of instruction. For early childhood/pre-primary school education, “the medium of instruction shall be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community” (*NPE* 12). Unfortunately, there is hardly any school in Nigeria, where the early childhood education instructions are in the indigenous languages; it is usually in English. As a point of fact, the speaking of an indigenous language, derogatorily termed, Vernacular, is usually met with disciplinary measures. At home, a child will quickly tell you that, “Our Auntie said we should not speak Vernacular.”

At the primary school level, which is regarded as key to the success or failure of the whole educational system, the *Policy* stipulates that pupils are required to learn the language of the environment, English, French and Arabic. The medium of instruction in the primary school is expected to be the language of the environment for the first three years, with English being taught as a subject. But from the fourth year, English shall progressively be used as the medium of instruction and the language of the immediate environment and French taught as subjects (*NPE* 16). Again, sadly, this is not the case in the school system.

At the Junior Secondary School level, the language of the environment is to be taught as L1; while one major Nigerian language, other than that of the environment, is expected to be taught as L2, that is, with emphasis on the spoken form. L1 is a language with orthography and literature; while L2 is a language without literature and orthography (*NPE* 19). The implication is that at this level, students are expected to study two Nigerian indigenous languages. The expectation is that by the time a child leaves school, he would have been proficient in three indigenous languages.

With regards to the Arts, the *Policy* emphasises the study of Cultural and Creative Arts (Drawing, Handicraft, Music and Cultural Activities) at the primary education level, and Local Crafts, Fine Arts and Music, as electives, at the junior secondary level. At the Senior Secondary School level, students are expected to learn one major Nigerian language that has orthography and literature, as a compulsory subject (*NPE* 22).

There is no doubt that, as a policy statement, the document appears lofty on paper. Like many other policy issues in Nigeria, the problem, over the years, has been its implementation. Experience has even shown that where aspects of the *Policy* are implemented, after the examinations, students no longer show interest in learning the indigenous languages, since the *Policy* has no provision at the tertiary institution level.

## **5. APPEARANCE AND REALITY OF LANGUAGE AND THE ARTS IN NIGERIA**

Nigeria is a multi-lingual country with over 250 ethnic groups and about 521 indigenous languages. Nine of these languages, namely, Ajawa, Basa-gumna, Holma, Auyokawa, Gamo-Ningi, Kpati, Mawa, Kubi and Teshenawa, have become extinct (Ayakoroma, “Reviving” 6). The country is aspiring to be counted among the most developed 20 economies in the world by the Year 2020. Lofty as the Vision 20:20-20 may seem, the fact remains that it could only be achieved if serious attention is given to the basics of national development. One of such fundamentals is the preservation, promotion and propagation of our culture; and there is no better way to do this than harnessing our indigenous languages as a major component of human culture. Unfortunately, most Nigerian languages have not been given the necessary attention, as they are hardly studied in the school system.

It is sad to note that, after 57 years of independence, Nigeria still recognises English as the *lingua franca*. According to Hale, “losing one’s language entails losing one’s culture, intellectual wealth, a work of art, and so on. It is like dropping a bomb on a museum” (5). The implication here is that there is no greater bond that can hold a people together as language. Adzer also opines that, language is not only a vehicle, through which a people’s culture can be expressed, but also a medium of one’s thoughts, imaginations, creativity, aspirations, desires, emotions and, indeed, the entire human needs and capacity. Adzer concludes that, literarily speaking, “when a language dies, the people who speak it also die” (cited in Banjo 1).

As it were, language is culture in expression; and culture and development are interwoven. Hence, language is central to human existence and, therefore, should be nurtured and preserved. When a language is lost, the culture is lost; and a lost culture is knowledge lost; also there is no development without knowledge. On the other hand, a language learnt is knowledge gained; and we know that knowledge is power, which brings about development that Nigeria is in dire need of. In the words of Ngugi wa Thiong'o:

... the more languages you know, the more keys to treasure houses you have. If you know all the other languages and don't know your language, that is called enslavement. If you know your language and add all the other languages, that is called empowerment (Bello-Osagie 25-26).

Professor Akinwunmi Isola, whose creative works are written in Yoruba language, noted the importance of the role of indigenous language in the socialisation of children, thus:

Around each language is a culture and it is the culture that sets certain standards about social interactions. Every culture of the world has acceptable standards of right and wrong. It is the local language that is used to pass it on to the younger generation. You have to socialise the younger ones into the culture.... If you want to create a society with acceptable standards of right and wrong, with values such as fairness, justice, accountability, and honesty, it is through the language. Every language has a way of doing it: it is not the same all over, such that if you want to make development sustainable, then you must promote the culture in the local languages... The language, the proverbs, names of trees, flowers plants birds, animals and so on are put together to train the young ones. The contention is that, when the child is very young, from age one to the teen age, you must build in his mind, images that will guide him throughout his life (Adesola 23).

The view of Professor Ishola is "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth". The position of Ifeanyi Chigbo, an English language teacher, also coheres with the above, when he said:

Children that are trained and properly brought up to use their mother tongues are very much likely to be better users of another language, English in this case. I refer to Achebe and Soyinka in this regard. While they are competent in the use of English, they are also proficient in the speaking of their mother tongue (MT). They are unlike today's children who are in the middle of nowhere; they are neither good at English nor are they competent in the use of their MT. To save our languages from dying, we parents must encourage our children to speak them, because languages that are not spoken are on the path of extinction (Adesola 23).

Many Nigerians will quickly point the direction of colonialism as being responsible for the gradual decline in the usage of the Mother Tongue (MT) in Nigeria. For instance, Professor Chidi Maduka had observed that colonial experience had been a source of great "ecological disaster" to Nigerian cultural life, in the sense that, the colonialists, as conquerors, imposed their worldview on Nigerians and used the state apparatus to make the citizens believe that, they were "not as civilised as the Europeans." He stated further:

To become civilised, one has to metamorphose oneself into a European. The Nigerian is yet to get over this streak of colonial mentality, hence his inability to develop himself with values rooted in his traditional value-system. In short, imported Western values have so depleted the ozone layer of the cultural universe of the Nigeria peoples that meaningful cultural development in the country has been stultified (Maduka 4).

Consequently, Maduka hinged the problem of Nigerian languages and literatures to colonialism as they were not insulated from the plague. According to him, the prejudice that they cannot be effectively used for national development still pervaded the thinking of many Nigerians, who felt that:

only English, French and Portuguese can perform such a task since they are perceived as languages of civilisation... that Nigeria is no longer *multilingual* but *bilingual*... all Nigerian Languages are now considered dead or at best viewed as objects of study for archival purpose (Maduka 6).

He warned that the clouds were thickening; and that unless drastic steps were taken to reverse the situation, Nigerian languages and literatures would disappear from the cultural map of the world. He went further to cite the experiences of the Finns, Luxembourgers, Vietnamese, the Welsh, the English and the French. Finland was colonised by Sweden for about 600 years and Swedish became the language of civilisation, used for education, commerce, politics, religion, and judiciary. Finns, who

did not understand the Swedish language, at that time, were socio-politically marginalised, a situation they found culturally unacceptable. The Finns had to fight for the survival of their mother tongue and today the language waxes strong in the socio-economic life of the people. The Vietnamese were colonised by the French, who imposed French language on them; but they found it inconceivable and discarded French for Vietnamese. The Welsh (Wales) have been victims of English colonialism for centuries but in spite of the pervading presence of English in their national life, they doggedly fight for the survival of the Welsh language (Maduka 7-8). In fact, I can attest that all road signs, billboards, and other roadside adverts, in major cities in Wales, are written in both English and Welsh languages, apparently, to safeguard the latter.

As at 2008, based on researches, UNESCO had warned that of the estimated 6,800 languages spoken across the world, more than half of them may become extinct, if they were not safeguarded. And only recently, the UNESCO Advisory Committee on Language Pluralism and Multi-language Education had predicted that Igbo language, and by implication, Igbo culture, may be headed for extinction, subsumed by stronger Nigerian languages, by year 2025, if nothing is done by its speakers to ensure that it is not only taught in schools, colleges and universities, but also used as language of official communications within government and business circles in the five Igbo-speaking states, namely, Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo (Abanobi 1).

It is really disheartening that many children in Nigeria cannot speak their native languages. Parents make efforts to see their children speak English language; but many hardly encourage such children to speak the indigenous language. Unlike what used to be the case during the colonial era and the 1960s, indigenous languages are no longer studied in schools. Also, they are not the media of communication in meetings, churches, campaigns, or conversations, not to talk of homes. This is where the case of the Igbo, one of the *Wazobia* languages, is worrisome. There was even an unnerving news report recently that Chief Chika Okpala (Chief Zebrudaya Okorigwe, Alias 4.30, of the *New Masquerade* fame), was embarrassed by an Igbo lady at a function in faraway Houston, Texas, USA. His offence: In his usual jocular way, he spoke Igbo language to her son. The sad commentary, in this episode, as Chief Okpala narrated me, was that he knew the young boy in Enugu; and that the lady and boy were not Diasporans, but only visiting the United States. If an Ibo woman, based in Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria, can do this, what do we expect of those in the Diaspora?

It has been discovered that children whose parents taught them in their local language, speak better English than those denied the opportunity of learning the indigenous language at home. Many, whose parents never taught them the MT, cannot speak it and have nothing to pass on to their children; which means, they have already lost their identity. Anthony Olaoye said this much when he stated that:

Mother tongue is an indispensable cultural legacy through which all forms of human interactions are carried out.... it is the key to the heart of the 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 wealth or/and affluence (Olaoye 50).

Similarly, Ademola Adesola reported that at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Odua Distinguished Lecture in Ibadan in 2010, a renowned Yoruba scholar, Professor Wande Abimbola, who is a former Vice Chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Osun State, Nigeria, had sounded the alarm, saying that Yoruba language may become extinct in the next 50 years, unless urgent steps were taken to revive it. Abimbola noted that the core values of the culture, including language, dresses, songs and dances had been terribly neglected by the people and government. Although Abimbola's observation mirrors the reality, Dr. Chijioke Uwasoma, a Literature in English teacher at the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, had a contrary view, when he stated:

By the death of language, linguists mean the new forms and mutations that a language undergoes. It should be understood from the onset that language is dynamic and is therefore bound to undergo changes over time.... He argued that a language like the Yoruba language cannot die because of the resilience of the Yoruba culture and lifestyle in spite of the internationality which the language has assumed (Adesola 23).

Otunba Gani Adams, leader of Oodua People's Congress (OPC), also added his voice to the concern over the state of Nigerian indigenous languages, recently, when he called on Yoruba people not to allow the Yoruba language to die. Speaking at the grand finale of the 2012 Osun Osogbo Festival,

held in Osogbo, Osun State capital, Adams stressed that, “no language is superior to another”; and that Yoruba people should “uphold the language irrespective of the language they have learnt to use”. He also lamented the decline in the use of indigenous languages, because culture holds the streams of all moral values in the society, adding:

Language is one of the values that culture holds and my fear is that when a language becomes weak and unused, the ideas and philosophy of the culture also become weak and unused, thereby making the ideas and philosophy of that culture to disappear (Braide 1).

Just as Nigerian indigenous languages have not been given serious attention in the school curricula, the arts have also been neglected. In fact, until recently, a child had been seen as a no-do-well, if he opted to study the arts. I recall that when I gained admission to read theatre arts in the university, an uncle scolded me for “foolishly” choosing to study theatre arts. He could not understand how I wanted to go to the university, to learn how to “act and dance” on stage, when that was what everybody can do. In fact, when I graduated and did not get employment for close to two years, he never failed to remind me every time I visited him, that if I had studied “good” courses like Law, Accounting or Business Administration, I would not have been “suffering.” The soft drink I used to be entertained with during visits stopped. But the redeeming aspect of my ordeal was that I started featuring in drama productions on Nigerian Television Authority (NTA), Channel 10, Lagos. Shortly, I realised that the appearances had made me a “local star” in Ajegunle-Lagos, being chased and admired by fans in his vicinity, every time I visited him. Suddenly, he became proud of me, telling anyone who cared to listen that I read theatre arts. Also, the embargo on entertainment was lifted; and that time, it was not just Coke; it was stepped up to Malt.

There is no gainsaying the fact that, Nollywood has enhanced the status of artists in Nigeria – actors, producers, directors, costumiers, cinematographers, and production designers, to mention just a few. Candidates can confidently choose theatre arts, as a course of study, instead of being dumped there because they could not meet the cut-off points for other “respectable” courses. Parents now encourage their children and wards to go and study theatre arts, so that they could be the next Pete Edochies, Richard Mofe Damijos, Sam Dedes, Nkem Owos, Genevieve Nnaji, Rita Dominics, Patience Uzokwos, and so on. Now, parents proudly take part in family dance competitions, as we find in the *Maltina Dance All*. The same is the case with those into music, because many young musicians are making decent living through it. P-Square, the Jos-born quintessential star musical twins, for example, have been listed among the few wealthy Nigerians that own private jets. But the situation in the fine and applied art have not been encouraging because the level of art appreciation in Nigeria is very low, compared to what obtains in countries like the United States, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. Many parents are yet to come to term with the idea of their children studying fine art, and remain glued in the studio to paint or sculpt one thing or the other.

## **6. MAINSTREAMING LANGUAGE AND THE ARTS IN THE NIGERIAN EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM**

At this juncture, let us come to the question of mainstreaming language and the arts into the school system. In doing this, we will be guided by the concept, principles, institutional requirement, and capacity building in gender mainstreaming. Here, the considerations are the policy actions, facilities, manpower development, implementation by relevant agencies, and the response to the programmes. In doing this, we are going to pose some questions, which would be food for thought, for us to find the relevant answers and chart the way forward. They include, but not limited to, the following:

1. Have we defined the issues of language and the arts?
2. Have we translated appreciable works into Nigerian indigenous languages?
3. Have we broadened the language and arts base?
4. Have we institutionalised language and the arts?
5. Have we shown the political will to take policy decisions?
6. Have we committed funds to language and the arts?
7. Are our schools ready to incorporate language and the arts into their curricula?
8. Can our universities make the study of Nigerian languages compulsory?
9. Do we have books on the indigenous languages?

10. Are there standard orthographies for the various indigenous languages?
11. Is Government ready to commit funds to language and the arts?
12. Are policy makers ready to integrate language and the arts into other programmes?
13. Is Government ready to facilitate special training for language and arts teachers?
14. Are non-governmental organisations and private sector ready to fund language and arts programmes?

Apart from the general challenge of funding, it is argued that lack of manpower is militating against the mainstreaming of language and the arts in the Nigerian educational system. For instance, former Executive Secretary of the National Commission for Colleges of Education (NCCE), Professor Muhammad Junaid, had admitted that it is not easy to find teachers of local languages nowadays as they tend to be less favoured than their counterparts, who teach English and other science subjects, saying:

Nigeria's language policy is that teaching must be carried out in the local language or the language of the environment in the first three years of primary school education. For instance, teaching in the south west zone must be carried out in Yoruba as the dominant language. Another problem is where to get adequate teachers to take on the subjects at the lower level. So, the policy is there but the implementation and lack of teachers have been the problem (Bello-Osagie 25-26).

It is also argued that lack of good textbooks is another major issue. The importance of textbooks in the study of language cannot be over emphasized. While the Federal Government has been distributing some textbooks to our primary and secondary schools in the past few years, it is disheartening that Nigerian language textbooks are not included. Subjects like, English, Mathematics, Biology, Chemistry, Physics, Agricultural Science, Social Studies, and a few others, which are adjudged "more important" or "core subjects," are the ones that are favoured. This approach has had debilitating effect on the use of Nigerian languages in our educational system. There is no doubt that if government includes Nigerian language textbooks in its distribution list, it will go a long way to enhance their study in schools.

On the other hand, the Nigerian higher education system has not seen the need to make the study of indigenous languages compulsory, as it obtains in several European and Asian countries. Nigerians going to study abroad, in Russia, Ukraine, China, Bulgaria, Germany, South Korea, and many other countries, study their languages compulsorily for one year, before proceeding to read the course of choice. The idea is for such students to learn the language and culture of the host country, in order for them to integrate. The same applies to those going to study in Britain, as they are made to write Test on English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL). Furthermore, the French are very sensitive to the role of French language in their civilisation. History tells us that the French policy of *assimilation*, during the colonial era, was distinct even in French West Africa. This, as Maduka rightly observed, may explain why the French are very determined to uphold the integrity of French language in Quebec, the French-speaking part of Canada, as well as protect the identity of French from the menacing presence of English (10).

## **7. NATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR CULTURAL ORIENTATION (NICO) INITIATIVE**

The National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) is a Parastatal of the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, which was established as a result of a joint initiative of the Federal Government of Nigeria and UNESCO during the World Decade for Cultural Development Programme (WDCD), which UNESCO declared between 1988 and 1997. WDCD emphasised the cultural dimension in the development of member nations. The Institute was subsequently established by *Decree 93* of 1993 with the primary responsibility of promoting positive cultural values and harnessing culture for National Development as enunciated in the 1988 *Cultural Policy for Nigeria*. NICO has the mandate of affecting a sense of cultural direction and relationship to meet the challenges of social integration, unity, peaceful co-existence, and self-reliant and national development. This is achieved through inter-agency, intersectional and inter-disciplinary programmes and projects.

The point had been made that indigenous language and indigenous knowledge both serve as the driving force of any society aspiring for greatness. One of the important aspects of indigenous



knowledge lies in the existence of different local languages, because cultural values, norms, and customs (cultural heritage) are transmitted from one generation to another by means of the local languages. This explains why NICO, having identified the importance language plays as a unifying and integrating factor, promotes the usage of indigenous languages through its Nigerian Indigenous Language Programme (NILP). The Institute initiated the programme in 2007 in the Lagos Office, starting with three languages, namely, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Today, the programme is also being implemented at the Abuja headquarters and the six zonal offices, with the number of languages taught increasing from three to thirteen, namely, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Izon, Efik, Tiv, Fulfulde, Nupe, Urhobo, Gbagyi, Batonu, Bwatye, and Chamba. NICO has also started the Weekend Indigenous Language Programme, which is designed for the working class, as an all-year-round programme.

Currently, the Institute has opened four state offices, in addition to the six zonal offices, to further coordinate the teaching and learning of more indigenous languages, among other functions, thus, taking the language programme to the grassroots. The NILP approach is such that participants undergo normal classroom teaching of the language(s) of their choice. Apart from the usual language study, key aspects of the culture of the people are embedded in the scheme of work. These include proverbs and aphorisms, recitations, folk songs, going to the market to buy items, the dress culture of the ethnic group, hair styling, cooking of the popular dishes from that ethnic group, and other major cultural practices. The idea is for those who go through the language programme to be well grounded in the culture of that ethnic group. This is why the Institute is working towards the production of software and creating a page on its website, <http://www.nico.gov.ng>, for participants and those who may not have the time to physically attend the programme; and Nigerians in the Diaspora to freely access such information.

Finally, the NICO Training School, affiliated to the Department of Theatre and Cultural Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nasarawa State, runs Diploma, Advanced Diploma and Post Graduate Diploma programmes in Cultural Administration. To encourage the learning and speaking of Nigerian indigenous languages, students in both programmes are expected to offer a course in Nigerian Languages. Students are encouraged to take this course, which they are expected to pass, before they could graduate. Thus, students who are not sure of their ability to meet the course requirement, register for the NILP to facilitate the language study process. The implication is that by the time students graduate, the language barriers would have been broken down considerably.

### **8. RECOMMENDATIONS**

At this juncture, let us ask: How can language and the arts be made relevant in the Nigerian educational system? In this direction, the following suggestions, which are by no means definitive, are proffered. There is urgent need,

- a) To promote national consciousness towards Nigerian indigenous languages;
- b) To strengthen governmental and non-governmental cultural institutions, at all levels, for effective service delivery, capacity building and development;
- c) To encourage the study of the performing, fine and literary arts, at all levels in the educational system, for their appreciation;
- d) To make the study of the language of the immediate environment in addition to at least one of the three major Nigerian languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, compulsory in the schools curricula for national integration, mutual understanding and sustainable peace;
- e) To promote the use of Nigerian languages at various levels of government business;
- f) To train language translators to facilitate the use of such languages in state functions and conferences;
- g) To fund research and documentation of the orthographies of many Nigerian indigenous languages;
- h) To fund the publication of books in the various Nigerian indigenous languages;
- i) To encourage research works to identify and document endangered Nigerian languages through visual, literary and performing arts;

- j) To translate road signs, sign boards, and so on, in the main languages or language of the immediate environment;
- k) To fund children's programmes that encourage the study and speaking of indigenous languages; and
- l) To fund the translation of major government policy decisions and gazettes into the indigenous languages.

## **9. CONCLUSION**

At this juncture, let us conclude that the state of language and the arts in Nigeria is not encouraging. It is important for Nigerians to follow the examples of countries like China, Japan, United Arab Emirates, South Korea, and even India that have turned to culture for national development. Language and the arts, as aspects of our cultural heritage, have the prospects of changing our development strategies. As Maduka rightly posited, Nigeria has to find ways of endearing itself to the world community by proving that it can push the World civilisation forward by discovering the hidden formula for using her languages, not foreign ones, as tools for national development (Maduka 5).

Language and the arts have the potentials of changing the mind-set of Nigerians. They can build in Nigerians that patriotic zeal, that dogged, "Yes, we can," spirit to get things going against all odds. Once children identify with their MT, at an early age, they will grow up speaking it with pride. This is what will make us distinct as Nigerians because the school system will ideally contribute towards actualising the vision. While the Federal Ministry of Education takes care of curriculum development, funding, and focus of implementation, parents need to entrench the speaking of indigenous languages, as well as encouraging children to appreciate the arts right from the home, to achieve good results. It can only be a reality, not ordinary mention in policy documents, if there is political will on the part of government, and patriotic zeal, on the part of the citizens, toward safeguarding the indigenous language and the arts through their reinvigorated use and appreciation. This underscores my position on the importance of mainstreaming language and the arts for relevant education in Nigeria.

## **WORKS CITED**

- [1] Abanobi, Chika. "Igbo Language to die by 2025!" Assessed 19 Oct. 2012 from: <<http://sunnewsonline.com/new/cover/igbo-language-to-die-by-2025>>
- [2] Adeniran, A. "Language Education Provision in Nigeria's *National Policy on Education*: A Critique." In Owolabi, D. (Ed.), *Language in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Group Publishers, 1995.
- [3] Adesola, Ademola. "A Language dies every two weeks somewhere around the World." *The Nation*. 5 Dec. 2010: 23.
- [4] Adzer, V. C. "Factors Militating against the Development of Indigenous Language: The Tiv Language in Perspective". *Journal of Igbo Language & Linguistics* (76-79). Assessed 27 Aug. 2012 from: <[www.linguisticafrica.com](http://www.linguisticafrica.com)>
- [5] Akowe, Tony. "Back to the Basics in Child-Centred Learning." *The Nation*. 9 June 2011: 25-26.
- [6] Ayakoroma, Barclays F. "Diasporans as Agents in the Promotion of Nigeria's Cultural Diplomacy: A Food for Thought." Keynote Lecture Delivered at New Yam Festival Organised Nzuko Ndigbo Berlin. 22 Sept. 2012.
- [7] Ayakoroma, Barclays F. "Reviving the use of indigenous languages in the contemporary Nigerian society: The National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO) Initiative." Paper Presented at the African Theatre Association (AfTA) Annual International Conference. University of Cape Town, South Africa. 12-15 July 2012.
- [8] Bello-Osagie, Kofoworola. "How to Preserve Africa's Languages." *The Nation*, 2 Aug. 2012: 25-26.
- [9] Braide, Damiete. "We won't let Yoruba Language die, say Osun Devotees." Assessed 25 Oct. 2012 from: <<http://sunnewsonline.com/new/featuers/arts-we-wont-let-yoruba-language-die-say-osun-devotees/>>
- [10] *Cultural Policy for Nigeria*. Lagos: Federal Government Printers, 1988.
- [11] Fadare, Sina. "Igbo Language: The Enduring." *National Mirror*. 8 Dec. 2011: 52.
- [12] Fakeye, David O., & Soyinka, Akeem. "Indigenous Languages in Pre-Primary Education in Nigeria... Beyond the Façade". *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 10.4 (2009). Assessed 27 Aug. 2012 from: <[www.eurojournals.com](http://www.eurojournals.com)>
- [13] "Gender Mainstreaming." Assessed 17 Oct. 2012 from: <<http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/GMS.PDF>>

- [14] "Language." Assessed 10 Sept. 2012 from: <[www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)>
- [15] Maduka, Chidi. "The Clouds are Thickening: Nigerian Languages and Literatures in National Development." Paper Presented at a Valedictory Seminar in Honour of Professor Benson O. A. Oluikpe, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. 27-28 Feb. 2002.
- [16] *National Policy on Education*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Lagos: Nigerian Educational Research & Development Council (NERDC) Press, 2004.
- [17] Ngugi, wa Thiong'o. *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*. London: James Currey, 1981.
- [18] Nzeh, Ezeocha. "Igbo Language faces Extinction." *The Guardian*. 3 May 2012: 7.
- [19] Olaoye, Anthony. "Indigenous Languages and National Development." In Obafemi, Olu & Ayakoroma, Barclays (Eds.), *Perspectives on Cultural Administration in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd, 2010: 50-63.
- [20] Orkar, J. T. (Ed.). *Tiv Language Endangered*. Makurdi: Indyes Publications, 2006.
- [21] Otti, Sam. "Latest on the endangered Igbo language: Achebe comes to the rescue, prepares to launch new Igbo Dictionary/Encyclopaedia." *Daily Sun*. 4 Sept. 2012: 30-36.
- [22] Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 Sept. 1997 (United Nations Publication, Sales No. E.96.IV.13), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

#### **AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY**



**Dr. Barclays Foubiri Ayakoroma**, Executive Secretary/CEO, National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), Abuja-FCT, Nigeria, is the author of the ground-breaking *Trends in Nollywood: A Study of Selected Genres*, *Theatre Management in Nigeria: An Introduction*, as well as many published plays, including *Dance on his Grave* and *A Matter of Honour*. A fellow of the Society of Nigeria Theatre Artists (SONTA) and a Member of Nollywood's Directors Guild of Nigeria (DGN), he is a Visiting Associate Professor at the Department of Theatre & Cultural Studies, Nasarawa State University, Keffi (NSUK), Nigeria. Website: [www.nico.gov.ng](http://www.nico.gov.ng).

**Citation:** Barclays Foubiri AYAKOROMA. "Mainstreaming Language and the Arts in the Nigerian Educational System: The Importance of Being Relevant" *International Journal of Humanities Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*, vol 4, no. 12, 2017, pp. 35-45. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.20431/2349-0381.0412004>.

**Copyright:** © 2017 Authors. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.