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## Indigenous Languages Genocide and Its Consequences on Ghana's Education

**James Nsoh Adogpa**

Lecturer, Department of Languages Education, University of Education,  
Winneba, College of Technology Education, Kumasi, Ghana

### **Abstract:**

*The work has examined the consequences created in the Ghanaian educational system as a result of the neglect of the role our indigenous languages play in the training of the individual. It has been established that graduate unemployment in Ghana is due to tertiary institutions not being able to shift their focus from the pre and post-colonial programmes and training. The curriculum of our educational system seems not to create freedom for the individual to be creative because the indigenous language that is the soul of the learner is taken away. Stakeholders in education appear to be examination-conscious so all that the curriculum puts emphasis on is how to make learners achieve excellent results. Learners are therefore given straight-jacketed education and training which make graduates not creative and innovative enough to initiate anything on their own when they are not absorbed by the formal sector. There is the need for tertiary institutions to link their learners to industry for them to acquire the needed employable skills for industry and themselves to set up their own businesses. All the findings can be possible when self-confidence, self-esteem and creativity are made part of the individual; all of which emanate from the person's mother tongue. Tertiary institutions have a role to play in instilling creativity in our learners and finding roles for our indigenous languages.*

**Keywords:** indigenous, languages, genocide, consequence, Ghana's education

### **1. Introduction**

The general outcry in Ghana today is graduate unemployment. It is not uncommon to see many teeming energetic youth wasting away after their tertiary education. The question is not that they are lazy but that the white colour jobs that their institutions prepared them for are basically non-existent. This suggests that there is a fundamental problem with the educational system and national needs. It appears that education these days in Ghana, whether formal or informal, has created some lacuna for the individual and how that individual can function effectively in society. The creation of that lacuna is the genocide of the Ghanaian languages in our educational system. If you want to kill a nation, take away their ability to think and reason in their own mother tongue. This is referred to as linguistic genocide by Skutabb-Kangas (2000)

According to Sakyi (2010), structural unemployment which is the worst form of unemployment has led to a great cut in the number of people that was formerly taken by government. Several undesirable practices have ensued. Some of these undesirable practices include mediocrity, old-boyism and Pluto-bureaucracy. He further states:

- Only those connected to the corridors of power get jobs in the formal sector, especially in the lucrative ministries .... The exercise of recruitment into the formal sector has been corrupted, prostituted, politicized, tribalised and to a greater extent trivialized (Sakyi, 2010:1).

One may argue that there might be more tribalization when education is to be done using different local languages. Rather, it is the absence of mother-tongue education that has eroded morality from our system. Baker (2001), Cummins (2000) and CAL (2001) posit that the affective domain involving confidence, self-esteem and identity is strengthened by the use of the L1. Any lack of self-esteem will lead to graduates of tertiary institutions settling on anything dirty to get themselves jobs as pointed out by Sakyi (2010).

### **2. Creativity: the Missing Link**

The mother of creativity in every society is the originality of its culture, the root of which is language. However, there seems to exist little or no space in the Ghanaian educational system to accommodate our local languages (Essien, 2017; GILLBT, 2016). This does not pertain to Ghana alone. The following depicts the case of South Africa.

- The absence of indigenous languages in schools and universities will prolong the cycle of 'intergenerational transmitted poverty' in which the majority of non-English speaking South Africans are trapped. The failure by most developing countries to promote the use of indigenous languages creates an impression that they perceive these languages as inferior (NGO Pulse, 2010).

The very reasoning of our thinking that our languages are inferior degenerates our self-confidence and therefore leading to lack of creativity after a graduate has only been taken through programmes written in some perceived superior languages claiming to possess market value. Until we find value in our languages we are likely to remain caged in the thoughts of foreign culture.

All manners of reforms have been made regarding the educational system of Ghana but the ever-forgotten aspect is how to harness our languages to create wealth. Wealth creation lies beneath our conscience, the engine of our creativity embedded in language. Ghanaian scholars who belong to the linguistic corps hardly do anything to promote the local languages except lecturers and tutors of the Ghanaian languages struggling for recognition and space in the school curriculum. Those in the foreign languages domain comment usually on the 'sick' nature of the English language (Gyasi, 1990; Criper, 1971; Sey, 1973; Tingley, 1981). The comments portray how incompetent Ghanaian users of the English language are. The Ghanaian linguist feels the foreign language is ill; yet, he offers no better solution in terms of developing the widely use of local languages to standards acceptable to promote creativity in the learners who finally come out of universities and ultimately lack innovation. The foreign language which is seen to have market premium stifles creativity giving rise to alarming rates in graduate unemployment as indicated by Ghana Statistics Service 2016.

Not only are school teachers and institutions that do not create the felicitous conditions for learners to think creatively but parents have contributed ignorantly to the problem. Some parents in Ghana have chosen to promote a foreign language in their homes with their children. Their local languages are down played. What they do not know is that they are creating a dilemma for their children. Part of their thoughts are done in the language that they are not well versed in and the expression of the ill-formulated idea is in another language. Originality is missing: creativity is lost.

Educationists in Ghana seem to have all the ideas in the causes of poor performance of learners at all levels of the education but they have little or never thought of the gap created in the absence of our local languages beyond primary three though some work has been done on the performance of students through the use of the mother tongue (Brock-Utne, B. and Alidou, H. 2005; Lai, C. 1994; Mazrui, A. 2004 and Allright, D. and Bailey, K. M. 2004). The enormity of the benefits that can be derived from the mother tongue as indicated by these researchers cannot be ignored by nations whose natives have their own world view through their own languages.

### **3. Does the School Curriculum Create Space for Creativity?**

One may ask; what is curriculum? Curriculum, according to some researchers, is the total experiences that a child undergoes whilst under the supervision of the school. It therefore means that the school has a greater role in making the learner not only one sided but responsive to arising situations in life. The curriculum within an institution has to equip the individual with the freedom to uncover his potentials and capabilities and be able to pursue them without restriction. It should be a curriculum that should bring about pedagogical novelty.

A good curriculum should integrate societal needs and work towards solving societal problems. This can be possible when learners are taught to think critically about issues and innovatively come out with matching solutions. Does the Ghanaian education from all levels create the opportunities for learners to be innovative? The answer may be yes by some people but in which language are the learners taught to do the critical thinking? Is it the foreign language that some of them are struggling to make meaning because their indigenous languages are not permitted in the curriculum? If this be the case, then the freedom for learners to think critically and be innovative is taken away.

What role are the indigenous languages to perform in our school curriculum? Just to be a theoretical medium of instruction from primary one to primary three? The non-implementation of this language policy has just been lamented on by the director of Bureau of Ghana Languages as follows: "Ghanaians are quick in making policies which are often not implemented as they should be and the mother tongue (11) policy is not exempted" (Ghana News Agency).

The question of the role of universities and other tertiary institutions in making the undergraduate/graduate student an independent, self-esteeming individual and analytical and critical thinker through its curriculum is yet to be addressed. How does the tertiary institution create space to let students unearthing their talents especially in courses that are technically oriented? Does the curriculum make space for the learner to have a say about the relevance of the programme to his/her interest or it is an imposed curriculum by people who imagine that the programme would be 'good' for individuals and must go through it?

### **4. Discussion and Findings**

The soul of every nation hinges on its culture; the chief of which is language. If the culture of a nation is transmitted in a language that is alien to its culture, mutilated system of the culture is expected to be transmitted and will only be understood by a few or none. The absence of the indigenous languages in the curriculum of the Ghanaian education above lower primary makes the grasping of concepts evasive to learners. As learners struggle to grasp concepts in a foreign language, very unfamiliar to them, there is little space to unearthing their talents. The concept of creativity is far removed from the learner. He/she is prepared to be straight-jacketed into the training imposed on him/her or be compelled to seek solace outside the school system by dropping out. This is as a result of what Baker (2001) refers to as weak models that take a subtractive approach to the mother tongue, undervaluing the first language and culture and prioritizing the second language. The language policy of Ghana has prioritized the second language in the school curriculum and this has seriously affected the creativity of learners; for, they are struggling to make meaning out of the second language being used as medium of instruction.

"The goal of a sound educational system should be to train our children in body, soul and mind to be able to eke out a living for themselves and to be fit and proper citizens who are assets to the nation" (Sakyi, 2010). The educational system of Ghana appears to be training children only in body and mind without soul. The soul of a nation is its language and when the indigenous languages have no role to play in our educational system, we are slowly killing the nation. This starts from the frustration of the youth through the unavailability of jobs after school. The educational system has marginalized the indigenous languages and has allowed a single foreign language as indicated by Benson (2004) to dominate the education sector. This marginalization has led to what Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) calls 'submersion of learners under water without teaching them to swim'.

It has been ascertained that the use of mother tongue increases confidence, self-esteem and identity which are key to developing motivation and initiative as well as creativity (Benson, 2004). The exclusion of mother tongue in our school language has created personalities of uncertainty in our learners. The individual graduates from a tertiary institution without self-esteem and confidence to take any initiative towards self-establishment in the face of unemployment. This is because education in Ghana has taken a nosedive (Sakyi, 2010). It lays emphasis on quantity rather than quality; it lays emphasis on theory rather than skills acquisition. All these happen because the educational system has marginalized the local languages, which are power to self-esteem, confidence and creativity.

Tertiary institutions that are expected to find solutions to national issues rather design programmes to go in line with what was needed at the pre-colonial era. Graduates those days were scarce and programmes were designed to fulfil the needs of that time. Trends have changed; needs of the country have shifted but the tertiary institutions have not changed their objectives and mode of training. Entrepreneurship is hardly taught as a course in our tertiary institutions. No matter the course or programme that one offers, entrepreneurship should be part. Skills acquisition should be a point of focus in the training of our tertiary students. Creativity should be encouraged in our educational system so that we do not only prepare learners solely for paper work but critical thinking linked to application of knowledge. A shift away from the pre-colonial educational objectives is needed now. If this is not done, the current figures on unemployment will continue to escalate as indicated by Onuma ((2016) that the incidence of graduate/youth unemployment in Nigeria is attributed to the educational system operated during pre and post-independence era in the country which placed emphasis on liberal education rather than vocational skills which prepares school leavers with vocational skills for better employment opportunities.

The floodgates of tertiary education in the late 90s and early 2000 witnessed the establishment of many government polytechnics and universities and consequently private tertiary institutions. Proliferation of tertiary institutions resulted in serious competition for programmes that appear attractive by their names. The functionality and marketability of these programmes to fulfill the need theory remains an issue. Do the institutions design their programmes and courses with industry and society in mind? How do institutions link up with industry for the training of their learners under training?

Linking tertiary institutions to industry can be an alternative way of addressing the gap that exists between what tertiary institutions do and what industries expect from graduates of tertiary institutions. There is however always an element of suspicion when institutions want to link up with the industry. Lecturers usually seem unsafe for their inefficiencies might be exposed through industrial exposure of their students. Workers in the industry also feel intimidated for fear of 'book long' people coming to criticize their way of practices. All these seem to be unnecessary fears and anxieties. We can only make our institutions and industry better if there is collaboration among stakeholders in education, industry and policy makers. Lecturers and learners in tertiary institutions would benefit since their theoretical knowledge would be linked to practical work. Industry would equally benefit; for, their manpower needs would be met due to collaboration. When students are exposed to all the learning opportunities available, they are more likely to be creative, innovative and come up with their own jobs and thereby reduce the figures on graduate unemployment.

It must be noted that many graduates from the tertiary institutions of Ghana are well-prepared in terms of theory. What they need usually is the opportunity to explore their talents but such opportunities are hardly made available to them. Where job opportunities exist, employers are looking for experience, sometimes up to ten years of experience. If the youth are not given the opportunity to experience, where will they gain the experience from? This is where all the undesirable acts and practices as referred to by Sakyi (2010) come in when people are searching for jobs. Those who are qualified and can perform to improve the economy are left out. Family members without education are made to occupy positions that they can hardly deliver. Positions that might have been taken up by graduates are occupied by ghost names. The tertiary institutions can do their part in terms of training the needed manpower but when the nation does not create avenues to utilize the graduates, there is likely to be social vices because the core values that should have been transmitted by the people's own culture have been left out in the educational system. The foreign culture has taught the learner foreign things that do not belong to our society. Grave consequences are created in our society because of the genocide of our educational system's failure to utilize the indigenous languages appropriately.

Another finding is the assumption that the educational reforms in the 90s has created a society of examination consciousness and a curriculum that does not allow students to be involved in other extra curricula activities. The resulting factor is 'creation' of graduates who can hardly apply what is learnt in the classroom to what is in the field of real life. All stakeholders in education in Ghana seem to be examination-conscious. Parents are desirous of their wards excelling and moving to the tertiary level; heads of institution gear their efforts towards attaining 100% in the final examinations so that they can always have many students choosing their institutions; and political parties are also concerned with comparing during whose tenure of office saw much success in terms of performance in education. Little thought is given to the need theory of education. The political will to implement difficult yet beneficial policies is absent in any of those political party leaders that play politics with our education when it comes to the language in our education.

In addition to the above concerns, the tertiary institutions in Ghana have not actually shifted their focus from examination being the "be-all" and "end-all". It is not uncommon to see lecturers dictating notes at lecture halls. It is a common practice to see lecturers demanding their students to regurgitate whatever was given them. This type of training does not prepare the graduate-in-the-making to think outside the box. Since students are usually demanded to use the low profile dimensions which are understanding and knowledge but not the application of knowledge, creativity becomes much stalled. If graduates were taught to think critically, they would certainly function effectively in their societies and this could help create self-employed jobs which would go a long way to reduce the alarming proportions of unemployment in Ghana as indicated by Sakyi (2010).

## 5. Conclusion

Universities all over the world have the responsibility of addressing national needs. If our universities fail to perform that responsibility, the world will be in crisis. The unemployment crisis now in Ghana might be attributed to lack of our universities ability to address the indigenous languages role in our education system. The educationist seems to be looking up to the politician to make policies but these policies cannot be implemented without the educationist. If educationists are waiting on the politician to assign the role of our indigenous languages as advocated by Ghanaian Languages Teachers Association at Tamale in 2016, the issue may continue to remain a mirage till the foreign language suffocates us.

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