

CULTURE AND IDENTITY AWARENESS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION: AN APPROACH TO LANGUAGE LEARNING

Oparah Chinwendu Everista

Abstract

This paper explores the importance of culture and identity awareness into Language Education with focus on Language learning. The concept of culture embraces the culture of mankind as a whole despite that man is born cultureless, therefore Language Education became necessary. This study pontificate that language learning is intricately linked to culture and identity, and that neglecting these aspects in Language Education can lead to cultural miscommunication and incomplete language acquisition. The concern here is to look at the strategies for integrating culture and identity awareness into Language Education and the relationship between culture and identity awareness in Language Education. The study anchored on Action Learning Theory and three research questions were formulated to guide the study. Data were generated through Library research Method. The researcher made use of descriptive technique to analyze the data. Findings show that Language Education can improve communication, fostering cultural empathy and understanding among the learners. It can also validate learner's identity and promote a sense of belonging in the language classroom. Finally, recommendations and suggestions were made and conclusion drawn.

Keywords: *Culture, Identity, Awareness, Language, Education and Language, Education.*

Introduction

Language Education has been seen as a means of acquiring skills such as grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation. Apart from these skills, the complexity of language learning is a multifaceted process that extends beyond acquisition of linguistic skills. Culture and language are intricately intertwined in the society and language is deeply embedded into culture and identity. While learners' linguistic and cultural backgrounds plays a significant role in shaping their language learning process.

The importance of culture and identity awareness in Language Education cannot be overlooked in the sense that, the language learner are not only acquiring a new language but also navigating new cultural norms, values and identities. To achieve greater learning outcomes, the integration of culture and identity awareness into Language Education became necessary to enhance language learning, promote intercultural understanding, empathy and create inclusive and diverse learning environment.

The importance of culture and identity awareness in Language Education has shown a great recognition, that is why Okwudishu and Okwudishu (2005) agreed

Oparah Chinwendu E.
PhD
Department of Linguistics and
Nigeria Languages
Alavan Ikoku Federal
University of Education,
Owerri
chinwendueverista@yahoo.com

that research in Language Education has given an opportunity for all children to benefit from learning other languages which will help them to develop communication competence in school, hence effective integration of culture and identity awareness into Language Education became necessary.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The Concept of Culture

Different scholars have defined the term culture in different ways depending on their perspective about culture. That is why Utoh-Ezeajugh, Utoh-Ojemudila and Nwafor said that culture has diverse meaning depending on the source. Some scholars see it as the totality of people's being. Others view it as the people's way of life which includes their believes, values, what they eat, what the wear, their custom and tradition. According to Isidienu (2013) culture encompasses a body of knowledge, customs, works of art, idiosyncrasy, belief system, language, music, ethics and morals, laws and orders which people share among themselves as the members of a particular society.

According to Tylor (1871), culture is “a complex whole” that consists of custom knowledge, law, belief, art, moral, and other attributes acquired by man as a member of a society. New world encyclopedia (1992) defined culture as a way of life of a group of people in a society, which includes their believes, traditions, customs, patterns of thought, behavior, rituals, language, dressing, art, literature and music. Culture is part of living that directs man's social life from generation to generation. Utoh-Ezeajugh etal (2013) added that culture is not ingrained in a person from birth, rather culture is something a person learns from his family and surroundings.

The Concept of Identity

Identity can be defined as an attribute or characteristics that distinguish an individual or a group of people in the society. It is a unique quality that makes someone what they are. According to Obi (2013: 381) identity means “idea of uniqueness, a perception of being distinct and independent. Identity also defines who we are and creates sense of self different from others. According to Emem (1999) referred Obi (2013:381)

Identity refers to certain qualities, absolute sameness of characteristic peculiar to a particular human society. Identity is something with which a person or thing is associated with or known. Identity helps the members of the society to be associated with the culture of the society to which they belong. Igbo language is an identity of an Igbo man or woman any place he or she may be found in this universe.

In all levels of human society, identity is applied be it in social gathering, in the family, age grades village, local government and state. People can be identified through their family name, or the age grade which they belong or their town, local government of origin, state or cultural group, (Obi 2013). Furthermore, identity is a distinctive characteristic shared by all members of a particular social group or category of individuals which differentiates them from others in the society. In a particular environment,

identity can be derived from locality, through commonality of interests, service and common fate.

Concept of Awareness

The term awareness can be defined as the state of being knowledgeable, being informed, and being conscious about something. It is the process of knowing that something exists. According to Oparah (2018), awareness can be self-awareness, social awareness, cultural awareness, environmental awareness and health awareness. It can be created through education and training programs, media and communication, self-analysis and interpersonal dialogue, community engagements, personal reflections and discussion. These are ways of creating awareness in the society.

Concept of Language

Language according to Offorma (2009) referred Emeribe (2011) is a formed style of expression which can be verbal or non-verbal, sign and symbols which are governed by rules to convey thought, feelings and information. As an aspect of culture, it also conveys the culture of a giving society. Okereke (2011) stated that language is a means of conveying message from person to person and it is the greatest attribute which characterizes behavior of human beings. Through language we can create, control and preserve our culture. All activities of man be it political, social, economical, regional, and educational have language at its nucleus. Which means man cannot do without language. Madukwe (2007) referred Njoku and Ovu (2011:83) that:

Language is the most valuable human tool for maintaining social regulation. It is an important regulator of individual consciousness and social action. It is a tool for communication and interaction amongst people in different circumstances. In fact, language is intimately linked to both human conceptual development and social experience.

Without language, life on earth would have made no difference from that of plants and animals. Language pilots all activities of man and determines what man do. Agboola (2011) added that language is human phenomenon through which human beings communicate with one another. Every human interrelationship is guided with language. There is no activity of man that language is devoid because language and man are inseparable.

Concept of Education

Education is the process of training, teaching or developing an individual or a nation. Education is power and can take a nation to greater heights. Through teaching and learning in school that learners acquire knowledge and skills and this is possible through the use of language. Anulobi and Anuonye (2010) posited that education is an instrument which positively affects national development. Offorma (2009) sees education as a process of making people functional members of their society. Education is also the process of providing information to the people for mental, physical, political, social, spiritual and economic development. These shows that education is used for all round development of a nation.

From all these definitions, it implies that a society cannot grow without education. Whatever man needs in the society can only be acquired through education. Through education, learning can take place. Education enables us to read and write, calculate or to be proficient in a given job. That is why Obasi and Kano (1960) refers education “as a guided recapitulation of the process of inquiry which gives rise to fruitful bodies of organized knowledge”. This means that, training and instructions are systematically given to the young ones through the school or from home in order to acquire the knowledge and good character development, (Obilo and Akuakanwa 2010).

Concept of Language Education

Language Education is the process of teaching and learning a foreign or second language in school. Kern and Schulz (2005) defined Language Education as a field of study where teaching and learning of first and second language, foreign language, and heritage language takes place. Richards and Rodgers (2001) opined that Language Education involves the development of linguistics, cognitive and socio-cultural competence. Ellis (2012) sees Language Education as a discipline like linguistics, psychology, sociology, anthropology and education to understand how language are learnt and taught. The goal of Language Education is to promote language learning and language use in the entire society.

Theoretical Framework

Reg Revans' Action learning theory is the theory behind this research work. It was coined in 1940 but his work gained wider recognition in the 1960s and 1970s. According to him, learning takes place as a result of taking action, reflecting on the experience and applying new insights. Okwudishu and Okwudishu (2005) observed that children are capable of learning many languages when they develop communicative competence in the language and students acquire language when the language is meaningful and interesting, and when they are in a non-threatening environment.

The value of learning another language according to NCDPE (2004) referred to Okwudishu and Okwudishu (2005) is that students gain access to the different cultures associated with the language, learn the ways of life and accomplishment of each culture. This exposure will make them more reflective about their own culture. This theory encourages reflection and self-awareness where learner will be discussing their experiences with peers in collaboration with the community. The language learner can develop their culture and identity awareness through collaborative activities such as group discussions and working with learners from diverse backgrounds. Finally, with problem-solving, critical thinking skill, and by engaging with authentic materials and scenarios that require critical thinking the learner can develop awareness.

Statement of Problem

The essence of culture and identity awareness in Language Education is to showcase the importance of culture and identity awareness in language learning, but the development of linguistic learning often neglects the importance of culture and identity awareness in language learning. This can lead to misunderstanding, miscommunication and lack of empathy among language learners. Again, linguistic

and cultural backgrounds are meant to shape the learners' identity. Therefore, Language Education should provide a safe space for learners to negotiate and explore their identity. In order to promote effective language learning and intercultural communication, there is need to investigate how culture and identity awareness can be integrated into Language Education.

The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study therefore is to find out the extent at which integration of culture and identity awareness into Language Education can harness language learning. The purpose of the study is:

1. To examine the importance of culture and identity awareness into Language Education.
2. To identify strategies for integrating culture and identity awareness into language learning.
3. To explore the relationship between language, culture and identity awareness into Language Education.

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following question:

1. What are the importance of culture and identity awareness into Language Education?
2. What are the strategies for integrating culture and identity awareness into Language Education?
3. What is the relationship between languages, culture and identity awareness in Language Education?

The Importance of Culture and Identity Awareness into Language Education

The importance of culture and identity awareness can not be over emphasized because culture and identity awareness played a great role in Language Education. Language Education focused traditionally on developing linguistic competence and it was recognized that language is embedded in culture and identity. A language learner can not only acquire a foreign or new language but also learn the cultural norms, values and identity of the owners of the new language. The importance are as follows;

1. **Cultural Sensitivity:** The language learner should be conversant with the culture of the target language in order to communicate effectively and avoid unintentionally offending others. Language is a two-edged sword, the misuse of language or going contrary to other people's culture can cause misunderstanding among the learners.
2. **Identity Information:** Language is one of the instruments used in shaping character and identity. The language learners' identity are shaped by their linguistic and cultural background, it also provides a safe space for the language learner to explore his or her identity.
3. **Diverse Learning Environment:** Culture and identity awareness makes it possible for diverse learning environment where the learner will reflect the diversity of language, background and experiences.
4. **Global Citizenship:** Through Language Education, the learners become global citizens and develop the ability to communicate effectively across cultural boundaries.
5. **Improved Communication:** Through Language Education, culture and identity awareness can improve communication and reduce miscommunication and misunderstanding in a

multicultural context.

6. **Increased Empathy and Understanding.** Culture and identity awareness in Language Education enhance the learners to have deeper understanding of cultural diversity and identities in learning, thereby increasing empathy in Language Education.
7. **Enhance Language Learning:** In Language Education, the language learner can have better understanding of the language use in a cultural context.
8. **Better Interaction:** Language education can better prepare learners for world interactions by developing their ability to navigate or direct diverse cultural contexts.

Integrating Culture and Identity Awareness into Language Education

To promote effectiveness and meaningful learning experience in Language Education, culture and identity awareness can be applied in the following ways:

1. Through curriculum design and incorporating the use of diverse textbooks such as authentic textbooks, images and videos that reflect diverse cultures and identities.
2. Through intercultural communicative competence, thereby teaching the learners to communicate appropriately in an intercultural setting.
3. Create good classroom environment where learners will have time and space to share their cultures and identities.
4. The use of sensitive assessment tools or images that will take into account learner's cultural background and experience.
5. The use of online cultural resources such as videos, websites, podcasts and also organizing online exchanges between learners of different cultural backgrounds.
6. Organizing professional training for teachers of different cultural backgrounds, and encourage community engagement by collaborating with local community organizations to promote culture and identity awareness.
7. To incorporate cultural contexts such as historical events, traditions and customs into teaching in language lessons.
8. To encourage learners to share their personal experience and their cultural background in a language lesson in order to promote cultural exchange and identity awareness.

The Relationship Between Culture and Identity Awareness in Language Learning.

In Language Education, culture and identity awareness has a complex relationship in the sense that they influence each other and shape the learning experience. It involves the learner learning a new culture as well as a new cultural background, a new environment and a new instructional approach. In language learning context cultural socialization plays a great role in shaping identity awareness, especially in language learning context. In learning context, cultural values, norms, and beliefs are being acquired through language instruction thereby increasing the learner's horizon as a result of integrating elements from multiple cultures.

In Language Education, there is cultural perception which influences the learners in a way that the

learner will be aware of themselves and their place in the world. Also, the learner will be conversant with the native culture and the world at large. The influence of culture and identity awareness in Language Education plays a great role in shaping the learner's experience. The learner's language experience can be influenced by their background through motivation where the learner will be connected with his culture in language learning. Culture and identity awareness position the learner on the use of language. Hence the learner can express their thoughts, feelings, experiences and shape their sense of self. Culture and identity awareness also influences the learner's choice of language, i.e. the language the learner chooses to speak, when to speak and how to speak can reflect our identity. Language use can position a learner within social hierarchies and enable the learner to perform and negotiate their identity in different cultural contexts.

Conclusion

Considering the importance of culture and identity awareness in Language Education, findings have shown that culture and identity awareness are essential components of Language Education. Therefore, incorporating cultural contents, materials and activities in Language Education can provide learners with more meaningful understanding of the language in a cultural context, improves communication and prepares the learner for real world interaction. Furthermore, by integrating culture and identity awareness into Language Education learning becomes more inclusive, effective and transformative experience for the learners.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion of this study, the following recommendations were made.

1. Government should organize teachers' education programs where teachers will be taught the importance of culture and identity awareness in Language Education.
2. The curriculum planners should incorporate the integration of culture and identity awareness into language teachings.
3. Teachers should develop strategies for improving Language Education, culture and identity awareness in language learning.
4. Teachers should encourage learners to examine cultural norms, values, cultural practices and understanding of cultural identity.
5. Teachers should incorporate cultural materials and activities into language learning in order to promote culture and identity.
6. Government should provide opportunities for teachers to develop their competence and responsiveness in culture.

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