

Steps to Re-Address Mother Tongue as a Medium of Instruction At Lower Level of Education in Nigeria

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The Mother Tongue(MT) is the language that the child came into contact with in life, it is through the Mother Tongue that the child establishes relationship with the immediate environment, the MT serves as a channel through which societal norms values and aspirations are transmitted to the younger ones. Little wonder, the National Language Policy (NLP) emphasises the importance of using Mother Tongue as medium of instruction at lower level of education, that is at pre-primary and primary school level, the policy also makes the study of indigenous languages a subject of study at higher level of both primary and secondary schools. It is in recognition of the importance of Mother Tongue in Nigeria that the paper discusses steps to follow in re-addressing Mother Tongue as medium of instruction at lower level of education in Nigeria. In order to achieve this, there should be a clear guideline on Nigerian Language Policy in which and at what level the teaching of Mother Tongue shall be used and at what level it will end. This will enhance and improve the level to which indigenous languages are used as medium of instruction at primary and secondary schools in Nigeria.

Introduction

The Mother Tongue of a child is closely associated with the child's growth and development. As the child matures, his language develops and experiences are expressed. According to Awoniyi (1982), language is closely related to culture. Mother Tongue is part of culture, it conveys and transmits culture and in turn is subject to cultural attitudes and beliefs. This is why some language enthusiasts believe that no greater injustice can be committed against a people than to deprive them of their language since the fundamental assumption in educational theory and practice is the adjustment of the child to life and culture of his society. Nigeria as a country recognises the role of education in national and human development, the Federal Government of Nigerian FGN (2013) taking into cognisance of rapid socio economic and political reforms in the country; the nation re-structured its education system into.

Early child care development	-	0-4 years
Basic Education	-	5-15 years
Post Basic Education	-	3 years
Tertiary Education	-	4 years

In considering the importance of Mother Tongue in the early education of a child, the policy states that: the medium of instruction in primary school shall be the language of immediate environment (Mother Tongue) for the first three years in monolingual communities. During this period, English shall be taught as subject "(F.M.E 2013 :24). it is with this policy

statement therefore the use of Mother Tongue as medium of instruction at the lower level of education is mandatory.

The Nigerian Language Policy (NLP)

The Nigerian Language Policy is a principled statement of the Federal Government of Nigeria, which has statutory flavour, guiding the reaching, learning and official use of different languages in the country.

It is necessary to distinguish two concepts, which we will be using constantly here, namely, Nigerian languages and languages in Nigeria. Nigerian languages, are languages which are indigenous to Nigeria by virtue of the fact that they are spoken by people who hail from Nigeria and are legally Nigerians. Languages in

Nigeria on the contrary are languages which are spoken within the shores of 'Nigeria irrespective of whether the speakers are legally Nigerians or not.

The Nigerian Language Policy affects all the languages in Nigeria in one way or the other. The NLP targets Nigerian languages. However, because of the exigencies of the moment, namely the multilingual nature of Nigeria some languages in Nigeria such as English, French and Arabic, which are not Nigerian Languages, given official recognition until such a time one or some of the Nigerian languages mature by gaining wide acceptance to play the aforesaid official role. In other words, as long as the NLP does not produce an official language or languages, the languages in Nigeria which have been given official recognition will continue to play such official roles assigned to them.

The aforesaid non-Nigerian languages which have been given statutory recognition are English, French and Arabic. It is observed however that there are many languages in Nigeria which are non-Nigerian and which are not recognised by the Nigerian State. These languages include all the languages spoken by the people in Nigeria who are either illegal alien: legal but non-naturalised persons, naturalised persons whose Mother Tongues are not officially recognised etc, In this class fall such languages such as Mandarin (Chinese), Japanese, Fante, Zulu, Ewe, Swahili and all other languages whose speakers inhabit Nigeria. These languages except the first three though linguistically important are not legally recognised in the NLP and consequently shall not engage our attention here. We shall concentrate our discussion on Nigerian languages and English, French and Arabic (Shallah, 2015).

The Importance of Language as Medium of Instruction

According to Shallah (2015), without language, no system of education can be operated. This is because language is the instrument that is used as a medium of instruction in educational delivering to the learners, it has been accepted that if language is maintained, proficiency will be quick and more effective, it also develops easily and applies to L2 i.e. reading skills such as the ability to get meaning leading to the acquisition of the ability to derive which word or concept to look up in the dictionary. The importance of Mother Tongue as a medium of instruction includes the following as opined by Shallah (2015):

- It helps in emotional and mental growth of the child;

- It impacts on the formation of the individual by shaping thoughts and emotional psychological and personality;
- It helps as a medium in emotional and mental growth of a child;
- Psychological and personality development depends on what is conveyed through Mother Tongue;
- Child's understanding of his environment and beyond, learning of concepts and skills in addition to his perception of his existence and formation of his world view starts with the language he has first heard and taught;
- With Mother Tongue, the child expresses his first feeling, his happiness, fear and his first word;
- With first language (Mother Tongue) the child frames his thinking, emotions and spiritual world;
- With it, the child establishes strong bond between his mother/teacher and himself by virtue of love, compassion, body language, verbal language and security;
- Talking and talked to in Mother Tongue connect mind, heart and the brain;
- Mother Tongue is a conduit through which personality characteristics, modesty, shyness skills and creativity are revealed because when sounds go to the ears, meaning goes to the heart which gives trust and confidence in the person;
- It is with the Mother Tongue that the child gets his cultural identity, expresses his cultural materials and these are what transmit from one generation to another. If not taught, then the identity is lost;
- Mother Tongue provides basis for learning. A child who comes to school with a strong foundation in his Mother Tongue can develop a stronger linguistic ability in the language use in the school;
- Ability to converse in a language is developed through Mother Tongue, where the child does not know his Mother Tongue -vocabulary and expression - he will prefer to use the taught language other than Mother Tongue, hence the beginning of cultural disconnect;
- Mother Tongue promotes love, motivation and courage to learning.

Hausa language as medium of instruction at lower level of Education in Nigeria

Language is an aspect of life which accomplishes life events. Its roles in education cannot be overemphasised. The choice of language hinges on its importance in the society. It serves as a nucleus for the development of a useful language policy. The Federal Government in an attempt to have a document in education that will benefit all citizens in terms of its relevance to the needs of the individuals came up with the National Policy on Education (NPE) first published in 1977 and revised in 1981, 1998 and 2004 (Federal Republic of Nigeria).

The language policy on education is formulated to develop effective citizenry in individuals and to provide equal opportunities for all Nigerians at all educational levels. In appreciating the importance of Mother Tongue, the policy (1998) states: In addition to the appreciating the importance of language in the educational process and as a means of preserving the people's culture..., each child should be encouraged to learn one of the three major Nigerian languages other than their own Mother Tongue.

Governments' regard for the indigenous languages and the desire to integrate the school children into the larger community both culturally and socially, precipitated the inclusion of each of the three major Nigerian languages in the school curriculum. In this regard, each of the three major languages is supposed to be used as a medium of instruction at the pre-primary and at the initial three years of primary education. Thereafter, it is considered as a core subject from primary 4-6, as well as senior secondary, but as a course of study in higher institution.

On the strength of the above policy statement, Hausa language is supposed to be the medium of instruction at the nursery and during the first three years of the primary school in Hausa land. At the upper stage of primary school (4-6) Hausa language is supposed to be one of the compulsory second Nigerian languages for non-native speakers of Hausa just as any one of the two, other indigenous languages is a compulsory second Nigerian language for native speakers of Hausa at the junior and senior secondary School levels.

According to Hassan (1999), the first language, which may be the Mother Tongue (MT) of the child, is that initial language spoken by the child at home. He develops side by side with this language; he needs not to stress himself before learning it and he is generously exposed to the language as he listens to the people around him speaking the language for a long period of time. Awoniyi (1982), opines that the significance of Mother Tongue in the child's life and growth can be categorized into the following:

- 1; The Mother Tongue provides the conceptual substance on which the child builds new thoughts;
- 2 . It is the language through which the child, early in life, learns to organise his environment and relates' himself to it. This fundamental experience outlives any other.
3. The Mother Tongue is closely interwoven with the culture of the speakers.
4. The Mother Tongue is closely related to the personality of the child.

Language Policy and Implementation

By recognizing all Nigerian languages, the NLP advocates multilingualism. This policy is in line with major language policies in the world today, international organizations have made laws to the effect that the peoples languages form part of their fundamental human rights and' they should be allowed to practice them without let or hindrance. Some of the relevant laws are:

- Universal Declaration of Human Rights;
- The Declaration of the Rights of Persons, National, Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992);
- The Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights; • The Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity.

The above laws provide that every people's language must be preserved and each language must not be legislated out of existence. This is especially in view of the fact that there is hardly any monolingual society in the world today. Thus, the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights stipulates as follows:

... to correct linguistic imbalances and ensure the respect and full development of all languages and establishing the principle for a just and equitable linguistic peace throughout the world as a key factor in the maintenance of harmonious social relations.”

All languages, like all persons, would not only be seen to be equal in all respects, they would also be seen to be treated equally in all respects, and politics. The above contention is in line with Carnardons (1997) who recommends egalitarian multilingualism, egalitarian multilingualism provides for balanced relationships among languages, which are based on equality and reciprocity of the linguistic communities and of the speakers so as to give due recognition to the linguistic rights of the speakers of all languages. However, it ranges all languages against one another in striving to survive. A people that strive and succeed in developing its language will join the community of official languages speakers. Shallah in his many publications has criticised the Federal Government for according recognition to any of them at all and giving them official or statutory recognition. He advocates the official recognition of all of them or none at all, It is worthy of note that the NLP recognizes all Nigerian languages but places priority on those that have largely developed, command a large population of speakers and have the timbre and calibre of the society that play the piper in the national life.

Steps in Re-Addressing Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction in Nigerian Schools

The Nigerian language policy has stipulated clearly that, Mother Tongue or language of immediate community shall be used to teach children in the four years 'of basic education classes and the first three years of basic education. But there has not been a clear direction or guidelines on how this can be implemented. According to Oguamaka (2011), this has led to serious problems in the schools. Unless the following issues are considered and implemented by the government the issue of Mother Tongue as medium of instruction will become a mirage. The educational basis of the country is weak by neglecting bilingualism to the background. The nation's peace stability and economic features are threatened. A situation where citizens do not understand each other except in one imposed language and where one party does not know the language, problem of suspicion, mistrust and of course hatred creeps in, and stability can definitely be absent.

In addressing this problem the nation needs a sound basic education for her citizens. Knowledge, wisdom, skills, creativity and character can only be transmitted and featured through language that is understandable to the child. It is to this effect that the paper suggests the strategic step to be taken according to Shallah (2015).

1. Continue building of fluency in oral language of LI in primary (1) reading and writing skills should be introduced here. Towards the end of primary one, sound language (L2) as subject should be introduced, L1 is still the medium of instruction.
2. Continue oral and written work in L1 at primary two. Reading and writing in L2 can be introduced here. Spelling work in L3 with reading and writing L3 can commence here too (still), L1 as medium of instruction.
3. Continue oral and written work in L2 spelling, reading and writing in L3 with L1 as medium of instruction.
4. At primary four, medium of instruction can still be L1 and later towards the end of primary 5, it can be switched to L2. Work on skills in L3 can proceed to primary 5-6 as subject.

Recommendations

Considering the role Mother Tongue plays in achieving objectives of education particularly at the early level of education in Nigeria the paper came up with the following recommendations: □ There should be a clear guideline for the implementation of Mother Tongue policy.

- There should be adequate supply of curriculum materials for Mother Tongue instruction.
- Teachers should be adequately trained for Mother Tongue instruction.
- English language not Mother Tongue should not be used as medium of instruction in pre-primary 1-3
- Mother Tongue should be a subject of study at primary 4-6.
- There should be a clear distinction between elaboration on home and school communication.

Finally textbooks and other teaching learning materials for the teaching of Mother Tongue at the lower level of education should be made available; this will enhance learning and make teaching easier.

Conclusion

It is obvious that Mother Tongue is very significant, because what a child says and how he says it have such far-reaching effects, this area of language development should not be left to chance. We must encourage the child to use both at home and in the school in a sociable way.

Language is meaningful when it is functional. We must not discourage the child in his efforts. Derogatory statements may adversely affect the child.

Adult must give meaningful direction to the child, children imitates all types of habits, so adults must be good models in every conversation with a child if you set good rules the child will know what is unacceptable. We must encourage the child to use language (Mother Tongue) to promote reasoning and understanding. The purpose of communication is to foster a healthy human relationship.

The Nigerian National Language Policy should be published in indigenous language and should be given proper attention they deserved in order to achieve the objectives stated by the policy through the use of Mother Tongue.

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