

## Decolonizing Education: Exploring the Role of Indigenous Languages in shaping Home-Grown Education Policy in South-Western Nigeria

Sanni, Mufutau Olayiwola<sup>1</sup>

Shekoni Lateef<sup>2</sup>

Olukoya, Tajudeen O.<sup>3</sup>

Jimoh Akinola Saliu<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>[mufutau.sanni@lasu.edu.ng](mailto:mufutau.sanni@lasu.edu.ng). 0000-0003-0233-3020

<sup>2</sup>[lashek8@gmail.com](mailto:lashek8@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>[olukoyatajudeen@gmail.com](mailto:olukoyatajudeen@gmail.com). 0009-0004-2266-4665,

<sup>4</sup>[akinola.jimoh@lasu.edu.ng](mailto:akinola.jimoh@lasu.edu.ng). 0000-0001-8066-0049

Department of Language, Arts and Social Science Education,  
Faculty of Education, Lagos State University, Lagos, Nigeria.

### ABSTRACT

*The study on indigenous languages as a catalyst for decolonising education and shaping home-grown education policy in Southwestern Nigeria aims to examine the nuances through which the Yoruba indigenous language serves as a tool for cultural revitalisation, promoting cultural identity and enhancing pedagogical relevance through policy decisions on education. The research is anchored on Decolonisation Theory. An interview guide is used to elicit information from respondents. The data from the respondents are analysed using the NVivo software and project maps. The study identified the point of departure and the gaps, which include the inherited colonial language of instruction, Western-oriented education policies, and curriculum design that are Euro-centric and not Afro-centric in most cases. These are the various challenges and realities that educators and learners are grappling with, and these call for concern. The study reveals that the alienation of the indigenous language and knowledge in South-Western Nigeria's formal education setting keeps promoting the colonial hegemony and legacies in the education sector. The study therefore recommends the renaissance of indigenous languages and policies for the promotion of knowledge.*

**Keywords:** *Indigenous language, decolonization, education policy, cultural preservation, home-grown education policy.*

### INTRODUCTION

Decolonisation education is becoming an issue of global concern, eliciting debates among scholars and academia. It is borne out of a need to crumble and uproot the colonial educational legacies and policies that are undermining the indigenous knowledge. Decolonising education started after World War II. However, the process is ongoing; it

is critical and inevitable for Africa, whose educational development is compromised by long-standing colonial heritage and neo-colonialism (Prah, 2018). Prem and Peter (2021) maintain that indigenous language is a catalytic tool for sustainable development, home-grown education policies and promoting an egalitarian society. It provides an appropriate and sustainable foundation for promoting cultural identity among young students in an academic setting, thereby serving as a medium through which the norms, ethical standards, and cultural values of a society are transmitted from one generation to another. From the foregoing, it could be inferred that a Society that is rooted in indigenous language and indigenous language education will automatically change the colonial narrative and dominance over their society, particularly the education sector. It will enhance the effective exploration of local content by the educators and students. Mullen (2021) argued that indigenous knowledge and education provide the pedagogy for the decolonisation of Education, both in theory and practice. This is because they provide potent intervention to enable indigenous language and education in the mainstream educational curriculum, thereby changing the racist trajectory of colonialists as well as bolstering future educators' stance for an indigenous home-grown education.

Language is a vital component of human identity and culture, playing a crucial role in shaping individual and collective experiences (Ndimele, 2019). In Nigeria, the importance of indigenous languages cannot be overemphasised, particularly in the southwestern region where languages such as Yoruba, Egun, and Awori are spoken. Indigenous languages in Nigeria are facing significant challenges, including the dominance of the English language, inadequate native language documentations and limited resources (Afolayan, 1976). The analysis of indigenous languages in Southwestern Nigeria is complex and multifaceted, influenced by historical, cultural, and economic factors. The region's experience with colonialism, for instance, has had a profound impact on the status and use of indigenous languages (Adegbite, 2020). Moreover, the increasing globalisation of education and the economy has created new challenges for indigenous languages, as the English language has become the dominant language of instruction and commerce. Southwestern Nigeria refers to the geopolitical region that comprises six states: Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, and Ekiti (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). This region is home to a diverse range of ethnic groups, including the Yoruba, who are the dominant ethnic group.

Furthermore, research has shown that the use of indigenous languages in education can have a positive impact on student outcomes and cultural preservation (Bamgbose, 2020). For example, a study conducted in Southwestern Nigeria found that students who received instruction in their indigenous language performed better academically and had a stronger sense of cultural identity compared to those who received instruction in English (Adeniyi, 2020). This highlights the importance of promoting indigenous languages in education and underscores the need for policies that

support the use of indigenous languages in instructional settings. The indigenous language is an agent that redirects people's culture away from and far from the colonial features and historical legacies of the colonial masters. Indigenous language refers to the native or local language spoken by the indigenous people of a particular region or country (Ndimele, 2019). In the context of Southwestern Nigeria, indigenous languages include Yoruba and other dialects such as Egun and Awori, among others.

Post-colonial education policies and systems are unrelated to the learning needs and experiences of the post-colonial learners. It is inhibiting effective transformational and environmental development in most developing countries. It is not befitting for emancipatory actions that can be geared towards educational development and that are capable of bridging monumental gaps in the various social, economic and political spheres. It is alien and externally fashioned and cannot meet the yearnings and learning needs of indigenous learners (Barongo-Muweke, 2016).

Policy is what a government decides to do and what it decides not to do. It deals with the setting of the Agenda, arrangement of findings, implementation and evaluation of what is planned and unplanned. Therefore, Education Policies are well-organised and articulated responses to observed educational problems (Meghan and Niccole, 2024). Language policy refers to the deliberate efforts made by governments or institutions to influence the language practices of a community or nation (Adegbite, 2020). Language policy can be explicit or implicit, and can have significant impacts on the status and use of indigenous languages.

Language education policy refers to the specific policies and practices related to the use of language in educational settings (Bamgbose, 2020). This can include policies related to the language of instruction, language curriculum, and language assessment.

Cultural preservation refers to the efforts made to protect and promote the culture and heritage of a community or nation (Ndimele, 2019). In the context of indigenous languages, cultural preservation involves efforts to document, teach, and promote the use of indigenous languages.

Economic empowerment refers to the process of enabling individuals or communities to enhance their livelihood and well-being (Afolayan, 1976). In this context, economic empowerment involves efforts to promote the use of indigenous languages in livelihood activities, such as commerce, economy, tourism, and education.

### **Relevance of Indigenous Languages to Home-Grown Education Policies and Cultural Preservation**

Indigenous languages are not only methods of communication but also a knowledge-based medium and significant in preserving cultural heritage and identity (The United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues, 2019). Home-grown education policies

incorporate indigenous languages to promote cultural preservation and transmission from one generation to another. Hence, it will become a generational legacy. Children who receive education in their indigenous language tend to perform better cognitively and academically (The United Nations Permanent Forum of Indigenous Issues, 2019) because indigenous languages provide a foundation for cognitive development and facilitate a better understanding of complex concepts.

Chiblow and Meighan (2021) noted that language promotes the cultural identities of a people by being transmitted from one generation to another, and safeguards the cultural identity of that particular people and their customs and values. Indigenous languages protect local content, indigenous knowledge and education. Indigenous languages are often closely tied to community identity and culture (Tencent, 2020). Home-grown education that incorporates indigenous languages helps to promote community engagement and participation in the educational process. Indigenous languages can also play a role in economic empowerment, particularly in regions where tourism is a significant industry (Tencent, 2020). Home-grown education incorporates indigenous languages to promote economic empowerment by providing students with skills and knowledge that are relevant to local economic contexts.

Indigenous languages are essential to home-grown education in Southwestern Nigeria. They play a crucial role in cultural preservation, cognitive development, community engagement, and economic empowerment. Therefore, efforts should be made to promote and incorporate indigenous languages into home-grown education.

This study examines the efficacy of indigenous language in Southwestern Nigeria, with a focus on its implications for home-grown education policies. By exploring the complex relationships between language, culture, and economy, the study interrogates the role of indigenous languages in education and development.

## **Theoretical Frame work**

The research work was anchored on Decolonisation Theory, which was espoused by Frantz Fanon, Ndabaningi Sithole, Claude Ake, Julius Nyerere, Thomas Sankara, Ahmed Sekou Toure, Kwame Nkrumah, the first Ghanaian president and a host of other protagonists of decolonisation.

### **Decolonisation Theory**

Decolonisation Theory is a theory that is predicated on the critical unacceptance of the Western Education system and liberal models of analysis as a universal standard in education (Fanon 1961). Accordingly, this theory emphasises three basic concepts which include the process of decolonising, democratising and diversifying education curricula. This is so important for enhancing local content-based learning experiences among

students and presupposes that every civilisation develops its system of education, which it uses to liberate its generation from the shackles of ignorance from one generation to another through its indigenous values, ethical standards and norms.

### **Basic Assumptions of Decolonisation Theory**

***Colonisation is a Systemic and Structural Phenomenon:*** Decolonisation theory assumes that colonisation is not just a historical event, but an ongoing process that has created systemic and structural inequalities.

***Indigenous Cultures and Knowledge are valid and valuable:*** The Theory assumes that indigenous cultures and knowledge are legitimate and valued, and should be recognised and respected.

***Language is a key aspect of colonisation:*** Decolonisation theory assumes that language is a critical aspect of colonisation, and that the imposition of colonial languages has contributed to the erasure of indigenous languages and cultures.

***Education is a tool of colonisation:*** The theory assumes that education has been used as a tool of colonisation, to impose colonial knowledge and values on indigenous peoples.

***All knowledge is partial and situated:*** The theory assumes that all knowledge is partial and situated, and that indigenous knowledge and perspectives are essential to decolonising education and society.

The above assumptions underlie the Decolonisation Theory and guide its analysis of the relationships between colonisation, education, language, and power. The Decolonisation Theory is highly relevant to the topic, which interrogates the relevance of Indigenous Language to Home-Grown Education in Southwestern Nigeria, for the following reasons:

***Promoting indigenous languages:*** Decolonisation Theory emphasises the importance of promoting indigenous languages and knowledge in education, which is a key aspect of the topic. The theory highlights the need to empower indigenous communities to take control of their own education and language policies, which is essential for promoting home-grown education in Southwestern Nigeria.

***Contextualising language and education:*** Decolonisation Theory provides a framework for understanding the historical and cultural contexts of language and education in Nigeria, which is crucial for developing effective language education policies.

***Informing language policy and planning:*** The theory offers insights into the development of language policies and plans that prioritise indigenous languages and promote linguistic diversity in Nigeria.

By applying the Decolonisation Theory to the topic, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the complex relationships between language, education, and power in Nigeria, and develop effective strategies to promote indigenous languages in home-grown education.

### Components of Decolonization Theory

***Decolonisation of Language:*** This component recognises that language is a tool of colonisation and that indigenous languages have been marginalised and suppressed by colonial powers (Wa Thiong'o, 2005). Hence, the indigenous education system must have a high level of recognition. Premium must be placed on it as the native mother tongue that the child gets first from its parents before any infiltration of any foreign source of education, thereby making it a natural medium of communication for a child to understand its parents, nuclear or immediate family members, extended family members, the community and the society at large.

***Reclaiming Indigenous Knowledge:*** This component emphasises the importance of reclaiming indigenous knowledge and cultural practices that have been erased or marginalised by colonialism (Battiste, 2000). It is essential to note that indigenous knowledge is beyond indigenous language, but language is the key to unlocking the door to indigenous knowledge. In Africa, there are indigenous sciences and technologies, such as the Nok bronze and iron, Ife bronze head and other artefacts from the Benin Empire, as well as the Oyo Empire. Undoubtedly, Indigenous knowledge is the cradle and bedrock which serves as the foundation for all other sources of knowledge, is pivotal to human development and civilisation.

***Language as Resistance:*** This component highlights the role of language as a form of resistance against colonialism and oppression (Fanon, 1952). Language makes it impossible for a culture to be eroded or go into extinction. That is why, if any culture downplays its indigenous language, such a culture is dead and not living at all, because the powerhouse of every culture is the language of the culture. The concept of language as resistance refers to the ability of a local language to endure and remain relevant despite the infiltration of foreign culture and language without being eroded, but may sometimes be slightly altered. The alteration is possible through spelling, pronunciation and usage. The Yoruba language is one of the most resistant languages in the world. The Yoruba language is not only spoken in Nigeria, but also in Ghana, Benin, South Africa, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Niger, Togo and Burkina Faso.



**Community Empowerment:** This component emphasises the importance of community empowerment and self-determination in language education and policy (Freire, 1970). The above presupposes that communal life is the most equitable way of living. Man is a social animal. And that man must come together as a force that will develop the community for the interest of all and not the interest of a few or some individuals in society.

## Research Questions

The research was carefully analysed by providing detailed responses to the questions below:

1. What are the indigenous languages of Southwestern Nigeria?
2. What role do indigenous languages play in decolonising education in Southwestern Nigeria?
3. How can indigenous languages be revitalised for a functional, home-grown education policy in South Western Nigeria?
4. What is the impact of indigenous languages on education?
5. What are the prospects of using an indigenous language as a language of instruction in Southwestern Nigeria?

## METHOD

This qualitative research employs a descriptive research design. Primary data were collected. An in-depth interview technique was used to collect data through an interview guide. The interview guide was carefully prepared to provide appropriate answers to the research questions. The items in the interview guide were thematically and sequentially organised in line with the research questions for clarity and coherence. The respondents were interviewed. Out of five respondents, three were conducted using the face-to-face method, and the other two were conducted via Zoom platform and Phone call. The sampling technique adopted was a purposive method. The data collected from the respondents were analysed using a thematic technique for a better understanding of the research.

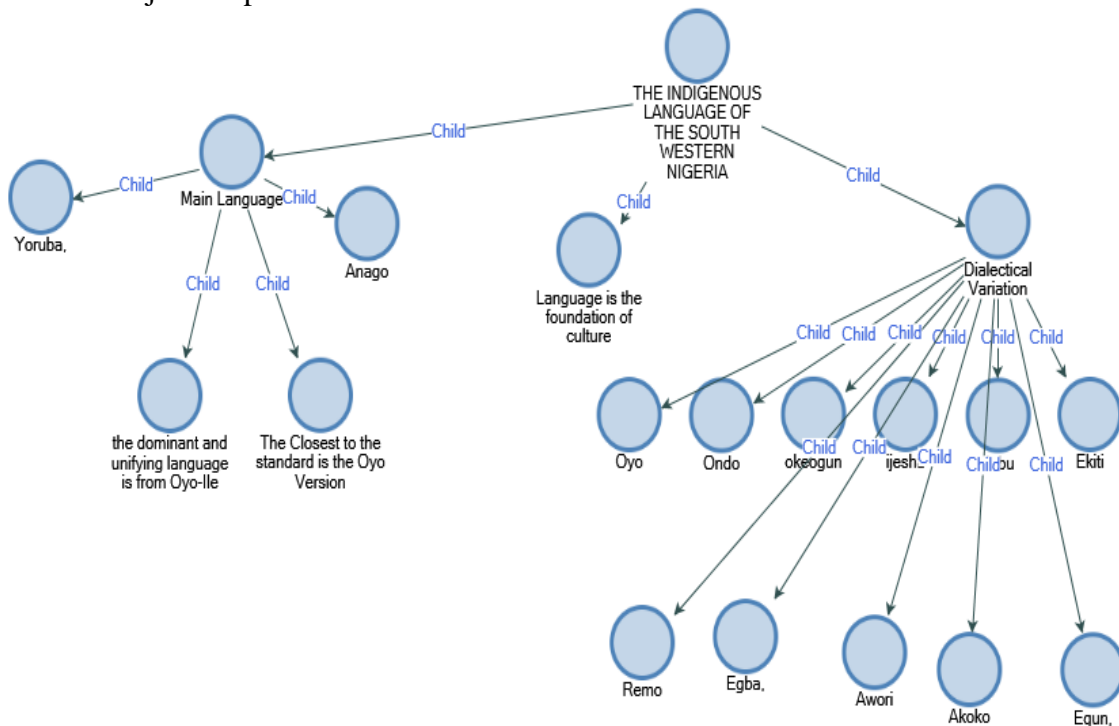
## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table showing summary of Responses from the Respondents**

S/N	Concept of Indigenous Language	Role of indigenous Language	of Indigenous Language in Functional Home-Grown	Impact of Indigenous Language on Education	Prospect of indigenous Language
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			decolonizing Education	Education Policies		
Respondent 1	Agreed Yoruba Language	its	Agreed it plays significant role.	Indigenous Language aids Home-Grown Education Policies	Suggested Impacts	Agreed it has prospects
Respondent 2	Yoruba and other dialects		Agreed it plays significant role.	It aids Home- Grown Education Policies	Suggested impacts	Agreed it has prospects
Respondent 3	Yoruba and other dialects		Agreed it plays significant role	It aids Home- Grown Education Policies	Suggested impacts	Agreed it has prospects
Respondent 4	Yoruba and other dialects		Agreed it plays significant role	It aids it	Suggested Impacts	Agreed it has prospects
Respondent 5	Yoruba and other dialects		Agreed it is significant	Aids Home- Grown Policies	Suggested impacts	Agreed it has prospects
<b>Percentage</b>	<b>80%</b>		<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

### NVivo Project Map



The NVivo project map above presents the results and findings from the above mentioned sub theme.

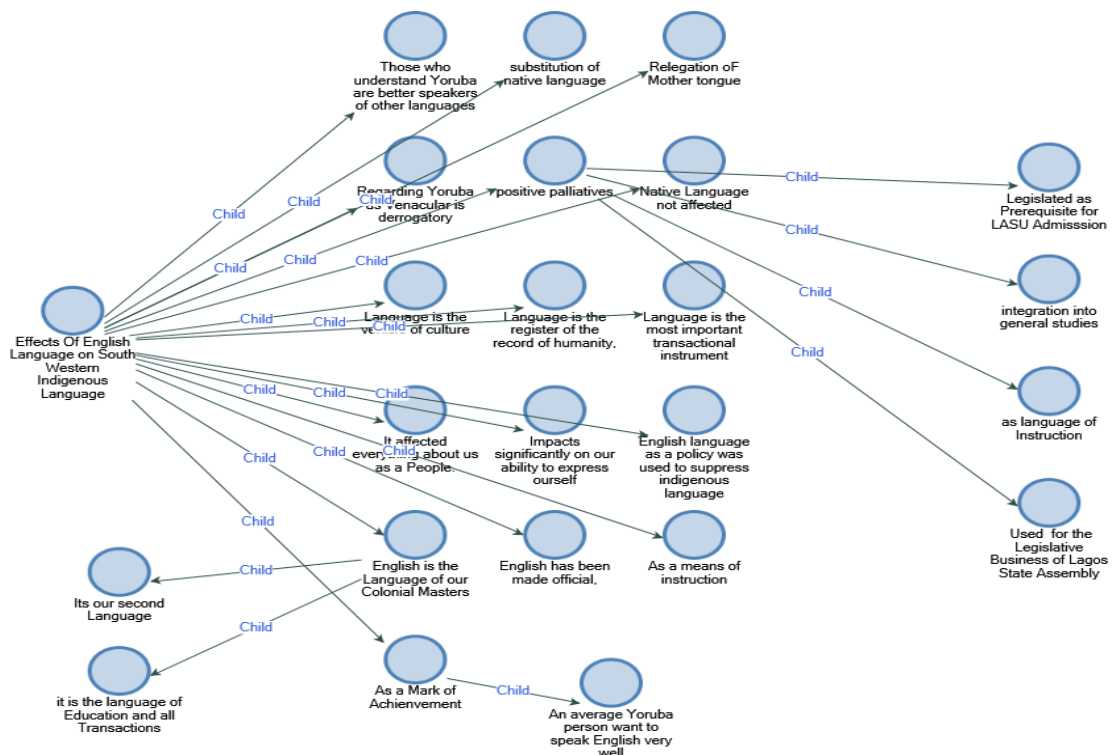


### Sub-Theme I: The Indigenous Language of Southwestern Nigeria

The respondents' perception of the actual indigenous languages of Southwestern Nigeria was investigated. Language was described as the foundation of culture. The respondents revealed that the indigenous languages of Southwestern Nigeria comprise the Yoruba language and different dialectical variations. Respondents differ on the main language, but the most generally accepted language is Yoruba. It was also argued that the dominant and unifying language is from Oyo-Ile. The Oyo version was adjudged the closest to the standard. The Yorubas who reside in some neighbouring communities, like Togo, the Republic of Benin, and the Ivory Coast, are referred to as the Anago people.

Various Yoruba communities within Southwestern Nigeria also have distinct dialects that they speak, with obvious and noticeable variations. What differentiates them from each other are the intonations, accents and stress in pronunciation, as well as sound. The dialectical variations include Akoko, Ijebu, Ekiti, Oyo, Ibadan, Ijesha, Ondo, Awori, Ogu, Egba, Egbado, Remo, Iseyin, Oke-Ogun, Ilorin and Igbomina.

The project map below indicates the analysis of the sub theme based on the responses of the interviewees.



### Sub-Theme II: Role of indigenous Language as a decolonizing agent and the effect of Colonial Language on South-western Education

All the respondents agreed that English Language affected the indigenous language in no small measure, it is the language adopted by the British during their colonial campaign in Nigeria, English Language was imposed by the colonizer to relegate our indigenous language, it was the language of instruction in the South-western Nigeria's schools, the indigenous language is classified as vernacular and substandard. The reason for this is not farfetched, indirect rule was anchored with the English language, the kings and most of their subjects did not understand the nitty-gritty of the administration, it was not known to them except the fact that their land had been annexed by foreigners. This significantly impacted our ability to express ourselves, the ability to speak our language to the extent that in our home, market, and everywhere, English is the language recognised as the official language of interaction and transaction. It is a policy that was used to suppress the indigenous language of our people; English is our second language.

Language is the vehicle of culture; without language, culture can never be retained, sustained, and preserved for other generations. If we allow the dominance to persist, we shall become people without culture, people of no heritage, and people without identity. It was also contended that language is the most essential transactional instrument in the international community. Developed countries do not transact any business except in their indigenous language, for instance, France, Spain, China, Malaysia, Japan, Germany, Poland and other advanced countries. In the case of South-western Nigeria, the English language has penetrated so much that it is the language of all transactions.

The respondents agreed that indigenous languages should be integrated into our general studies across all the levels of institutions, starting from the pre-primary Education level. It must be inbuilt into their curriculum as the language of instruction in the teaching and learning process. It was also seen as the best way to improve learners' cognitive, affective, and psychomotor abilities. It was maintained that indigenous Language is the register of the record of humanity; if any language is promoted other than the native language, such a foreign language will automatically relegate, distort, and may eventually substitute the native language. It was also argued that those who understand the indigenous language (Yoruba). They are better speakers of other languages. Despite all the influence of the Colonial language, the Yoruba language still remains so resilient and enduring to date. English also impacts negatively on the Yoruba language because some indigenes of the region see the English language as a mark of achievement.

Lagos State Government was commended for being proactive and futuristic by salvaging the Yoruba cultural heritage, culture, identity and the Yoruba language in particular. Lagos State Government, through legislation, introduced some positive palliatives to circumvent the situation from getting worse. The indigenous language was rejigged for a sustainable usage in the South-western Nigeria, As part of the Yoruba

language sustainability of Lagos State Government, Yoruba language was used to conduct the legislative business of Lagos State House of Assembly for a day in a week, Yoruba language was legislated as the prerequisite for the Lagos State Higher Institution admission, it was integrated in to general studies curriculum of all higher institution in Lagos State. It was also elevated to a language of instruction in all public primary and secondary schools on every Wednesday. Above all, the National Anthem and the Pledge were translated into the Yoruba language by the Lagos State Government.

Indigenous Language should be used as our first language unlike what is operational in the South-Western region and the whole Federation whereby native language is relegated to second language and in some cases it is even optional for students, respondents agreed that indigenous language must be at the center of our education because without the mother tongue development in the education sector will always be seen as a mirage hence colonization of the education will continue. Our education policy should be geared towards indigenous knowledge through the indigenous language.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The quest for decolonising education in Southwestern Nigeria requires an urgent rethinking of the current educational policy, framework and curriculum, which were established and imposed by colonial agencies on the region. And the country in general. Hence, the role of indigenous languages in invigorating homegrown education policy is highly critical for effective transformation, an education system that is devoid of foreign influence. The role of indigenous languages in education cannot be erroneously limited to means of communication; rather, it is an everlasting vehicle for cultural identity, cultural transmission, socialising agent and enabler of unfettered classroom interaction. Restraining indigenous language from education is tantamount to severing the umbilical cord between the mother and the child, and this will be counterproductive. The integration of indigenous languages into education policies will strengthen and foster inclusivity, critical thinking, cultural transmission and development of local content.

The government should legislate and implement education policies that fully promote indigenous language and education to engender cultural preservation and propagation, thereby legitimising the Yoruba language as the medium of instruction and transaction at all levels of academic institutions in the region and beyond.

Designing and implementing a curriculum that accommodates indigenous education and knowledge that gives credence to folklores, oral traditions, proverbs, Yoruba relics and artefacts that are reflective of the Yoruba indigenous identity and cultural diplomacy.

Power-packed Trainings, workshop and seminars should be organized for teachers, teacher trainings and students on the efficacy and the utilization of indigenous language for effective teaching and learning process that is result oriented, and which enables the teachers and students interact seamlessly without any hindrance in meaning of concepts, concept formation, phenomena, semantics in foreign languages, dictions and dictums.

An effort should be made to develop resource materials (audio, visual, audio-visual, and other digital channels) on indigenous languages for effective teaching and learning. It could be manufactured or produced, and may be improvised.

Community engagement and propagation must be employed to promote indigenous knowledge and language, and to realise the lifelong goal of the African people. It is the way forward towards progress on which the development of the region's educational system and other spheres depend.

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