

GS IGBO: BETTER LATE THAN THE LATE

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Abstract

The genesis of the university studies sprang from the insatiable human cravings for knowledge. The word University comes from two Latin words uni (dative case of unus), meaning “one” and versus meaning; in the direction of, towards. Universus means towards one-a whole, the whole of existing things, everything that is, the whole of reality, also a consideration of all things as forming a whole creation. The Latin suffix itas (genitive itatis), connotes a condition of being united. This is why universitas signifies a state of things united to form a whole. It can also express a quest to comprehend the universe. This paper sees this conference as a welcome development. The neglect of “Mother tongue” has always been viewed as a dangerous signal in the advancement of scholarship in Africa, since the advent of the Western education. The problem of course-specialization in the Nigerian Universities; ought to be reviewed because every university with a strong scientific bias, tends towards a vitiated idea and consequently leads to a one-sided knowledge borne out of the illusion that education can always be better reduced to the shallow focus of specialist research, and ignores the wider horizon which reflects the etymology. Bearing in mind the huge functionality of language in educational foundation that would in turn lead to the holistic roundedness of the human dynamics, the question of upholding Igbo as a G.S. Course in the Universities of the South-East and other regions where Igbo stands as an indigenous language would become a desideratum

Introduction

The complexity of the human person has always been a huge source of worry for those who are at the echelon of proffering solutions to the abundant lacunae that the whole reality of existence projects. Since it is a truism that the unexamined life is not worth living and that the nature of man as man has recurrently challenged him to know himself, both the pneumenal and the phenomenal aspects of the daily components of humans cannot be nipped in the bud. The idea of civilization and the equivalents as concretized in the shore of human development and advancement present humanity with an incessant call to unraveling the mysteries surrounding the universe.

The desire to impart knowledge to humans by talented teachers motivates them to render their knowledge more profound, as an essential reason for the emergence of universities, especially in the early ages (Newman 1960:10). The term *Mahadum* is a near Igbo equivalent of the Latin source of the English term University, *Universitas Studiorum* involving the engagement of teachers and students in specialized study, the expectation are targeted towards the student seeing beyond the natural sphere into a higher and purposes of the establishment of universities. Since the dawn of man’s great struggle toward universal human dignity, the basic objectives of the known universities of the world have been to seek the truth, to teach truth and to preserve truth (See *University of Nigeria 2001-2004 calendar*: pp 38-42).

Basing on these, one envisages that the pursuit of education would entail the encouragement to students to undertake the task of acquiring a regular and liberal course of scholarship. What it means therefore is that the conception of the founding fathers of University wherever, may not be far from promoting researches and the advancement of knowledge and

learning. Again it would involve the intention to organize, improve and expand education to the level of avowed standard.

At the instance of the insatiability of the human person, the University would go beyond those factored education per se, but rather place educational pursuit at the echelon of higher learning, committed to playing a dynamic and vital function in the significant task which faces the challenges of building a great and virile society, that is expected to lunch these endeavours into the world which is at its structure the greatest University.

This succinctly is rooted in the spirit of man's unfathomable search for his own realization and fulfillment. This also brings to the fore the fact that the presence of a University can really worth it when it has the responsibility of shaping destinies of races and nations and at the microcosmic parlance individuals.

At the level of engagement, it would not be over labouring the obvious when the *modus Operandi* states that the courses of study of the environment are channeled towards the holistic and integral needs of the peoples. Hence, the optimism would lie vividly on higher education that portrays diversity. However this diversity in the pursuit of learning brings out the essence of university and would undoubtedly draw heavily upon the cognitive, affective and emotional domains of the human community as a whole.

Objectives of University Studies

With the set objectives, University education would whereby be fully equipped to proffer vistas for causes in the branches of learning that are relevant to the emancipation of the peoples. At this, the academic structuring is expected to sincerely attempt to evolve into a pattern which would be uniquely appropriate to the cultural and vocational endeavours of the community. The students who are privileged to be admitted into the institution thereby metamorphose into individuals who are academically and professionally mature and attend self determination and actualization.

The length and breadth of the curriculum would result to distinguished scholarship and academic excellence and in effect accrue a significant constitution to the enlightenment of humanity. As far as this level of educational expose is concerned the orientation would gear towards cultural purification which invariably calls for a realistic approach to the problems of the society. Thus, the university is expected to devise the features that would enable students who are mainly youths to re-discover themselves and as early as possible dedicate their lives and energy to the course of civilization.

This is where the focus of our study lies, whereby the issue of language and education comes to the lime light. Here, the Igbo Language as a General Study (GS) course in the Universities of the South East and other zones where Igbo stands as an indigenous language is viewed as a *sine-qua-non* in salvaging the crisis of development in the bid to sustain the indigenous variables of the area. (Chinagorom; 2013:237-255).

Briefs on University Education

As already indicated, the initial brain behind the establishment of universities and university education was due to the inherent unlimitedness of human's desire to acquire knowledge, which is closely related to human emancipation. Thus Francis Bacon an English Lawyer and Thinker (1561-1626) is associated with the saying that *scientia et potentia*-knowledge is power (Mautner, 1999:59). This equally spurs humans to enquire and further the

examinations of the universe. Through learning and educational exposure both social and economic realities are brought to the door step of those who are aware of man's incarnate nature of being dominion over creation.

With the consciousness created during the Scholastic age by the Catholic Monks in Europe (Burns 2007: xi-xiv), there came a trend towards expanding the horizon of learning by those who are to be at the helm of affairs of empires and nations. The In-depth curiosity of learning sparked off by the Medieval scholars of great repute like St. Anselm (1033-1109 AD) to the time of the "School men" like St. Albert the Great (1206-1284) the Seraphic Doctor, St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) his student and the Angelic Doctors and those subsequent personalities, the emperors of Europe saw the need to train their heirs and successors in the well organized environment of learning and enquires.

The saying that is associated with St. Anselm runs thus *Fides querens intellectum* – that is: "Faith seeking understanding" (Traupman 1994: 224). Thus generates the question of *universitas magistrorum et scholarium*, which means the gathering or the assemblage of masters and students for the purpose of instilling and imbibing knowledge (Obilo, 2010:6-7). The students were exposed to not only pure academic learning, but also imparted on them the means of how to survive integrally. The principal Universities of the Middle Ages were: Bologna-constituted in 1111AD. Thus, about 1150AD the Paris University was founded, about 1170AD the Oxford University was founded. In 1209, the Cambridge University was established, Toulouse 1223, Naples, 1224, Padua 1228, Rome 1245, Salamanca 1255 etc. (Kingfisher, 1995:258, Attwater, 1997:507-508 etc).

In the 14th Century Italian scholars began to take an interest in the writings of the ancient Greeks and Romans so that about 1397AD Manuel Chrisolas became the first Professor of Greek at the University of Florence. In 1636, the Puritans of New England who had a high regard for education founded Harvard College in honour of John Harvard. Universities invariably became the pride of nations and Kingdoms.

Attwater, (1997:501-508) asserts that the troubled times which followed the Reformation crippled the once flourishing Universities of the Middle Ages in many parts of Europe. The Recovery of 18th and 19th Centuries still continues in the contemporary epoch.

Indeed, a law to establish a University in the Eastern Region of Nigerian was passed in 1955. The Eastern Nigerian Government linked up with both the United States of America and the United Kingdom to help in the planning of physical and educational aspects of the proposed University. The University of Nigeria (UNN) was officially opened on 7th October 1960, While classes began on 17th October 1960 with the enrolment of 220 students and 13 members of the academic staff. Before this the University College of Ibadan was an affiliate but only became a full flagged University with autonomy in 1962.

Other Universities followed in Nigeria with the high enthusiasm of the post independent era with the commitment of playing the dynamic and vital role not only academic but also cultural excellence in line with the aforementioned classical concept of Universities. Today, there are numerous universities both Federal Government status and some States status and today some private Universities owned by individuals and Non-Governmental Organizations' are operating in Nigeria.

The Locus of General Studies

Ab imtio, the courses of study at the University level have been devised to enable students to rediscover themselves and dedicate their lives anew to the building of humanity, it stands

obvious that the General Studies (GS) would be mandatorily a requisite for the effective realization of the set objectives. In view of this universities incorporated schools of General Studies with the acronym “GS”. Some of the causes as seen in programmes of Nigerian Universities in line with the traditional status of Universities globally include, use of English, involving nature and types of communication, the use of library and basic research methods. Other areas include social affairs involving government and politics, religion and its place in human society.

Students also are exposed to the Natural sciences to stimulate their interest in Sciences and human society. The Humanities are equally incorporated with the objectives of understanding causes of development in the developing world, with Nigeria as a case of study, the roles of language, arts, history etc. They are aimed at giving the students the opportunities to identify the importance and relevance of the Humanities in any aspect of human development.

The attention of this study is drawn to the level of commitment to the indigenous languages in our institutions. The concern is much more engaging to us because of the place of indigenous language in Nation building and the capacity among individuals. (Chinagorom, 2014:13-21, 2015, 29-36, Chumbow, 2004,61-72).

We expect the result that would involve abundant intellectual harvest; technological advancement, economic emancipation, political autonomy and even psychological and mental revolution. The fruit would also affect other cooperate activities that are result oriented and utilitarian to the high level of holistic progress, linguistic parlance that is closely linked with the UNESCO’s Declaration of 1953, which unequivocally and categorically states that humans amass their potentiality greatly through the use of Mother Tongue (MT).

Placing Igbo Aright

Adequate cognitive maturation, development and intellectual capacities are inherently linked with indigenous languages (Ejiofok 2002:14-25). The question of education embodies the totality of the human person. It essentially stimulates the quality of human resourcefulness. Education develops both mental and moral rectitude to the level of integral capacity and intelligence. Due to the recurrent nature of the question of functionality of education. Ahumibe (2002:175-176) opines that education should be made to show case learning through meaningful application, since it is the aggregate of all the processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour which are of positive value to the society in which he lives. Okafo (1981:16) equally sees education as a process of acculturation through which the individual is helped to attain the development of his potentialities and their maximum activation when necessary according to right reason and to achieve thereby his perfect self-fulfillment.

From these inferences, one seriously becomes worried that in the cause of the phenomenon of colonization of the Southern Protectorate and the subsequent amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates to the entity called Nigeria (Niger area), in 1914, the forces’ of imperialistic dynamics between the “Masters” and the “Natives” have resulted to gains and loss, displacement and intermingling of peoples with various indigenous variable (Chinagorom 2013:244-245).

This condition therefore leaves the inhabitants of what is today Nigeria to the tough challenges of the instinct of the survival of the fittest, to the extent that warnings are coming from right, left and centre about the extinction of most of the languages of Nigeria, even

including the Igbo language that suppose to be the language of an indigenous people and a large chunk of them in Diaspora, approximately about 50 million today.

One links the problem to the 1903 Education Code that was promulgated for the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria with an Education Department. This code provided for the control of Schools, curriculum as well as financing of the schools. In the views of Iwuchukwu (2006:134), after the amalgamation of 1914 another Education Ordinance was promulgated to cover what was called Nigeria by Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard. The purpose was that the training of the natives to the extent that they can gain employment in “British investments”. The question then is: which type of employment, and at what sections of the investments?

Indeed, it is good to state here that even the emergence of National Policy of Education (NPE) from 1977 to date, each of these policies only serves as a mere paper documentation without implementation (Chinagorom 2016:7). Scholar would ever bemoan the ugly treatment meted on the indigenous languages of Nigeria. Thus Eme (2015:34) states: “The basic notions of linguistics presented below take me to the issue of the Igbo Language and its users who undermine the language for such derogatory assumptions that it is incomplete”.

From my perspective, as I was privileged to undertake an indepth scholarship into the course of Linguistics and Igbo, I would say that this worry expressed by this concerned scholars of Igbo extraction is as a result of lack of proper understanding of what language stands for. Since some of us have come to be associated with the Igbo Language in synergy with our exposure in other areas of studies, we have come up with the connection that since language contains the veritable qualities within any traditional setting, the indigenous variables that would create avenue for the initial purpose of university education can be said to be immensely manifested in the teaching and learning of the Igbo Language by every undergraduate student in the Universities of the South East and other areas where the Igbo Language serves as a mother tongue.

Suggestions/Recommendations

In view of the fact that language as observed by the father of Modern Linguistics Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) is “in the lives of individuals, important than any other (2005:7), we make the following suggestions and recommendations:

- Igbo language should be a compulsory course in the General Studies Curriculum.
- Again the time allotted to the teaching of the Igbo language as a G.S course should be extended to achieve better results
- Igbo language should be recognized as the main medium of instruction in the schools of South East and other areas where the language stands as Mother Tongue (Chinagorom, 2014b: 279-285).
- Since education is the aggregate of all processes by which a child or young adult develops the abilities which are of positive values to the society, it should be appropriate to device ways that are developmental in order to facilitate human evolutionary mechanisms.
- The governments of the South East and other areas involved should take the responsibility of seeing that the language is uplifted from the bemoaned state and be given a pride of place
- The NGO’s and other humanitarian groups should be able to promote the Igbo language by giving financial and moral support to the development of the Igbo language (Obinna, 2000:5-6)
- Best students of the Igbo language at all levels should be encouraged by offering them scholarship and other motivating dynamics.

Conclusion

Education is the bedrock of people's development because it involves a socio-cultural process, which is achieved through the means of corporate activity. We have also stated here that University studies involve a holistic pursuit of learning for man's realization. We therefore look forward to applying; those means by which the programmes of study in a University, where a young adult decides to engage himself should be filled with contents that are self enriching. Again, the end product ought to be qualitative, efficiently productive to the society and the universe to balance the yearnings of the world which today harps on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

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