

## Challenges in The Implimentation of Mother Tongue Education in Nigerian Schools: the Way Forward

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### ABSTRACT

The paper focuses on the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at pre-primary and primary levels of education is very vital for educational development of our children. Researches have shown that the child learns better and quicker his mother tongue is used in instruction than using a foreign language (English). This paper discusses the provision made by national policy on education (NPE) on the relevance and importance of mother tongue in education. It also highlights the benefit of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at both pr-primary and primary levels. Additionally, the difficulties in implementing mother tongue education are addressed, as is the best strategy for doing so in Nigeria, and the conclusion is provided at the end.

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## INTRODUCTION

The mother tongue is used to denote a child's first language (L1) and is the language that a child acquires first in life. Mother tongue-based instruction in a child's first language, usually with a planned gradual transition to a second language (L2) or foreign language at a specified time in primary school (Nyanged, Ambiyó, 2014), is the language that a child acquires first in life. Mother tongue-based instruction in a child's first language usually involves a planned gradual transition to a second language (L2) or foreign language at a specified time in primary school (Nyanged, Ambiyó, 2014). Every level of education depends heavily on the language of instruction since it is the foundation of learning, particularly in the primary grades when a large number of students are exposed to formal education for the first time. Most people agree that when a youngster encounters a language they are already comfortable with at school, their creativity is improved. In contrast, a child's spirit of innovation may be inhibited if he/she is confronted with unfamiliar language at school (Olagoke, 1997 In Simeon, 2014). Since the introduction of western education to Nigeria, the issue of the medium of instruction has caused great concern to numerous governments and educational agencies. The main concern is to make sure that children receive instruction in the most appropriate language at least at the beginning level of education, i.e. pre and primary school levels. The use of the mother tongue in education in Nigeria is as old as the introduction of western education in the country. This is due to the fact that even the colonial masters emphasized the use of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction at the lower level of primary education. Many problems or challenges are faced in the implementation of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in the Nigerian education system.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Provision of National Policy on Education (NPE)**

The National Policy on Education (NPE, 1997) revised in (NPE, 2016) has specified pronouncement on the importance of language to educational system. For pre-primary education, the policy provides, thus:

*"Government will ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or language of the immediate community".*

The policy makes provision for primary level of education on the relevance of language to education. The policy also provides that:

*"Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community and, at a later stage English". NPE, par.15 (4) primary education.*

And in section 3:15 of the same document it is stated that:

*At the primary level, government will see to it that the medium of instruction is initially the mother tongue or the language of immediate community, and at a later, English.*

One can easily deduce that the above statement of the policy for both pre and primary levels recognizes the importance and appropriateness of mother tongue to children. Additionally, English is needed to support the mother tongue later on. However, the policy recommends that for pre-primary education, mother tongue instruction be used from the start of the level until the finish.

### **Mother Tongue**

Scholars have provided several definitions for the term "mother tongue" (MT).

Mills (2000) sees mother tongue as any of the following; the first language a child speaks, the language spoken at home, the language in which the child is most competent, and the language of child's community. Like wise, According to Simeon (2007), there have been some disagreements regarding Mill's definition of mother tongue in the Nigerian context. Mill defines the mother tongue as the language in which a child is most proficient, which implies that some Nigerian children may speak English as their mother tongue. For instance, Biron infants in Plateau State, whose mother tongue would have been Hausa instead of Biron, etc.

According to UNESCO 1963 in Simeon (2007) mother tongue is the "language which a person acquires in the early years and which normally becomes his natural instrument of thought and communication". UNESCO argues that a child's mother tongue may not be the language used by the child's parents or the first language he or she speaks, as special circumstances can cause him to abandon this language more or less completely at an early age. Mother tongue may also mean the language spoken at home by the child, which is called "home language." It also means the indigenous language, among others.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Benefit of Mother Tongue Education on the education of Nigeria child**

Mother Tongue Education is very important for the education of a child in numerous ways. In other words, giving instruction in child's native language is of great significance to educational development for many reasons. Thus:

First of all, studies conducted over an eight-year period (1970-1978) have shown that children learn best in their mother tongue (Odumah, 2007). This is because, in most situations, it is the language of education and socialization, and it is the language he or she is accustomed to using at play and at home. The school does nothing more than refine the acquisition of their native tongues.

Second, concepts are more meaningful to a youngster when learned in their native tongue than when learned in a second or foreign language, according to Folasade (2012). By adjusting and translating these alien notions to his or her manner of experience, the child might learn more effectively.. In addition, in a report released in 1953

**UNESCO** confirmed the relevance of mother tongue teaching. It states:

*"It is self-evident that, psychologically speaking, the best medium to teach a child is his native language; It is a system of meaningful signs that automatically provides expression and understanding in his mind. In social terms, it is a means of identification between members of the community to which he or she belongs. From a*

*pedagogical perspective, a child learns faster in their native language than in an unfamiliar language medium.*

The optimum scenario for all educational progress should be mother tongue instruction. In order to verify this, all developed nations worldwide teach their children in their mother tongue as a medium of teaching and communication. Japan, USA, Norway, Russia, for example. Even some of the so called developing use the first language of their children in their education, e.g. China, India, South Korea, and Malaysia. Additionally, Folasade (2012) stated that during a bilingual child's formative years, their mother tongue is the most beneficial language. Additionally, it is the way in which his or her aptitudes and attitudes are best developed. For the child's physical, mental, and intellectual growth to be as optimal as possible throughout his first twelve years of life, it is recommended that he learn his mother tongue.

Ultimately, a number of Nigerian academics have argued in favor of delivering primary education entirely in the native tongue (Chumbow, 1990; Cummins, 2005). Mother tongue education advocates in Nigeria point to the country's well-known six-year Life Primary Education Initiative as evidence that the program is effective there. The project's goal was to demonstrate that teaching primary students in their mother tongue will probably result in greater outcomes than the current practice of teaching upper primary students in English instead of their mother tongue. The project's outcome showed that students who were taught in their mother tongue outperformed those who were taught in English (Simeon, 2007).

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

### **Challenges in the Implementation of Mother Tongue Education**

In relation to the above discussion on the importance of teaching a child in his or her mother tongue, the results indicate that students learned more effectively in their mother tongue than when English was the medium of instruction and the emphasis placed on this by the national education policy in Nigeria Use of the mother tongue in preschool and lower primary education. However, the implementation of mother tongue teaching faces many challenges as it is not implemented properly. Therefore:

- The attitude of Nigerians is usually one of scorn for what is indigenous and a warm embrace for what is foreign. This is one of the reasons why most parents of children at the nursery or pre-primary level, particularly the private ones, prefer the use of English as a medium of instruction for their children instead of their mother tongue. The supervisors of instruction at primary and secondary schools do not bother themselves with what is going on in the private schools; they limit their visits to only public schools. Further, most parents are of the belief that English as a foreign and international language is a vehicle for gaining employment and a ladder for social status; they therefore see the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, which is to the disadvantage of their children in the sense that it is not recognized as a language internationally.
- Another challenge is the lack of qualified professional teachers to teach indigenous languages. Most teachers are not professionally grounded in the

mother tongue education that they are expected to teach. The teachers may also have come from different language environment from that of their class children. And the remuneration is very low and therefore these teacher slack the motivation and zealot put in their best (Akindele, 2005).

- -Funding is another challenge that hinders the implementation of mother tongue teaching. The provision of necessary materials, facilities and equipment is inadequate. There are not enough textbooks, reading books and other literacy materials in schools to properly conduct mother tongue teaching. It is generally observed that many primary schools do not have libraries and, if they do exist, they are poorly equipped. Furthermore, book production in indigenous languages is quantitatively much lower than in English. Bangbose (1992) has emphasized that some problems faced by mother tongue teaching in primary education are the diversity of languages, the shortage of teachers, the multilingualism or multilingualism of textbooks, spelling and heterogeneity pressure in the classroom, especially in urban areas , are. Furthermore, there is a lack of awareness of language policy among senior ministry officials, supervisors, education inspectors, school principals, principals, teachers and practicing teachers as outlined in the National Education Policy.
- Dominance of English languages the official language in Nigeria is another challenge that makes the Nigerians indigenous languages to be inferior. Oyetade (1992) has put that "English has become the Nigerians official languages as well as dominant language of education. In written form, it is used as an administrative language from the federal to local levels. It is also used as a language of commerce and politics." Likewise, Igboanusi and Peter (2005:11) emphasized that in Nigeria, "the dominance of English is overwhelming in virtually all areas; Government and administration, education, mass media, parliament, the judiciary (except Sharia courts), science and technology, and creativity in literacy. It is also the language of interethnic communication. Hence, this general domination of English to almost all Nigerian activities makes the indigenous languages ro lack prominence to the perception of elites, and the government stakeholders as result they shun the proper implementation of mother tongue education in the country.

### **The Way Forward**

For mother tongue education to have a successful implementation in Nigerian education system, the following need to observe:

- Adequate fund need to be provided by the government and other agencies for primary level of education for the purchase of adequate facilities and equipment such as textbooks, and possibly well equipped library for indigenous language materials for effective implementation of mother tongue education.
- In order to improve their qualifications, the government should hire qualified native language instructors for primary schools and provide them with further training through seminars and workshops. To encourage

teachers to have the desire and zest to perform their jobs well, this should be coupled with generous compensation..

- Effort should be made by the government to develop positive attitude towards indigenous language among Nigerians particularly the elites. In other words. People in Nigeria should be made to be aware of the importance of mother tongue to the education of their children at primary school levels.
- A purposeful policy should be implemented to ensure that Nigerian languages are prepared for primary education through effective planning, standardization, material development, and teacher preparation.
- Each local educational authority should assign responsibility to its supervisory unit to ensure adequate monitoring of the implementation of mother tongue education. And parents who prefer to educate their preschool and primary children in English should be aware that the Nigerian Constitution or any political declaration is binding on all citizens. Therefore, education stakeholders need to ensure that the implementation of mother tongue education is fully mainstreamed at both primary and pre-school levels.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Using the mother tongue of the child (L1) as a medium of instruction in education at the formative stage of a child's life is very important to child education. The directive must be properly implemented to achieve an appropriate result. Teachers need to be trained, and parents and community members should be encouraged to change their attitudes towards accepting indigenous languages to be used in teaching their wards. Let them be aware that teaching their wards using the indigenous language is better than using the English language as a medium of instruction for the effective development of education and the learning efficiency of their children, which they prefer.

## **Suggestions**

The following will form some food for thought:

- Encourage the active participation and involvement of various bodies (e.g., the community and other partners).
- Legitimize the languages within the school, making them compulsory for all. There is no certificate without them.
- Respect local languages by giving them pride of place in the scheme of things and enriching them.
- For Nigerian languages to serve as teaching tools, they must go beyond simply describing the legend of the forest and be able to handle things such as the scientific assessment of plants and the greenhouse effect (UNESCO, 2003).
- Children should be made to share languages in the class. (E.g., a child is made to bring one word from their home language into the class, and the entire class discusses that word.).

- A terminological database needs to be created to check all the words and expressions it contains. Then invent new words to describe the legal, commercial, diplomatic and technical aspects of modern life.
- Children should be encouraged to write in their mother tongue in addition to the majority school language. They can be made to write and publish student-authored bilingual books, pamphlets, magazines, etc.
- The government should be ready and willing to mount a campaign against and enforce the use of the language policy on Nigerians.
- The government should also provide adequate funds for the policy to succeed.

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