

INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES, ORAL LITERATURE AND CRITICAL LITERACY IN DEMOCRATISATION PROCESSES

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Abstract

This study explores the judicious deployment of indigenous languages (henceforth, ILs) and oral literature (henceforth, OL) for the attainment of democratisation through critical literacy among individuals and groups. It is anchored on Freire's Theory of Critical Literacy, which seeks individual's and group's development of a critical consciousness as 'conscientisation' that gets rid of socio-political constructions of indoctrination in society like Nigeria. Data are drawn from observation, focus group discussion and the Internet and library print materials. Based on its qualitative approach, content and thematic analyses are employed. The analysis proves that when not neglected but used judiciously, ILs and OL aptly serve as viable mechanisms for creating and achieving true democratisation vis-à-vis democracy in Nigeria through the instrumentality of critical literacy. The paper concludes that borne not for their unharnessed potential, endangerment and attrition, our indigenous knowledge systems are viable mechanisms for finding tangible solutions to our nationhood problems and for pursuing and attaining new world orders, as in democratisation cum democracy. It calls for a change of attitude towards our ILs, OL and other indigenous systems.

Key words: Indigenous languages, Oral literature, Critical literacy,
Democratisation

Introduction

Every society institutes a system of government in order to avoid anarchy and maintain law and order. The government is the institution of the state or society that leads, controls, or directs the citizenry. The transition to and pursuit of true democracy is regarded as democratisation. Civil rule in democracy refers to a set of ideas, institutions and processes of governance that allows the masses to choose their leaders in accordance with the law, and guarantees human rights and socio-economic opportunities of life, and the existence of the rule of law (Abubakar & Fadeyi, 2017). The essential concepts of democracy include leadership, followership, governance, law, constitution, the state, citizen, citizenship, rights, representation, election, rights and equality, among others.

Democracy in Nigeria began in 1960, when the country gained independence from colonial rule and became a sovereign state. Kia and Vurasi (2013) aver that 'Nigeria has never been lucky enough to have good elites since 1960' (p. 165). Since then, Nigeria has experienced a lot in the course of its democratisation (Abubakar & Fadeyi, 2017). The experience Nigeria has had includes successive military coups, interference and takeover of civil rule. The absence of democratic dividends, opportunities and features in the military rule grounded the glamour the people showed at the last return to civil rule in 1999 (Igili, 2005). In both military and civilian rules in Nigeria, politicians along with their families and allies and the other elite have always been at vantage positions to the detriment of the masses- the average Nigerians.

Apart from perpetuating electoral frauds and crimes, Nigerian politicians and most of their elitist fellows have taken to and seemingly institutionalised corruption, looting and misappropriation of public funds, lies, deceit, propaganda, gross misconduct, bad governance, unaccountability, dictatorial policies, ethno-religious politics, forming, sponsoring or supporting thugs, assassins, militias, bandits and other non-state actors (Robert, 2020; Abubakar & Fadeyi, 2017; Besong, 2017; Jang, 2012; Odo, 2012; Pate, 2012). The poor masses suffer

incapacitation, impoverishment, and disregard and abuse of their fundamental rights. Given the pervasive ills having political trace, there is need to pursue deserving change. One way of achieving the change is democratisation. This study argues that indigenous languages (ILs) and oral literature (OL) are viable mechanisms for critical literacy targeted at attaining meaningful democratisation and true democracy in Nigeria.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to show that meaningful democratisation requires measures such as deploying critical literacy for critical education of the public on how best to go about democratisation in order to attain good governance. Its specific objectives are to:

1. Show that indigenous languages, oral literature and critical literacy are viable instruments of critical education;
2. Explain how indigenous languages and oral literature can serve as critical literacy mechanism for engendering and attaining democratisation;
3. Demonstrate that the masses and the leaders can understand and practice democratisation when familiarized with democratisation processes using indigenous languages, oral literature and critical literacy.

Statement of Problem

The absence of true democracy cum its features, and democratic dividends raises the question of whether or not democratisation obtains in Nigeria and what ought to be done to attain meaningful democratisation processes. The pervasive political ills in Nigeria destroy or paralyze democratisation. The need for solutions from within informed this study. That is why it seeks to explore the mechanisms for attaining meaningful democratisation processes.

Theoretical Framework

The study is rooted in a critical literacy theory. The reason is that critical literacy (CL) is theorised within socio-political context in relation to language. Freire (1970), a pioneer theorist of CL, describes CL in relation to critical pedagogy (CP) and points out that both CL and CP are characterised by socio-political constructions of indoctrination and the development of critical consciousness. CL is noted to have, and exhibit the complexity of a socio-political framework that grounds 'the relationships of language and power with practical knowledge of how to use language for advocacy, social critique, and cultural transformation' (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993, p. 152). With this observation, it becomes quite clearer why CL and FP Theory are chosen for this study.

Freire (1970) has also described political indoctrination and the development of a critical consciousness as 'conscientisation'. Consciousness is needed to do meaningful reading and writing, critical thinking, critical teaching and literacy learning, and to pursue and realise change or a new world order, among others. As Lankshear and McLaren (1993) have rightly observed, literacy is more complex than the traditionally defined skills of reading and writing. According to them, literate skills and forms are socially practised, and the traditional definition of literacy ideologically aligns with particular postures of normative and inherently exploitative socio-political consciousness (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993). Lankshear and McLaren's (1993) view corroborate that of Freire (1970) on socio-political constructions of indoctrination and the development of critical consciousness. The implication is that critical literacy (CL) places emphasis on socio-political constructions and how they are created and the issues associated with the constructions.

The postulations of Freire (1970) and Freire and Macedo (1987) on critical literacy have brought to place what is now known as the Freirian Pedagogy (Theory). Thus, Freirian Pedagogy is the theory critical literacy taken to ground this study theoretically. The central

argument of FP Theory is that critically literate persons do not only understand how meanings are socially constructed in texts, but also understand the political and economic contexts of the created texts, and the contexts ground the meanings of the social constructions created in texts (Freire & Macedo, 1987; Freire, 1970). Leaning on the Freirian Pedagogy, this study demands that the Nigerian masses should be well sensitised on, and be led into democratisation processes through sustained intellectual activities that make them to be critically literate persons. The essence is for them to be critically literate persons in political and public matters. The masses have to be rightly sensitised and conscientised on the nitty-gritty of democracy and democratisation by agents of socialisation. The school, the family and the media have to take up this thankless task with consistency and continuity.

It follows that conscientisation is a prime gesture to undertake in massive critical literacy on democratisation, good leadership and followership for good governance and meaningful socio-economic and political development and stability in society. Individuals and groups have to be conscientised against misleading constructions by politicians and their elitist fellows, exploitative socio-political consciousness, and political indoctrination. They have to be conscientised by scholars, teachers, parents, the media and other agents of socialisation to always do all that can allow for the realisation of true democratisation vis-à-vis democracy. By engaging the masses in positive critical literacy on democratisation, they get conscientised in that regard. This study argues that conscientising the Nigerian masses to become and remain politically informed and literate requires deploying CL, ILs and OL appropriately by the individuals and groups undertaking the task either willingly or charged with such responsibilities by agents of the state.

In their contribution to views on conscientisation, Robert and Peter (2021) are of the view that indigenous ideologies, theories, measures and so on can be deployed to get individuals and groups conscientised on, and made perpetually conscious of doing all that is right, just and the for the common good of all. They argue that once

imbibed and deployed appropriately, ‘Existentialist Conscious Consciencism ideology and Ezumezu Logic’ and other indigenous ideologies, theories and measures are capable of resolving ‘issues of leadership cum followership, gender, elitism, racism, discrimination, ethnicity, religious crisis, neo-colonialism, Westernisation, sour intergroup relations, international relations and diplomacy, justice and human rights abuse, insecurity, social vices, etc.’ (Robert & Peter, 2021, p. 124). Robert and Peter (2021) advise that conscientisation should be done consciously by individuals and groups pursuing meaningful goals and ‘common good’ agenda. It is by doing so that the goals of conscientisation can be realised.

CL is apt here in that the relationship between language and power (democracy cum democratisation) is not only affirmed, but also described. Power involves and relies on language to operate and function. Without language, nothing tangible can be done in any human endeavour (Mbah, 2018; Robert, 2018; Emeka-Nwobia, 2015; Dibia & Robert, 2014; Uche, 1994). Seidel (1985) has noted that all kinds of discourse are political, because “each discourse serves as a site of struggle, whereby there is a ‘semantic space in which meanings are produced and/or challenged’” (p. 45). Power (politics) of any system needs and uses language, including democracy. The idiomatic expression: ‘Politicians have sweet tongues’ highlights how and the extents to which politicians use language (to manipulate the masses). They politick different public affair involving them and exercise of power. They also display and express propaganda using language. Politics is so pervasive that everyone is involved in it, either directly or indirectly.

CL is the most distinct of all the four major approaches to critical teaching and literacy learning, inclusive of critical teaching and learning (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993). It remains politically neutral while at the same time addressing socio-cultural issues. Other approaches are ‘functional literacy and the rhetoric of objectivism; interpretive literacy and the politics of nostalgia; expressivism as literacy

for personal growth' (Knoblauch & Brannon, 1993, p. 152). Critical literacy, Lankshear and McLaren (1993) have pointed out, differs from cultural literacy. Cultural literacy dictates a given knowledge corpus (Hirsch, 1988), unlike critical literacy. Taking a different approach and standpoint, critical literacy seeks epistemic independence or freedom for learners, whereby learners are not confined to getting, accepting and holding on to only whatever comes from the teacher. That is, the restrictive, rigid and teacher-centred traditional system of teaching and learning is discouraged by advocates and theorists of critical literacy and thinking. This rigid system is seen as the tyranny of academic literacy by Street (1984), Knoblauch and Brannon (1993) and Lankshear and McLaren (1993), among others. According to Street (1984), this tyranny could serve the purpose of socially reproducing dominant ideologies, such as racism, sexism, classism, homophobia and xenophobia, which perpetuate different forms of injustice in societies.

Lankshear and McLaren (1993) have held that the traditional system is 'colonisation culture' pedagogy (p. 17). Lankshear and McLaren (1993) are of the view that critical literacy seeks to question both historical and contemporary imbalance or inequality and the politics of exclusion among groups from the angle of mainstream narratives. They identify three educational practices that demonstrate critical literacy, which are liberal education, pluralism, and transformative praxis (Lankshear & McLaren, 1993, p. 17). The realisation of these three becomes possible with critical thinking, and critical and creative reading, writing, learning, teaching and analysis. Let us give a brief on liberal education and transformative praxis, leaving out pluralism for the sake of precision. The concept of pluralism suggests what it means in the context of the three approaches. Accordingly, liberal education refers to an approach to disciplinary knowledge, whereby intellectual freedom exists with considered disparate interpretations, but any form of inevitable contradiction is avoided, while rational argumentation takes precedence and gains victory at last (Bishop, 2014, p. 53). This system of education

emphasises critical and creative reading to evaluate principles that support a loose conception of tolerance of what comes from those who are not mainstream, while at the same time maintaining the mainstream.

Transformative praxis refers to the process of naming the conditions of oppression and struggling collectively with others in a cycle of action-reflection-action against such oppression (Freirian, 1970; Bishop, 2014). Lankshear and McLaren (1993) maintain that there is ‘a guiding principle behind the processes of transformative critical literacy praxis,’ which concerns making analysis to understand how agents functioning within the confine of ‘established structures of power participate in the social construction of literacies’ (p. 7). Lankshear and McLaren (1993, p. 7) call critical literacy praxis ‘political and social literacies’ involving ‘textual studies that are analysed at the discursive level, in which the texts were created and sustained. Obviously, the foregoing expositions prove critical literacy (CL) and Freirian Pedagogy (FP) to be appropriate for the present study.

Methodology

In line with its nature and thematic concerns, the study adopts descriptive survey design and qualitative method. Data are drawn from observation, introspection, and library and internet print materials. Synthesis and analysis of the data involves systematic review, content and thematic analyses, critical interpretation, and analytic description. The theory adopted centres on critical literacy in relation to language in democratisation processes. The adopted theory is dissected on the basis of its applicability and contextual relevance to this study.

Indigenous Languages in Democratisation Processes

Akinyisola (2017) defines language as a systematic means of communication by the use of sounds or conventional symbols, and the means of human communication through which knowledge, beliefs, and behaviour can be experienced, explained and shared with one

another. This definition captures that commonly offered by linguists. Language is described as the most powerful and distinct way humans express their thoughts, articulate their rationality, interact and conduct effective communication within a society, community and nation (Aimiwu, 2017). This definition highlights the point that language is a mechanism that can be used to find solutions to problems within a given place, a place like Nigeria. Thus, Nigerian indigenous languages (NILs) are those speech forms inherent to Nigeria, used by the different Nigerian peoples of different places or societies in Nigeria. NILs include Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Tiv, Bini, Urhobo, Adim, Efik, Ibibio, Bekwarra, Idoma, etc.

The problem-solving potentials of Nigerian indigenous languages are affirmed in the literature (Mbah, 2018; Oyedeji, 2018; Emeka-Nwobia, 2015). Just as all human activities depend on language for survival, sustenance and continuity (Emeka-Nwobia, 2015; Emeka-Nwobia, 2007; Uche, 1994), surviving the storms of pandemic as well as the attendant challenges depends on language in some regards. As Taylor (2005) has rightly noted, language is a tool [mechanism] for doing this and/or that in society. That is, language is a tool for everything, or every human activity, without which nothing can be done reasonably. Language is tool for finding lasting solutions to different problems, including the problems of democratisation or democracy.

The use of language for various purposes and to find solutions to different problems is also affirmed by scholars outside the field of linguistics. Franz and Murphy (2018) emphasise the unreserved place of language in medicine, as both a field and practice. They state that language is 'a process of knowledge creation,' but also what is used for 'looking for the world' (Franz & Murphy, 2018, p. 5). The study done by Franz and Murphy (2018) shows 'how paying close attention to the role of language in medicine provides a philosophical foundation for supporting recent changes in doctor-patient communication' (p. 1). By implication, paying close attention to NILs would produce the same results in tackling issues of democratisation cum democracy in Nigeria.

The stance of this study on language as a problem-solving mechanism in every society is affirmed by some other scholars in the literature. McLuhan (1964) has maintained that language ‘tells the media student of the power of the media, with which they could transform societal structures alongside the society and the lives the media touch’ (p. 52). Also, as Plato had prophesied, ‘media literate people are more capable of forgetting than the media illiterate ones’ (Alić, 2010, 209). Osuagwu and Chimakonam (2018) argue that language-based techniques have the capacity of tackling various issues in society. They stress the need to evolve, use and sustain language-based techniques to pursue and attain meaningful solutions to problems, such for attaining decolonisation, development, new orders and innovations (Osuagwu & Chimakonam, 2018).

Similarly, Ekpenyong and Ikegbu (2018) maintain that ‘languages, linguistics and communications must be added to the list of the allied challenges of humanity, where there is a high increase in knowledge upon which philosophical thought is increasingly needed to deal with them.’ This quotation wholesomely highlights the place of language (indigenous and alien languages alike) in finding lasting solutions to problems in society, such as those bordering on democratisation and democracy. Similar to Ekpenyong and Ikegbu’s (2018) stance on language as a problem-solving mechanism, Alić (2010) observes that:

Philosophy has always relied on language as well as language medium [or media]; found validity in the grammar structure of sentences it suggested to be used as laws of thought- objective laws of everything that exists; and acknowledged the language medium, while at the same time negating the completeness of that medium’ (p. 207).

Oral Literature

Oral literature is a means of expressing thoughts, ideas, facts, emotions, experiences and shared ways of life. People, animals,

phenomena and things are subjects of such symbolic expression, which could be verbal or non-verbal, using language. Robert (2017, p.1) defines oral literature as what ‘refers to all forms of expressions that are first presented and transmitted verbally (orally).’ Literature informs, educates, instructs and entertains; transmits culture, norms and values; creates from nowhere and represents the society in both concrete and abstract forms, reality and imagination (Robert & Besong, 2016). Basically, literature is of both oral and written forms. The oral forms are myth, folktale and legendary, while the written form comprises prose, drama and poetry.

The literary artist can narrate both past and current societal events– legendary, myth, poetry, folktales, songs and proverbs, among others, through literary perspectives, approaches, narrative techniques and plot development (Robert, 2016). Epic is another poem of the oral tradition. It is a long narrative poem that tells a story of a heroic deed(s) of gods (myth) and great men/women, or the early history of a nation (myth and folktale). These poems usually lack authorship and are largely praise songs or chants (eulogy) that celebrate heroic deeds, persons, animals and so on, as legends. Examples of written traditional poems are ‘Salute to the ‘Elephant’ and ‘When a Strainer Take in Water’ (Nwachukwu-Agbada et al., 2011, pp. 1, 7-8). It could be learnt from these two poems, among others, that oral poems could be made written. In other words, some poems are both oral and written, as in ballad and epic.

Also, lullaby is a drama form of poem. Values and ideals of a society are handed down by the progenitors of a society. These include proverbs, folktales, myths, legendary, idioms, migration and origin stories, poems (oral accounts), stories, songs, taboos, dances, artefacts, masquerades, etc. These embodiments of oral literature cannot be over-emphasised. The importance of oral literature is evidenced in different regards. It could be recalled that philosophy rose from oral poetry and myths (Udigwomen, 2014). Its importance is also seen in what proverb is and does, as applicable to many other aspects of traditional literature.

Proverbs are said to be the flavour of language and culture (Robert, 2017). Achebe (1958) describes proverbs as ‘the oil with which words are eaten.’ For Okoye (1995), proverb is ‘the soup with which words are eaten’ (p. 15). This assertion highlights the place of proverbs in indigenous languages and the nexus between oral literature and language.

In addition, Noah (1996) says a proverb is a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it. Meider (1985) has stated that ‘a proverb is a short generally known sentence of the folk, which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form handed down from generation to generation’ (p. 119). This view tells of the place of proverbs in various indigenous systems. According to Honeck (1997), ‘the development of a literal meaning model is the first phase of the overall proverb understanding process’ (p. 129). This expression highlights the place of oral literature through proverbs in communicative and linguistic processes, which involve language use.

Indigenous Languages and Oral Literature

A people’s literature and other aspects of their culture are expressed using language. The knowledge of all that exists is expressed using language. Interestingly, every given people have a language and other indigenous systems, including ILs and OL. According to Opeoluwa (2014), every given language directly mirrors a given culture, and either enriches or impoverishes the culture it serves. The given language of a people is their indigenous language, as in the indigenous languages of Nigerians. Thus, literature, both oral and written, is a mechanism for expressing, maintaining and sustaining indigenous knowledge, education and systems (Opeoluwa, 2014). In view of this, Nkereunwem and Robert (2023) argue that oral literature is a viable means of maintaining indigenous languages, stressing that OL can help address endangerment and attrition of ILs. In the same vein, this study

argues that OL is also a viable means of attaining CL and democratisation. That is, significant democratisation or true democracy and effective CL are only possible with ILs and OL.

The interplay between language, literature and culture is affirmed by Opeoluwa (2014), who notes that these phenomena correlate. It is to that end that this study considers ILs and OL as viable mechanisms for CL on democratisation in contemporary Nigeria. Oral literature reserves a pride of place in the sustenance of a people's culture (Robert, 2017 & 2016). Both material and non-material aspects of a culture are usually expressed, taught and transmitted orally. Even when documenting them, oral source of data collation comes first. Oral narration comes before written narration. A written narration is possible only because of the existence of oral narration. In other words, literature, language, history and all forms of knowledge are first expressed or orally before being put into writing or written forms. Oral literature is affirmed to have been preserving, transmitting and sustaining indigenous languages and other aspects of cultures from time immemorial (Robert, 2017). Oral literature, also regarded as *orature*, is an invaluable means of teaching and learning various aspects of a culture, inclusive of established conventions. It encompasses 'history, belief, norms, values, customs, traditions, wisdom, knowledge and cosmology of a people' (Robert, 2017, p. 1).

According to Robert et al. (2016), oral literature plays an essential role in various phases of the society, and thus, it ought to be sustained rather than exposed to attrition and endangerment. Scholars kick against the tendency of substituting Western literature, languages, technology and other systems for those of Africa (Prah, 2009; Robert, 2017; Robert *et al.*, 2016). Such scholars, just like these authors, insist that Nigerian indigenous systems should be developed, promoted, digitalised and sustained. Also, there should be both informal and formal education on indigenous systems, as the cultural heritage of the Nigerian peoples. Some African indigenous scholars demand that there should be cross-borrowing, modification, change, innovation and

blending rather than attrition, acculturation and the erosion of indigenous knowledge (Robert & Dibie, 2015; Robert et al., 2016; Prah, 2009). This means that cross-borrowing, modification, change, innovation and blending rather the otherwise are needed for the improvement of indigenous systems, such as ILs and OL, which are viable means of educating and arming people intellectually with the right skills and knowledge that allow for significant or true democratisation.

Factors Militating against ILs and OL

Despite the potential of oral literature and indigenous languages in solving issues, most people consistently neglect, abuse and endanger their indigenous languages, (oral) literature and other aspects of their cultures. As Nwabueze (2004) has rightly noted, ‘any society that abhors literature is incapable of humanistic thinking and cultural behaviours’ (p. 6). Clearly, he also affirms the correlation between literature and many other systems of the society, such as languages, history, philosophy, religion, psychology and culture in its entirety. The negative attitude towards ILs, OL, indigenous knowledge (IK) and other indigenous systems continue to pose severe threats to growth and development, peace and safety, socio-political stability and democracy cum democratisation, among others. Thus, indifference or negative attitude to literature causes a lot of harmful changes. These changes are more evinced in themes of cultural songs, dances and proverbs. The changes can also be realised in folktales, with both human and animal characters. Literary elements such as characterisation, setting, language and plot can be created to reflect the contemporary society (Robert, 2017).

Globalisation with the imposition of Western systems on Africa and its peoples and systems continuously work against ILs and OL and other indigenous systems in Nigeria as well as other parts of Africa. Colonial impositions, which Wiredu (1980, 1993 & 1995) seeks conceptual decolonisation from, are trends posing untold challenges to

the indigenous languages of Nigerian peoples, especially those outside the three major languages and a few others. Condemning the Western superimpositions on Africa, Wiredu demands that conceptual decolonisation be evolved, used and sustained to do away with colonialisation and neo-colonialism. One of the impositions is the Western language. Eurocentric conception of African culture and indigenous systems is one negative trend confronting Nigerian ILs, OL and IK. The contemporaneous tend to uphold on to Western culture and systems. Agbo (2011) laments the effects of, and condemns Western superimpositions on Africa.

Endangering indigenous languages for the alien ones is problematic and harmful to various aspects of the systems of the society. Addressing the associated problems requires falling back to various indigenous mechanisms, which include ILs, OL and IK. Nigerian leaders fail to recognise, harness and utilise the prospects of ILs, OL, IL, and other indigenous systems making up the wholesome indigenous culture of Nigerian peoples. As Agbo (2011, p. 214) notes, the quest for development in Africa as a whole and Nigeria in particular can be attained when the indigenous leaders resolve identity crisis and create a new culture. Doing so entails resolving the lingering linguistic identity crisis, which involves the relegation, attrition, endangerment and abandonment of ILs, OL, IK and other indigenous systems. Besides, the goal of attaining commendable democratisation and true democracy could be realised through effective use of ILs, OL and other indigenous systems.

As Prah (2009, p. 17) observes, in preference and pursuit of Western culture, African culture with all its systems is too often than not misunderstood, perceived wrongly and dabbed variously. In his words, 'African culture tends to be regarded as museum pieces, arrested and fossilised in time' (Prah, 2009, p. 17). Agbo (2011) notes that the general consensus seems to be that without the distortions imposed by colonial hegemonies, the African peoples would have evolved unique, primordial and adaptable socio-cultural and political systems that could

have purely emerged from African orientation, predicated solely on African metaphysics, African world views, and ontologies.

Wa Thiong'o (1981) strongly argues for the decolonisation of the minds of Africans in African literature and politics. This implies that OL and ILs could be used to decolonise African systems from the Western superimpositions brought upon Africa and its peoples by colonialism. He also emphasises that once African literature is freed from language politics, the minds of Africans would be significantly decolonised. Chinweizuet *al.* (1980) have also made a strong argument for the decolonisation of African literature. Be it as it may, it is important to realise that decolonisation and any other forms of new world order involve as well as rely on ILs, OL and other indigenous knowledge systems.

The indigenous people of every society are more conversant with these systems than aliens. As Nkereunwem and Robert (2023) rightly observe, formal education in contemporary Nigeria is given using the English language exclusively at the expense of indigenous languages. They add that the national language policy in Nigeria is a mere statutory proclamation without practical reality or practised (Nkereunwem & Robert, 2023). Since the provisions of the National Language on Policy are not implemented, ILs are perpetually neglected. The negligence accounts for why ILs are not used for educating learners in early and middle years of education in contemporary Nigeria, being the reverse of the provisions of the National Language on Policy (Nkereunwem & Robert, 2023).

ILs and OL have to be well harnessed and utilised to orientate young people on the right ways and deeds through which significant democratisation and true democracy can be realised. Past records being enshrined in oral forms of literature and language prove the nexus between oral literature and oral history from time immemorial. Robert (2016) maintains that there is a nexus between literature and history, as history depends on literature for its activities in both present and future presentation of historical facts to generations. Opeoluwa (2014)

expresses the importance of language in human endeavours by noting that language is central to the survival of mankind, because it is a vital instrument of communication, negotiation and the transfer or preservation of literary and cultural heritage of a people from one generation to another. According to Opeoluwa (2014), there exists a strong relationship among language, literature and culture to such an extent that whatever affects one does same to the other two. Any change to one also affects the other two.

Critical Literacy, ILs and OL as Means of Democratisation

The issues of democratisation ought to be tackled by deploying different measures and mechanisms. For this study, critical thinking (CL), indigenous languages (ILs) and oral literature (OL) are among the mechanisms for pursuing and instituting true or significant democratisation cum democracy. In what lends credence to the foregoing, Robert and Peter (2021) note, 'the widespread global problems in contemporary time call for finding evolving and experimenting more workable measures, since the extant ones seem to be defective, inefficacious or less productive' (p. 124). They stress that ideologies that are theoretically and practically 'problems-solving are some of the workable measures' to global issues such as the aforementioned (Robert & Peter, 2021). In their words, 'the quest for finding lasting solutions has often been the rationale behind the formation of different ideologies' (Robert & Peter, 2021, p. 124). It is the consciousness of the foregoing that these authors make a case for considering and deploying ILs, OL and CL as mechanisms for democratisation cum democracy in Nigeria.

The problem-solving potential of CL is affirmed by scholars in the literature. Shor (1999) has noted that individuals redefine themselves and remake society through critical literacy in form of alternative rhetoric and dissident projects. This means that CL is a viable mechanism for attaining democratisation. According to Shor (1999), in an effort to discover alternative paths for self and social

development, critical literacy challenges the status quo. Also, as Shor (1999) notes, CL interrogates power relations, discourses and identities in a world that is yet to be just, humane and finished. This means that CL has the potential of interrogating the aforementioned in the context of leadership, governance, democracy and democratisation. In what lends credence to the stance of this paper and the above quoted view of Robert and Peter (2021), Shor (1999) states that critical literacy ‘connects the political and the personal, the public and the private, the global and the local, the economic and the pedagogical, for rethinking our lives and for promoting justice in place of inequity’ (p. 2).

Blackburn and Clark (2007) show a nexus between critical literacy and activism, as in advocating the entrenchment of democratisation. Morrell (2008) also affirms that CL is a method of social enquiry involving activism and refined education. Norton (2007) agrees that CL concerns the ‘connections between literacy, power and educational change,’ (p. 6). More so, Norton (2007) shows elaborately that critical literacy is a mechanism for international development. This means that (critical) literacy also impacts on culture, and makes some cultures more prominent and known than others among heterogeneous public. Street (2001) and Canagarajah (1999) also show elaborately that critical literacy is a mechanism for development at all levels, not at the international level alone. It is to that end that Canagarajah (1999) emphasises that understanding the ‘politics of location’ is paramount to understanding the literacy practices of a given community.’

Critical literacy is also affirmed to play a crucial role in education, linguistics, development and health, among other fields (Kwesiga, 1994; Makoni & Meinhof, 2003; Openjuru, 2003; Parry, 2003). Since CL propels participation in different crucial affairs, as noted by O’Donoghue and Kirshner (2008), it is capable of rousing participation of individuals and groups in democratic processes and democracy. Critical literacy is a strong factor in cultural studies, education (pedagogic context), identities and differentiations, consciousness, broadened knowledge and intellectuality, diversity and

cohesiveness, power relations, and socio-historical constructions, among others. It is critical thinking that grounds critical literacy, which is made manifest through teaching and learning. These involve ideological and pedagogic processes, logical and evidential evaluation, analysis, criticism and decision-making. Interestingly, ILs and OL are needed and relied on in all activities involving CL.

Singer's (2006) study shows that critical literacy is a viable means of changing the world. With various stories, Singer's (2006) study illustrates how reading and writing change the world. The students studied by Singer (2006) wrote about stories of injustice, and finding an audience and collaborators. In doing so, they got themselves 'consumed' with activism and the world outside the school. Singer's studied students got immersed in the world outside the school, as they got participating in activism and literacy research (Singer, 2006, p. 112). Lankshear and McLaren (1993) have talked about this situation in students' reading and follow-up literary appreciation, as they noted that readers, including student readers, are bound to react to what they read in texts with 'their own ideological investments' (p. 8). Obviously, they affirm ideologies to be strategic intellectual measures for attaining practical solutions to problems.

Smetanová, Drbalová and Vitáková's (2015) study reflects the foregoing. Smetanová's et al. (2015) study concentrates on situating implicit theories of teachers and students in teaching-learning process in the issue of critical thinking in education context. It also interrogates Czech teachers' consideration of the desirability or not of critical thinking. The study proves that the concept of critical thinking is variously conceived among individuals. It also reveals a correlation between teaching experience and opinions on the need to develop critical thinking. Essentially, critical thinking is a tool for CL and a skill needed for effective CL. Since all public events and stories involve and rely on language and literature, the place of Nigerian ILs and OL in the CL targeted at realising democratisation cannot be over emphasised.

Conclusion

As shown variously above, Nigerian indigenous languages (ILs) and oral literature (OL) are indeed viable mechanisms for critical literacy on democratisation. With ILs, a larger number of the public would be more familiarised with themes and matters of democratisation. With CL, they are bound to be well informed about socio-political constructions in society. Being well informed about them makes it possible for the masses to know all that has to be done to attain democratisation as well democracy, and makes the electorate conscious of electing the right candidates for political offices in order to true democracy. With OL, a lot can be learnt, memorised and internalised about democratisation.

Therefore, it is destructive to allow any trends destroy ILs, OL and other indigenous systems, following the substitution of alien systems for the indigenous ones. Negative attitude towards indigenous systems worsens the ills of westernisation, globalisation and neo/colonisation. As such, there is need to work against negative attitude and the ills. It is logical to submit that once the potentials of our ILs and OL as well as other indigenous systems are duly harnessed, they aptly serve as viable mechanisms for finding tangible solutions to issues of democratisation and other nationhood problems, and serve as mechanisms for pursuing and attaining new world orders, as in democratisation cum democracy.

Recommendations

Following the research problem theme and findings, the following recommendations are made:

- (i) Individuals and groups are charged to change their attitude towards our ILs, OL and other indigenous systems.
- (ii) Nigerian ILs, OL and other indigenous systems have to be promoted at all times in order to rouse the younger people's consciousness to, and interest in them.

- (iii) Another way-out is building sustainable democratisation spirit, ideals and normative values in individuals and groups.
- (iv) Legislations, which promote sustainable use of ILs, OL and other indigenous systems in contemporary Nigeria, should be enacted by the government and the traditional rulers.

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