

Indigenous Media: The Role of Local Languages and cultural Narratives in Shaping National Identity

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Abstract

This study examines the role of local languages and cultural narratives in shaping national identity. It looks at how important regional languages and cultural narratives are in forming a country's identity. It emphasises the complex relationship amongst indigenous languages, literature, and culture by examining their interdependence. Nigeria's rich cultural legacy presents a special chance to advance cultural integration and strengthen the country's reputation as an inclusive and varied country. This paper, which draws from primary and secondary sources, highlights Nigeria's cultural richness and the significance of presenting its true identity to the world in order to be established as a top destination for cultural tourism. The significance of reviving regional languages as essential elements of Nigeria's cultural legacy is emphasised in this essay. To achieve this, the report suggests that Nigeria may use leverage to effectively and sustainably promote its cultural identity and rich legacy to the world.

Keywords: Language, Indigenous languages, Cultural Narratives, National Identity

Introduction

A nation's history, beliefs, and customs are reflected in its language and culture, which are inextricably linked. Language is essential to defining national identity in a heterogeneous country like Nigeria. Language, the foundation of any culture, allows engagement, dialogue, and group life. Language is essential to every facet of human endeavour, from economic growth to democratic engagement. Second only to air, which nature freely provides, language is an essential need. Language is essential for economic development, education, and effective democratic involvement. According to Ayodele (2013, as cited in Eze, 2024), language is a tool for communication that transmits ideas, emotions, and values from one generation to the next.

In addition to facilitating communication, languages, whether native or foreign, also serve as a window into the history and cultural legacy of a society. They are vital resources for people, as successful language usage is necessary for all facets of human endeavour. People may communicate their views, traditions, customs, and way of life via language, which promotes national development and communication (Benson, Anyalebechi, and Ariola, 2017; Okeke, 2000).

Shared tales that express a culture or community's values, beliefs, and past experiences are known as cultural narratives, and they have a significant impact on both individual and group identities. People's views of the world and themselves, are shaped by these stories, which are passed down through the generations via oral traditions, literature, media, and regional languages. Since

language is the main medium of communication between people, it is essential to human behaviour (Adedeji, 2015).

The concept of indigenous language

An indigenous language is one that has been spoken by the local population for many generations in a particular geographic area Adedeji (2015, as referenced in Benson, Anyalebechi, and Ariola, 2017). Native languages that have been passed down through generations are known as indigenous languages.

Indigenous languages of Nigeria include Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba, among other local languages spoken by the populace (Adeniyi & Bello 2006; as in Orji & Udeze, 2021). According to Yusuf (2012), these languages are essential for passing down culture, conventions, values, and beliefs from one generation to the next, which makes them a major determinant of a country's overall standing.

Indigenous Languages, Culture, and National Identity

Indigenous languages, literature, and culture have a well-established tripartite link and, by fostering development, they play a vital role in identity building (Daber & Faith, 2022). With indigenous languages acting as conduits for culture, identity, and knowledge, this relationship emphasises how language and culture are inextricably linked. Indigenous language literature is a kind of art that informs, entertains, and alerts people to danger. It illustrates a variety of ideals and attitudes through scenarios, exchanges, and oppositions (Fatokun, 1992). Literary artists convey ideas, emotions, and sentiments about societal evils using satire, proverbs, and symbols.

Language constitutes an essential component of culture, with both maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship that serves as a foundation for national integration and development (Nwankwo & Okanume, 2022). As Montero Reyes (2024) notes, drawing on the perspectives of Geertz and Williams, culture extends beyond shared traditions to encompass symbolic systems in which meaning is continually constructed through interpretation rather than fixed laws. In this sense, indigenous languages permanently mark a people's identity by reflecting their beliefs, customs, and social practices.

National Identity and Cultural Diversity

Understanding how local language and cultural narratives contribute to national identity is essential for fostering harmony and inclusivity in heterogeneous countries like Nigeria. A people's fundamental beliefs, which are expressed in their languages, customs, cultures, and institutions, are crucial elements of a national identity. According to Otumba (2024), "We cannot afford a national identity without a cultural identity." Without instruction, a man is born with an appreciation for his culture. His first constituency is his language, which is his cultural right, as well as the food and clothing he consumes. A nation's rich legacy, may be enhanced by embracing

cultural variety and supporting indigenous languages, which can aid in defining and differentiating different civilisations.

Fani-Kayode (2006) asserts that fundamental principles like integrity, openness, and regard for institutions are necessary for national transformations. A people's identity, culture, customs, and systems, which are frequently embodied in their languages, all reflect these principles, which are ingrained in traditional behaviours. These fundamental principles are essential elements of national identity in heterogeneous cultures such as Nigeria. We can identify and differentiate different cultures by accepting variety, which adds to a rich cultural legacy. Fostering a peaceful and inclusive society requires an understanding of how local languages and cultural narratives shape national identity.

The Role of Indigenous Language and Cultural Narratives in Shaping National Identity

Language serves as a sign of cultural identity that distinguishes a certain group and is a potent expression of pride in one's country. Language, common history, and customs all influence national identity. As a highly networked country, Nigeria must begin its national renaissance with its youth. The majority of the leather used to make football, comes from Kano, but the source is never disclosed to the public. When our cultural psychology is correct, we will have the correct mindset and cultural pride. We may speak for ourselves, strengthen our cultural diplomacy, and reap economic benefits with the launch of the global cultural digital portal "DuduPlugs" (Otumba, 2024).

Indigenous languages, which convey distinctive values, beliefs, and rituals, are essential to the preservation and transmission of culture in heterogeneous communities such as Nigeria. Nigerian authors such as Chinua Achebe and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, celebrate Nigerian identity and examine the intricacies of contemporary life, by incorporating cultural narratives into their writings. National identity is largely shaped by cultural narratives, such as those found in music and movies. Nigerian culture and identity are portrayed internationally by Nollywood and Afrobeats, which have gained international prominence. Artists like Fela Kuti have used music as a vehicle for political activity, opposing corruption and promoting democracy. Festivals, which highlight customs, music, dance, and cuisine, are essential manifestations of cultural heritage. Celebrations that foster harmony, cultural identity, and communal ties include the Argungu Festival, the Osun-Osogbo Festival, and the Abuja Carnival.

According to (Abutu and Managwu as cited in Anyira & Emakunu, 2021), the Abuja Carnival (now known as the Nigerian National Carnival) has evolved over time to represent and illustrate Nigeria's unity in diversity, as each of the federation's states competes to showcase its distinct cultural traditions. The richness and variety of a country's cultural identity are enhanced by these gatherings, which strengthen participants' sense of heritage and belonging.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In summary, national identity is significantly shaped by indigenous languages, cultural narratives, and festivals. Building a peaceful and inclusive society requires an understanding of the

connections between language, culture, and identity. We can promote togetherness and a sense of pride in our country by embracing cultural variety and supporting indigenous languages. Understanding the importance of indigenous languages and cultural traditions, is crucial to achieving a unified Nigerian identity. Nigeria may develop a national identity that accurately embodies its ideals, by using them.

Nigeria's national identity is greatly influenced by the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC). The Bank Verification Number (BVN), International Passport, Certificate of State of Origin/Certificate of Local Government of Origin, Driver's License, and Birth Certificate are additional forms of national identification papers in Nigeria, in addition to the NIN. Nigeria may strengthen its sense of identity and national cohesion by utilising these identity management systems and supporting indigenous languages and cultural customs. Although the road ahead may be difficult and drawn out, it is an essential step in forging a unified Nigerian identity. Nigeria must display and acknowledge its distinct character, if it hopes to have a major worldwide influence. To do this, it is essential to promote indigenous languages and cultural narratives. The following are recommended in this study;

1. The use of indigenous languages for instruction and learning at all educational levels in Nigeria should be included in the National Policy on Education amendment. While English should remain the federal language, Nigerian indigenous languages ought to be designated as official languages at the state level.
2. Documentaries and cultural events, exhibiting fashion, music, dancing, storytelling, visual art, and other arts should be promoted by Nigerian media sources. According to Ruth (2024), NTA promotes wearing native clothing.
3. The government needs to assist the entertainment sector by offering loans, grants, and prizes for the creation of music, movies, and handicrafts. Make sure that stories that are culturally relevant and spoken in indigenous languages make about 75% of the production material.
4. The Nigerian government ought to guarantee the establishment and long-term operation of the Nigeria Institute for Cultural Orientation's (NICO) 'Duduplugs' global digital cultural platform.
5. The government should take the time to educate Nigerians and policymakers about the need of adopting a framework that takes into account the cultural aspects of our diversity.
6. If Nigeria wants to be taken seriously in all spheres of human effort, it should work to preserve, uphold, protect, and enhance Nigerian identity.

By doing this, Nigeria may eliminate unproductive western ideologies and cease relying on other cultures to elevate the country to a higher level of civilisation. Communities may promote better awareness and improve national identity by putting these recommendations into practice.

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