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The cultural transfer of African indigenous minorities through teaching people to read in their native languages

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Abstract

The article aims to study the mutual influence of the process of teaching African indigenous minorities their national languages and the process of transmission of their cultural values. There is a need for determining whether it is necessary to combine teaching African indigenous minorities their national and official languages and whether the whole educational process should be based only on teaching African indigenous minorities these languages or it is preferable to use languages that allow for providing more opportunities for professional development, such as easier admission to higher education institutions, and lower barriers of intercultural communication. The national language is often the only tool for preserving the cultural values of the indigenous population, its loss being viewed as the loss of national identity and self-consciousness. The national languages of African indigenous minorities are part of their culture, that is why they have its main quality that consists in showing a tendency towards the constant incorporation of new elements and transformation. The national languages of indigenous minorities are viewed as a condition for culture preservation; at the same time culture should be taken into account while teaching people languages.

For citation

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Keywords

Indigenous minorities, languages spoken in Africa, history of postcolonial Africa, cultural values, schooling.

Introduction

The practice of schooling of indigenous minorities in various regions of the world suggests that a simple unification of the educational process leads to the loss of cultural identity, a decrease in the cultural diversity of the peoples of the world [Koptseva, 2014; Pimenova, 2014; Chaudhri, 2013]. In the context of globalization, this problem is significantly aggravated due to the fact that the amount of information traffic in less common languages decreases annually, while even the most significant languages for the world cultural heritage are experiencing a crisis associated with an increasing number of borrowings from English [Conover, Kermish-Allen, Snyder, 2014; Stoneman, Jinnah, Rains, 2014].

The measures taken by the State and public organizations to maintain linguistic diversity are not always sufficient, especially when there are a significant number of languages. In these conditions, only the most significant indigenous languages in terms of the number of native speakers are supported through the implementation in national languages of part of the educational process in secondary schools in the area of their compact residence. In these conditions, the search for a form of transmission of the "cultural code" is a very relevant topic [Holmes, 2008], and the study of the experience of indigenous peoples of Africa in preserving cultural diversity is becoming increasingly important, where, in the absence of a sufficient level of development of educational institutions and scientific study of indigenous languages, not only languages are preserved, but also cultural values indigenous peoples [Mukeredzi, 2013]. This experience is interesting for the study of the cultural development of small indigenous peoples of various regions of Russia in the conditions of constant strengthening of interethnic interaction and globalization.

Literature review

Teaching native languages as a tool for transmitting the cultural code of an ethnic group or territory is the subject of a significant amount of research. Conditionally, they can be divided into works dealing with various institutional aspects of the problem under consideration. For example, in relation to African cultures, this topic has been considered in works devoted to teaching reading and writing outside and within school education [Hlalele, 2014]. Another area of research was the consideration of literacy within the framework of the cultural development of territories, including in order to identify the ontological components of the stages of development of the process of transferring the cultural code of the territory. In the socio-cultural framework, the practice of developing a system of teaching reading and writing in the native language was considered in conditions when a certain language did not have its own writing system [Holmes, 2008].

A fundamentally different direction of research in this area is represented by works considering the ethnographic aspects of literacy teaching as a tool for transmitting the "cultural code", some of which relate directly to the study of customs and rituals of the peoples of Africa, and others are devoted to various issues of linguistics [Mukeredzi, 2013].

Thus, research in the field of the transfer of cultural values in the teaching of native speech is interdisciplinary, including such areas of modern science as cultural studies, ethnography, sociology of rural life, linguistics and pedagogy.

Materials and methods

The paper uses the results of research in the field of literacy education, the transmission of cultural heritage, as well as the ethnic diversity of the peoples of Africa in the postcolonial era.

As research methods, the tools of meta-analysis of the subject area of the study are used with the use of an interdisciplinary approach in order to identify the mechanism of transmission of cultural values through teaching reading in the native language.

The problem of preservation and development of the written language of the small indigenous peoples of Africa as a socio-cultural phenomenon

Historically, during the colonial era in Africa, there was a serious suppression of local writing and culture at the expense of the languages of the metropolises – English, French or Portuguese. By the time of independence, a small number of national languages were sufficiently widespread. These include, first of all, Swahili in Tanzania and the Amharic language spoken in Ethiopia [ibid.]. The reason for the preservation of these languages was the significant efforts of the Governments of these countries to preserve their language. At the same time, recent studies have shown that the preservation of the national cultures of these countries is primarily due to the widespread use of national languages in the education system. The policy of preserving national culture and national identity became the key for the countries in this period and in conditions when one or two national languages existed in the country, and led to the fact that the set goals were achieved. In these conditions, it was quite simple to organize teacher training, the creation of special programs and textbooks [Hlalele, 2014].

However, these goals could not be achieved in all cases. In the case of small indigenous peoples, the problem of teaching writing has not been solved for a long time. Despite the fact that UNESCO adopted a document supported by all UN countries on the need to preserve the languages of indigenous peoples, it was only in the XXI century that teaching in the native language became available virtually everywhere in most regions of the world [Lester, 2012]. If in the 50s education in Africa was carried out only in English, French and Portuguese, then by 2004 more than 50 languages were used in the pedagogical process. To this end, specialized programs were created, such as PROPELCA, used in Cameroon, which involved even those languages whose native speakers were less than 2% of the local population. This program was extended to 29 languages of the north-west of Cameroon, the number of native speakers ranged from 80 to 150 thousand [Trudell, 2005]. It should be noted that the purpose of this program was not only the development of languages, but also the preservation of cultural values of indigenous peoples, the preservation of national identity [Mukeredzi, 2013].

The generalization of the experience of implementing training programs in the native language showed not only significant improvements in the process of preserving and transmitting cultural values, but also an improvement in the social climate in the habitat of small indigenous peoples, the expansion of social ties. It was also noted that the identification of children as members of a certain commune or ethnic group, the demonstration of a certain cultural identity made their life safer, and teaching in a language understandable to students made it more understandable. All these positive aspects were noted in the preamble of the normative document developing approaches to preserving the linguistic diversity of Africa – Asmara Declaration on African Languages (2000) [Musau, 2003].

However, there are still a number of uncertainties associated with the inclusion of national languages of small peoples in the educational process. Firstly, the question remains unresolved as to how necessary it is to combine teaching national and state languages, whether the entire educational process should be based solely on teaching these languages or use languages that allow for more opportunities for professional realization, for example, easier admission to higher education institutions, and reduce barriers to intercultural communication. In particular, the negative effect of

excessive use of national languages has been shown in a number of studies on the indigenous peoples of Brazil, where the conditions created for the availability of work and study have led to the fact that indigenous minorities have virtually completely abandoned teaching in their languages, despite the availability of widely available state education programs in their native language [Plastow, 2012]. Therefore, when choosing the form of education in the native language, it is necessary to take into account the need for further socialization of young people, the need to be able to fully use state languages.

National languages in the socio-cultural aspect of the life of small indigenous peoples of Africa

According to a number of researchers, the culture of the indigenous peoples of Africa over the past 200 years has not had enough opportunities for development and survival. After gaining independence, African countries did not have time to create institutional conditions to support national cultures until the moment when globalization began to have a significant impact on them. At present, writing is almost the only tool for preserving culture, in fact its key element. Thus, the use of native speech for the preservation of cultural values has become the source of the emergence of a new socio-cultural space - places of compact residence of the indigenous population [Mukeredzi, 2013].

However, at the same time, research shows that attempts to artificially preserve a culture or language unchanged lead to its extinction, since the peculiarity of the development of culture lies in its constant variability, the inclusion of new elements in it. The colonial period caused the loss of many elements of the cultural diversity of Africa, in fact, the desire to become familiar with the values of their ethnic group was not the goal of the metropolises. In the postcolonial period, the cultures of the peoples inhabiting the countries became an object for study and protection. Thus, the preservation of cultural values became possible only in the presence of their own language [Musau, 2003]. This conclusion is confirmed by the example of many other countries, including Russia, where, according to a significant number of ethnographic studies, in the Russian-speaking countryside, the loss of cultural traditions is more significant compared to the rural areas of peoples living on the same territory, for example, the peoples of the Russian North speaking the languages of the Finno-Ugric group [Kryazhkov, 2012].

However, a simple teaching of the native language using standardized textbooks that are not based on the need to transfer the socio-cultural context of a certain ethnic group, according to a number of researchers, is also ineffective, which was shown by the example of a number of studies conducted when studying the process of mastering national languages with the number of native speakers from 50 to 100 thousand people [Hlalele, 2014]. Only when this component is taken into account, the pedagogical process will avoid conflicts of cross-cultural communication in the "school – family" relationship.

Conclusion

The national language is often the only tool for preserving the cultural values of the indigenous population, while its loss also means the loss of national identity and self-awareness. Despite considerable pressure from the metropolises, national languages have not been lost, since, being a component of culture, they acquire its main quality – a tendency to constantly include new elements

and transformation. Not only is the national language of small indigenous peoples a condition for preserving culture, another thing is also true: culture is an object for language acquisition, since teaching it without taking into account national cultural characteristics is ineffective.

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Культурологический трансферт у малочисленных коренных народов Африки посредством обучения чтению на родном языке

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Аннотация

Цель работы заключается в исследовании взаимного влияния процесса обучения малочисленных коренных народов Африки национальным языкам и процесса передачи их культурных ценностей. До настоящего времени сохраняется ряд неопределенностей, связанных с включением национальных языков малочисленных народов в образовательный процесс. Так, остается нерешенным вопрос о том, насколько необходимо сочетать обучение национальным и государственным языкам, стоит ли весь образовательный процесс строить только на обучении данным языкам или использовать языки, позволяющие обеспечивать больше возможностей профессиональной реализации, например более простое поступление в высшие учебные заведения, и снижать барьеры межкультурной коммуникации. Поэтому при выборе формы обучения на родном языке следует учитывать необходимость дальнейшей социализации молодежи, необходимость иметь возможность полноценно использовать государственные языки. Национальный язык часто является единственным инструментом сохранения культурных ценностей коренного населения, при этом его потеря означает также и потерю национальной идентичности и самосознания. Несмотря на значительное давление со стороны метрополий, национальные языки не были утрачены, так как, являясь компонентом культуры, приобретают ее основное качество – склонность к постоянному включению новых элементов и трансформации. Не только национальный язык малочисленных коренных народов является условием сохранения культуры, верно и другое: культура является объектом для усвоения языка, так как обучение ему без учета национальных культурных особенностей является неэффективным.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Коренные малочисленные народы, языки Африки, постколониальная история Африки, культурные ценности, школьное образование.

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