
Literature in Indigenous Language: Its Relevance to Human Development

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Abstract

This paper attempts the examination of the relevance of literature in indigenous languages such as Igbo in human development. One of the major challenges of Nigeria is how to work out modalities that will enhance good human development. Human development has been defined as a process of widening people's choices as well as raising the level of well-being. For this to be actualized there is need to carry out a re-orientation of the people's general conception of process of development in terms of economy. The paper therefore argues that since human development have to do with human mind, literature (as genre) in indigenous language such as Igbo as a school subject at all levels of education and as well as reading it for leisure will obviously play important role in achieving good human development index. Igbo literature in the areas of prose, drama and poetry can play crucial role in sensitizing and orienting the people on the steps to take in other to achieve good human development index. The theoretical framework adopted for the study is Aristotle's Rhetorical Theory. This literary approach is relevant to this study because it advocates that its concern is with the type of discourse whose chief aim is to persuade an audience to think and feel or act in a particular way in other to achieve the desired objective(s).It is hoped that this study will be useful to the government and students who are carrying out further research on human development.

Introduction

The enhancement of good human development should be the ultimate goal of every society. Literature, because of its nature and power can create impact on the lives of people in the society. Literature can act as a sensitizing and mobilizing agent to make the people act towards achieving the desired goal. According to Obi (663), the role of literature, particularly literature in indigenous languages such as Igbo language in making Nigeria a better country has been overlooked over the years.

It is the researcher's contention in this paper that adequate knowledge of the fundamental pre-requisites for good human development is generally needed in order to achieve good or high human development index. It is along this line of thought that this paper asserts that literature in Igbo language can be effective instrument of sensitizing and orienting people towards the achievement of good human development index. The literary writer can use his art work which can be either in the genre of prose, drama or poetry to call his people's attention especially the students to the requirements or pre-requisites of attaining good human development.

Generally, people need to be given orientation on the fact that human development we are discussing in this paper is purely different from material and economic development. This is because whenever we think about development, people tend to think about material and economic development. Presently a change in the thinking about development have been introduced and that was a change in emphasis on economic to human. This has led to the concept and process of measuring human development index. Hence using literature in Igbo language as a

veritable tool is very crucial in the issue of human development. This is because the indigenous language is a handy tool that will enable the literary artist to carefully articulate “the three basic dimensions” of measuring the average achievements of human development in a country into the literary work. The artists will also articulate in their work identified reasons in favour of human development. When students as well as other people outside the school system read these types of works, they will gain adequate knowledge and information on the issues of human development. This will in turn help the country to achieve good or high human development index.

Literature and Society

In this study, our working definition of literature is the entire collection of books of high merit containing works which are products of creative use of imagination in a particular language”. Literature as the entire collection of book of high merit embraces prose fiction, drama and poetry. Obi (487) asserts that literature is an important means of understanding and interpreting human beings and aspects of society such as politics, religion, economics social conflicts, class struggle and human conditions through the medium of language. That is to say that literature takes care of various aspects of the needs of the society. According to Udochukwu (368-369)

Literature is an act of imaginative and artistic composition of events (oral or written) that concerns itself with life and human experiences in which words are arranged in pleasing patterns to express some special aspects of human experiences.

That is to say that literature can use language in every way it can; conventionally, experimentally, stretching words to the highest limit to achieve its goal. Caudwel (145) notes that the task of literature is keeping the collective imagination of a society alive, such that its members will be able to channel their energies to communal social construction. Egudu (1) defines literature as a mood of expression”.

Literature does not only reflect, it also affects the society. It is not just a subject that expresses something, but rather it is the way, manner or method in which something is said or written. According to Duviguand (67) Literature is not just a reflection, rather it’s a projection of the people’s aspiration for the future. The literary artist does not just reflect his society, rather he also responds and reacts to socio-political ,religious, economic and cultural changes of the time through the medium of specified language. Thus is this study we are looking at how the literary artists will divert their work to emphasize on measurement of development from purely economic to human. This is because the need of the time is how to achieve good or high human development index Nigeria. This show that literature does not reflect, rather it affects the society.

Literature is an integral part of language. It is language well used for understanding of the audience according to the message passed across through the genre of prose, drama and poetry. Obi (664) notes that;

Literature, be it oral or written plays vital roles in the society. It mirrows the society and checks the situation of things in the society. Thus the life of a people is embedded in their literature as it teaches the cultural values of the

society. The novelist or prose writer, the play-wright and the poet join hands in creating a society that is free from vices and that attains its national goals and aspirations.

In that same vein, Ezejideaku (2) upholds the above view and notes a poet is a visionary, a reformer, a political watchdog, a satirist, a praise singer, a chronicler of events, a teacher and the people's spokesman. He notes that he regards it as his duty to sensitize his people on happenings around them with the hope that they would react positively. As a result of all the force-goings, we observe that through literature, we not only study our image through other people's perception of us, but we also analyze and criticize things like our political, social-cultural, religious, economic and educational institutions as a way of effecting a desired change in the society which will enhance good human development index.

Indigenous Language

An indigenous language or autochthonous language in the words of Obi (719) is a language that is native to a region and spoken by indigenous peoples, but has been reduced to the status of minority language. The language would be from a linguistically distinct community that has been settled in the area for many generations. Indigenous language may not be national language. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, an indigenous language is the language of the people regarded as the original inhabitant of the tribe that own it. It is commonly referred to as mother tongue (Li). Indigenous languages registers our culture, as a result of this, development of a cultural group according to Pei (97) is printed in its language. It is therefore the submission of this paper, that literature in indigenous language such as Igbo will play important role in improving human development in our country.

Human Development

Whenever, we think of development we usually tend to think about the material and economic development. Even the entire world is classified into two groups namely (a) developed and (b) developing countries. This classification is obviously based on their level of economic development. According to Human Development Report (285), though this trend is still continuing, but a change in the thinking about development was introduced and that was a change in emphasis on measurement of development from purely economic to human. The report future notes that two economists, Prof. Mehbuh Al Haque and Prof. Amartya Sen in 1990 introduced the concept of Human Development. Then from this above period onwards, each year, United Nation Development Programme (UNDP) calculate Human Development index and publish as a report which is referred to as Human Development Report (HDR). This report, is published each year in which almost all the countries of the world are placed under three categories high, medium and low based on defined parameters.

The Concept of Human Development Index

According to the Human Development Report (286) the Human Development Index (HDI) is a composite index that measures the average achievements of a country in three basic dimensions of human development. These three basic dimensions are:

1. Long and healthy life
2. Knowledge a
3. A decent standard of Living.

These basic dimensions are measures by the following indicators.

1. Along and healthy life is measured by life expectancy at birth.

2. Knowledge is measured by the adult literacy rate and the combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrollment
3. A decent standard of living is measured by GDP per capital in purchasing power parity.

Table I. Analysis of Dimensions Used in Human Development Index (HDI)

S/No.	Indices	HDI
1.	A long and healthy life	Life expectancy at birth
2.	Knowledge	Adulty Literacy rate (with two third weight And The combined primary , Secondary and gross enrolment (With one third weight)
3.	A decent standard of living	GDP per capital in purchasing power parity.

The purpose of this construction is simply to provide a measure which goes beyond the traditional measurement of development which is always based on income. Therefore, Human Development Index (HDI) is a barometer of changes in human well-being and for camping progress in different regions.

Human development concept is based on the idea of development as a freedom. Human development is about building human capabilities- the range of things they can do and what they can be. Individual freedoms and right matters a great deal. But these

freedoms and rights are restricted for some people because they are poor, ill, illiterate, discriminated against threatened by violent conflict, or denial of political voice etc. That is why in the inaugural issue of Human Development Report -1990, the authors defined these above mentioned indicators as essential choices and the absence of which can block many other opportunities. Therefore they defined human development as a process of widening people's choices as well as raising the level of well-being. Obviously, in order to achieve this, there is a need for re-orientation of our process of development. As it were, development must revolve around the people, not people around the development.

Actually, the basic difference between economic development and human development is that economic development entirely focuses on the increase of income; whereas human development believes in expanding and widening of all aspects of human life be it economic, social, political, cultural etc. The basic idea behind this is that it is the use of income and not the income itself that decides the human choices. Since, the wealth of a nation is its people therefore, the goal of development should be the enrichment of human life.

As a matter of fact, from the research carried out, the major reasons which keep some countries like Nigeria at the bottom of human development are as follows:

- i. Rapid increase in population
- ii. Large number of adult illiterates
- iii. Low Gross Enrollment Ratio
- iv. Inadequate government expenditure on education and health.

- v. Large proportion of under-weight children and as well as under nourished people.
- vi Very poor sanitation facilities and low access essential life saving medicines, etc.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve in health situation, educational attainment and increased standard of living and reduction of poverty level. However, there has been a significant improvement.

The Relevance of Literature in Igbo Language to Human Development

Literature in Igbo Language is a veritable instrument of mobilization and orientation of citizenry in Nigeria's quest for human development. Literature plays important role in the lives of people in the society. By its nature, Literature as a school subject and even as a leisure offers training in creative logical and critical reasoning and also develops the readers' analytical mind. The fact that literature is a mirror of its time makes it a handy tool for educating both students and other people in the society on the three basic dimension of measuring a country's achievement in human development which include the following:

1. Long and healthy life
2. Knowledge
3. A decent standard of living

As it were, in this study, our working definition of human development says that "It is a process of widening people's choices as well as raising the level of well-being". Now we observe that to achieve good or high human development index which is measured by attaining long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent

standard of living, the important role of literature of offering training in logical and critical reasoning and the development of analytical mind is very necessary. Obi (66) notes that

A novelist, a playwright or a poet is not insensitive to the socio-political, religious, economic and cultural development and environmental protection realities of his time. He is affected by them like any other member of his society.

The Igbo literary artists that use Igbo language as their medium of communication can play vital role in sensitizing the people on the issues of human development if given the enabling environment. The artists can carefully articulate the necessary information which the people (especially the students who are basically the future politicians and leaders of the society) suppose to get about the three basic dimensions of human development as listed above. The people will see the need maintain a healthy living, aspire to acquire adequate knowledge and also to maintain a decent standard of living.

To achieve this, there is a need for re-orientation of our process of development. This is because the people are already used to associating development with income. As a matter of fact, the Igbo literary artists are going to carry out the re-orientation and sensitizing through their works.

The issue of human development is entirely new to the people as such, our literary writers will duly examine the people and the society and collect vital information and knowledge that the people

suppose to acquire in that area and articulate them into their literary works.

For instance, we observe that there are basic things that people in every country will attain to achieve good or high human development index such as long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard living. The artists usually direct their writing towards mirroring the need of the time. Through the reading of these literature people will tend to direct their attention towards acquiring long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living.

Again, we also note that there are reasons or factors that can hinder human development. All these things which have been enumerated above will be mirrored to the society through literature and as people read these both as a school subject and for leisure, they will receive necessary information and knowledge with regards to human development.

In course of teaching this literature as a subject, the teacher have to apply persuasion as advocated by Aristotle's Rhetorical theory which is the literary approach adopted for this study whose chief aim is to persuade an audience to think and feel or act in a particular way. In this case, with the help of persuasion the people will understand the issue of human development. They will understand the fact that development must revolve around the nation not people around development.

It is worthy, to note that the three genres of Igbo literature are usually designed in such a way that they teach moral, expose the follies of people or government and as well extol the praise-worthy

action of others. This is very vital roles of literature as a work of art.

This paper therefore submits that literature in indigenous language as Igbo language can be effective instrument in mobilizing, orienting and sensitizing people on the basic dimensions and other necessary information on human development. Through literature we can learn from the experiences of others; both positive and negative experiences. This will help us to take the necessary actions towards improved life.

Summary and Conclusion

From the forgoing discussion, we observe that literature in indigenous language such a Igbo can really play vital role in mobilizing and orienting the people to imbibe the basic dimensions of human development. We note that the three basic dimensions that is being used to measure the achievement of high human development index are:

1. Long and healthy life
2. Knowledge and
3. A decent standard of living

In conclusion, people need to be educated through literature in indigenous language to work very hard so as to make Nigeria be placed among top countries in the medium, human development category. Also, the goals of development have to revolve around the people, not people around development.

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