

**INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND SONGS FOR EFFECTIVE
TRANSMISSION OF TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE**

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Abstract:

Indigenous knowledge is native to a region hence environmentally based as well as orally transmitted. Indigenous language which is also native becomes a veritable tool for transmission of such knowledge. In recent times, most of our indigenous knowledge has been colonized, modernized, and globalized thereby losing our rich cultural heritage which is embedded in our indigenous knowledge system. This paper tries to explain the meaning of indigenous knowledge, the relationship that exists between indigenous knowledge and indigenous language, some challenges facing the use of indigenous language for transmitting indigenous knowledge. It also x-rays how some Igbo rhymes and songs could be used to teach morals and cultural value as part of indigenous knowledge. Finally, the paper ends with conclusion and recommendations.

Keywords: language, song, transmission, knowledge

1.0 Introduction

Indigenous knowledge is an emerging area of study that focuses on the ways of knowing, seeing and thinking that are passed down orally from generation to generation. These ways of understanding reflect thousands of years of experimentation and interaction in topics like agriculture, animal husbandry, child rearing practices, education system, medicine and natural resource management among many other categories. These ways of knowing are particularly important in the era of globalization in time in which indigenous knowledge as intellectual property is taking new significance in the search for answers to many of the world's most vexing problems: disease, famine, ethnic conflict, and poverty. Indigenous knowledge has value not only for the culture in which it develops but also for scientists and planners seeking solution to the community's problem.

Development professionals treasure this local knowledge finding it extremely useful in solving complex problems of health, education agriculture and environment both in developed and in developing countries. Indigenous knowledge reflects a community's interest, norms, beliefs and general philosophy of life etc. Some communities even depend on them for survival. For instance, Awka is known for blacksmithing, Akwaete for weaving, Oguta for fishery, Ohaji for good garri, Etche for quality fufu, Mbaise for their Abigbo cultural dance, Arondizuogu and Nsukka for mmonwu (masquerade) etc. Indigenous knowledge serves as a means of preserving cultural heritage as well as a veritable tool for transmission of knowledge based on accumulation of empirical observations and interactions. In many African communities indigenous knowledge is available in form of words, sounds, images and objects that were generated by the members of the community across ages / generations through performances, conversations and various creative activities.

2.0 Indigenous Knowledge and Language

The transmission of knowledge cannot be done in isolation to language. Therefore, when we talk of transmission of indigenous knowledge, the best instrument to use is indigenous language. Okere (2006:27) describes language as the verbalization of ideas or ideas in words. He opines that it is in language and with language that all knowledge plays its self out. For him, trying to obtain

education and knowledge through a foreign language is for most people a frustrating obstacle. The assertion shows that using indigenous language enhances the transmission of knowledge especially traditional because it makes it more real for the learner. Nwadike (2008:48) affirms that a people renouncing their language are doomed to stagnation and even retrogression and to disappear completely as a people. In line with this, Ezikeojiaku in Anasiudu et al (2007:114) says:

“Using foreign language in cultivating scientific literacy makes the Nigerian nay, the African regards science as foreign and therefore somehow not indigenous to him”.

This attitude to science education will drastically change if scientific knowledge is imparted through the medium of the indigenous language. “In this way, science and technology will acquire an indigenous scientific culture which will speed up her economic development”. This assertion is true because an individual naturally acquires his or her indigenous language with little or no effort. Every normal child is born with the language acquisition device (LAD) which enables him/her to acquire basic knowledge about the nature and structure of the language to which he/she is exposed to right from infancy. Anyanwu and Ikonne in Anasiudu et al (2007) argues that one of the advantages of L1 Indigenous language to a learner is that the child tries to categorize his environment using his/her indigenous language (L1). By this, it means identifying most objects, actions, ideas, attributes etc first in his indigenous language. In this way, indigenous language plays an important role in molding the child’s early concepts in life. This is in line with the view of the National Educational Research Council (NERC) (1971) which holds that “Nigerian children will develop in curiosity, manipulative skills, spontaneous flexibility, initiative, industry and manual dexterity if they are taught through the use of their L1 (indigenous language). Anyanwu (2007:236) argues that:

The indigenous language (L1) of a child carries its culture with it; hence educating the child in it, gives the child the opportunity to be part of the cultural orientation of his L1. Thus a child whose early education is acquired through the use of his L1 does not get alienated from the cultural values embedded in his L1”.

For Banjo in Uozie (2011:97)

“Development is about people {and} if development is all about people, then we must of necessity seek to empower them by making them draw inspiration from their very root....”

Since indigenous knowledge cuts across traditional technology, culture, agriculture, ecological knowledge, ethno-botany etc, indigenous language therefore becomes a veritable tool for the transmission of such knowledge. It is obvious that certain terminologies and expressions cannot adequately be interpreted or glossed in foreign languages because such traditional knowledge may not be in existence in such foreign places. For example, some Igbo herbs like: *nkwugbuaruru*, *korikori*, *mmimimuo*, *ubogu*, *utazi*, *uziza*, *akugbara*, *Nwanyiobioma*, *oritangele*. These are used in preparing special Igbo traditional menu. They have no English translation because they are purely indigenous and peculiar to Igbo natives. For the farm implements and cooking utensils, most of the items and their names are no longer in use because the younger generations appear not to show interest in such knowledge and the older ones who are the custodians of such knowledge are dying out.

3.0 Review of related literature on indigenous knowledge

So many people have tried to define indigenous knowledge from different perspectives, the reason being that one person's indigenous knowledge could be another's global knowledge. However one thing is common to all these definitions of indigenous knowledge. It has been seen as the expression of locally owned and adapted knowledge of a community, where the community is defined by location, culture, language or area of interest (global knowledge partnership 2005). Pakenham (2001:9) sees indigenous knowledge as not only the original research and expression of local knowledge but also a complex process of access, interpretation, synthesis and repackaging of local and global knowledge. Akinde (2008:8) defines indigenous knowledge as the expression; access and exchange of local knowledge in both local and foreign languages whereby the accessibility of the information for both the community are increased and in the process enhance respect for local culture and identity.

4.0 Indigenous knowledge and music.

Music naturally characterized with the power of expression, a relative function with what language does. That creates a relationship between language and music, for instance, Agu (2010) notes that “the level of relationship between music and language appears to be the hallmark of Africans music theory, practice and performance”. Idolor (2011:9) opines that:

Teachers who apply music to their lessons not only achieve a lively session, but speed up the rate of assimilation of learners. One solid way to increase the speed at which people learn is with music. This learning is without stress and fear of failure and therefore, makes learning permanent in learners that so long as the melody can be remembered, the content comes to mind.

Since traditional knowledge is orally transmitted using rhymes and songs from one generation to another, it makes them enshrined in the child’s memory so that even when he/she grows, he will not easily forget.

5.0 Using Igbo traditional rhymes to teach health science

5.1 Personal hygiene: The teacher uses this rhyme to teach the pupils how to keep their bodies clean.

Indigenous language (Igbo)

Onye nkuzi lele isi m
Lele isi m
Lele isi m
Onye nkuzi lele isi m
Mara ma o di ocha

English

Teacher inspect my head
Inspect my head
Inspect my head
Teacher inspect my head
And see whether it clean

Onye nkuzi lele eze m	Teacher inspect my teeth
Lele eze m	Inspect my teeth
Lele eze m	Inspect my teeth
Onyenkuzi Lele eze m	Teacher inspect my teeth
Mara ma ha di ocha	And see whether they are
clean	
Onye nkuzi lele mbo m	Teacher inspect my nails
Lele mbo m	Inspect my nails
Lele mbo m	Inspect my nails
Onyenkuzi lele mbo m	Teacher inspect my nails
Mara ma ha di ocha	And see whether they are
clean	
Onye nkuzi lere uwe m	Teacher inspect my clothes
Lele uwe m	Inspect my clothes
Lele uwe m	Inspect my clothes
Onye nkuzi lele uwe m	Teacher inspect my clothes
Mara ma o di ocha	And see whether it is clean

5.2 Discipline: The teacher uses this song to teach the young people how to obey without hesitation. It also draws the attention of the pupils on the consequences of disobedience.

Indigenous language (Igbo)

English

Onye elele anya n'azu oo	Nobody should look behind
oo	
mmonwu anyi na-abia n'azu (2times)	Our masquerade is coming
behind onye lee anya n'azu,	If anyone looks
behind, our	
mmonwu anyi achabie ya isi	Masquerade will cut off
his/her head	

5.3 Perseverance/ Patience: Perseverance/patience is one of the characteristic of the Igbo people. The teacher uses this song to teach the children how to be patient and persevere in every good thing they do.

Indigenous language (Igbo)

English

Igu akwukwo na-ato uto

Education is good

O na-ara ahu na mmuta

it is difficult to learn

Onye nwere nkasi obi

He who perseveres

O ga amuta akwukwo

will be able to learn

Para akpa n'isi

carrying the bag on the head

Didinke dinke

Didinke dinke

6.0 Challenges of Indigenous Language as a Useful Tool for Transmission of Indigenous Knowledge

6.1 Illiteracy in the use of the indigenous language (language gap): based on the value place on the use of English Language by this present generation, most people have lost the terminologies used for local herbs, tools crafts and skills generally. For example, a situation where someone may know a herb without knowing its name.

6.2 Lack of proper documentation: Since indigenous languages are mostly transmitted orally, majority of the earlier custodians of indigenous knowledge could not document them so they die with such knowledge. Dialectal variation: what is obtained in a particular environment may not be obtainable in another, so one may know what a particular thing is called in his/her dialect without knowing it in other people's dialects.

7.0 Summary/Conclusion

It is a known fact that music facilitates learning in terms of recall and long term memory but knowledge of any kind cannot be done in isolation to language. Even

music plays itself in languages. Indigenous languages enhance the transmission of knowledge especially indigenous knowledge since it is environmentally based and orally transmitted. Indigenous language carries with it the culture of its owners which gives a child an enabling environment to be part of the cultural orientation of his first language and makes him conversant with the cultural and moral values embedded in his indigenous language. Trying to teach indigenous knowledge using foreign languages makes an individual a stranger to what he lives with everyday. Indigenous language therefore becomes a veritable tool for the transmission of indigenous knowledge which goes along with cultural and moral values. However, this is not without challenges. This paper has tried to highlight some of the challenges facing the use of indigenous language in the transmission of indigenous knowledge using some rhymes and songs.

8.0 Recommendations

- Stakeholders of various indigenous languages should endeavor to encourage the teaching and learning of indigenous languages at all levels in every institution.
- Interesting programs that encourage teaching and learning of moral and other cultural values such as wrestling, tales by moonlight etc should be encouraged and featured in television, radio stations and other media house on regular basis
- Standardization of various indigenous terminologies that cut across indigenous languages should be done by linguistic experts to minimize dialectical variations.
- Government agencies such as museums, craft centers and individuals who are involved in the teaching of arts, culture and socio-linguistics should enhance such through the use of teaching aids like tape recorders, video, projector etc.

The older generation should be encouraged to spend time with the younger ones to enable them educate the younger ones on some of the indigenous knowledge. Proper documentation of information embedded in traditional knowledge should be encouraged.

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