

TONGUE IN EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper critically investigated the linguistic aspect of Nigerian education policy. It examined the relevance of language of instruction in classroom learning. The philosophical nature of the study necessitated the analytic and speculative modes of research. The concept of mother tongue was analytically examined in order to give a clear-cut definition and facilitate a quick understanding; while the prescriptive mode was used to assess the place of indigenous languages in Nigerian curricula. The paper x-rayed arguments for and against the use of mother tongue in Nigerian schools. Among several works considered, the experimental work of Fafunwa was particularly showcased. The famous Ife Six Year Primary Project (SYPP), which was conducted between 1970 -1979, had established beyond any reasonable doubt that the Nigerian child will benefit immensely if schooled with mother tongue. Despite the success, it was however discovered that some challenges are constantly militating against the use of mother tongue in Nigerian schools. Such challenges range from one-nation-one-language myth; perception of English language as a global language; absence of orthography of some Nigerian languages; lack of trained teachers in the use of indigenous languages; lack of political will; among others. These challenges were addressed in this paper. The researchers, laconically, submitted that for education in Nigeria to function as it should, as elsewhere, her language policy should be revisited; and to actualize this, the researchers recommend that teacher education in Nigeria be revitalised, while adequate training is given to teachers, so as to enable them to comfortably and conveniently teach their subjects in indigenous languages. It was suggested that for cognitive, cultural purposes and national interest, use of mother tongue is a necessity as education is to the society what fuel is to a vehicle, and language is to education what blood is to humans.

Key words: Mother tongue, Nigerian education, relevance and use.

Introduction

Communication has been pivotal to man - his existence, co-existence and relationship with other men. Man must express his thoughts, share his opinions, exchange ideas, dish out instructions and of course extend to his offspring the accumulated body of knowledge and established values of the society. While communication is uniform to mankind, language is not. This explains the position of Dopamu (in Alamu, 2010) that "God hates monotony, but loves variety". The cultural diversity of the world explains the linguistic differences and distinctions among world societies. Language is in fact the socio-cultural characteristic and identity of individual societies. This distinctiveness indicates that an individual speaks or communicates first in a language he/she is first exposed to, thus, his mother tongue. Mother tongue is the language human beings acquire immediately after birth. Such language helps the child in his/her mental, moral and emotional development (Noormohamadi, 2008). Pocock in Tulasiewicz and Adams (2005) defined mother tongue as the language spoken in a region, which enables the process of enculturation, the initiation of an individual into a particular system of linguistic perception of the world and participation in the centuries old history of linguistic production. In every African state, mother tongue indicates the language of one's ethnic group.

In Africa, like every other continent, education predates schooling. The origin of school in Africa is clear; the Afro-European colonial relationship in the early 18th century necessitated the need to create a literate labour force for the colonial government and the evangelical mission led to the establishment of schools in the colonies. All missions designed their own curriculum to suit their purpose, but they all had one thing in common: English Language as the language of instruction, as stated in the 1882 and 1887 ordinances of Education. The fault does not rest with the missionaries but with the colonial government, as Fasokun (2000) recorded that with the beginning of government participation in education, indigenous languages began to suffer some setbacks. He also stated that there was a clause in the Education Ordinance of 1882 (Clause 10, section 5) which stipulated that grants would only be paid for the teaching and learning of the English language, and not for the teaching and learning of vernaculars. This practice continued in most African countries even after independence. To Adegbija (1994) this was in total disregard of the Phelps-Stokes commission's report of 1925 which had observed that all colonizing nations in Africa had forced their languages upon the people and discouraged the use of vernaculars as had often been done by dominant groups in Europe.

Generally, this kind of instruction does not prepare the African child to face the world of economic competition. Instead of receiving quality education, students in such classrooms do not get quality education (Qorro, 2006). That is to say, learners who are been taught with foreign language do not acquire proficiency in their mother tongue and even the foreign language. Fafunwa (1977) in Ogbonna (2007) acquiesced with this when he stated that since the English child still has problems in understanding his or her language, the Nigerian child suffers double jeopardy because he or she has to learn the second language first, before using it as a tool for learning, and this hampers his or her mental and social development. That is, separating home language and school language is more or less an epistemological torture for the African child. After all, you can banish the mother tongue from the classroom, but you cannot banish it from the pupils' heads (Butzkamm in Khan, 2014). This is the dilemma of an African child who is first exposed to his mother tongue at the early stage of his education, whose in-built learning mechanism is internalizing and structuring the grammar and technique of his mother tongue, but he is all of a sudden introduced to a foreign language as he begins schooling. This will have ripple effects on his mental and social development. Fafunwa, Macaulay and Sokoya (1986) observed that the first twelve years are the most formative period of a child's life, for it is during this period that attitudes and aptitudes are developed. It is also during this period that the child requires diligent care for his physical needs and trained guidance of his mental, emotional and social development. Fafunwa et al (1986) further stressed by asking if the Nigerian child is not being unnecessarily maimed emotionally and intellectually.

Obanya (2011) observed that, in all other parts of the world, the educated is usually the cultured, but in Africa, the educated is the de-cultured. In other words, the school is supposed to be a miniature African society, but in an African society, the school is a smaller version of a foreign society. Khan (2014) argued that language is very closely related to the mind because one thinks and conceptualizes, by means of language and without language normally no one can think.

Fafunwa et. al (1986) asserted that if the Nigerian child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, initiative, industry, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, manual dexterity, mechanical comprehension and the coordination of hand and eye, he/she should acquire these skills and attitudes through his mother tongue. Also, Aladejana and Odejobi in Oribabo and Adesina (2013) subscribed to the fact that a child will learn faster and better if he is taught in his mother tongue at the early stage of his education. According to Canadian Education Policy (2005) quoted in Telli (2014), the use of first language in classrooms enhances learners' development of language proficiency, supports

their sense of identity and self-confidence and promotes positive attitudes towards language learning among students. Hence, the mastery of one's own language and its usage as a language of instruction facilitates the quick absorption, digest and understanding of content and synthesis. This is the goal of any educational process, after the entire process, the learners are evaluated and their evaluation is subjected to measurement.

The Concept of Mother Tongue

The Microsoft Encarta dictionary (2009) described mother tongue as a language from which other languages have developed. From this definition, British English is the mother tongue of American English, as indicated in the statement of Thomas Jefferson when he stated that "the new circumstances call for new words. An American dialect will therefore be formed; and should the language of England continue stationary, we shall probably enlarge our employment of it, until its new character may separate it in name as well in power, from the mother tongue (Jefferson in Microsoft Encarta, 2009). Khan (2014) recorded that André Martinet, the French linguist, once said that mother tongue is "the language through which one comes to know the world". That is, the language through which the social reality of people is revealed to the child. Ross (2004) however adopted a holistic approach by defining the concept in several ways. To her, mother tongue means: the language learnt from the family; the language used at home; the first language a child speaks; the language used in the community; the language most competent in; and the 'preferred' language. It is pertinent to examine the definitions in the Nigerian context. The first four definitions for example would suggest that the mother tongue is the linguistic instrument utilised in the socialization process of the child, the last two suggest that the language a child has learnt and have been assumed to have acquired proficiency in, then automatically becomes his/her most favoured linguistic means of communication. That is, the mother tongue of a child of Ibibio, Igbo or any other Nigerian tribe, who as a result of English proficient background have acquired an excellent command of the language and prefers to communicate with it, is English language. Ross' last two definitions supports the verdict of UNESCO (1963) that mother tongue is the language which a person acquires in early years and which normally becomes his natural instrument of thought and communication. These later definitions are devoid of the concept of mother tongue as a vehicle for ethnical and cultural values to which education is a machinery of transmission.

For the purpose of this study, the concept of mother tongue is understood as **the language spoken within a locale, which is used for the linguistic and verbal interaction of day to day activities such as bargaining, negotiating, etc, and most importantly, the socialization process of the child born into that particular community.** Put differently, mother tongue is the language of a people which predates them and is used to represent, project and amplify their own reality; which is the totality of the creativity, unique practices, cultural deposits and the progress recorded over time. Thus, mother tongue is not just a language one has acquired proficiency, but a language that serves as one's linguistic identity and to which an individual has an ethnical, cultural and sentimental attachment. It refers to one's native language or a language that one is regarded as a native speaker; a language which one has acquired early in life without any formal training.

Use of Mother Tongue in Nigerian Schools: Arguments for and against

There have been claims and counter claims on the issue of mother tongue in Nigerian schools. Those who view mother tongue as the only salvific solution and genuine effort to educate the African child and those who consider it as balderdash. Dutcher (2003) for example, contended that children who begin their education with mother tongue as the language of instruction perform better than those who begin their schooling in another language other than the indigenous one. Olowoyo in Abidogun et. al. (2014), on the other hand, argued that the indigenous languages are not developed to welcome new concepts,

ideas, formulae, theory and scientific terms that have their origin in the western world. Kalu (1990) in support of Olowoyo questioned the practicality and cost effectiveness of producing materials and teachers in all the indigenous languages in Nigeria.

The technological advancement and the economic prowess of countries using their indigenous language as the language of instruction is enough justification. African languages like any other language can serve any official purpose, especially that of formal education. For example, Léopold Senghor once illustrated this by translating Einstein's Theory of Relativity into Wolof; a lingua franca of Senegal (Benson, 2004). One is also compelled to share the testimony of Mahinda Ranaweera, who was a principal officer in the Ministry of Education, Sri Lanka. The testimony goes thus;

The transition from English to the national languages as the medium of instruction in science helped to destroy the great barrier that existed between the privileged English educated classes; between the science educated elite and the non-science educated masses; between science itself and the people (Ranaweera in Brock-Utne, 2013: 85).

As a matter of fact, Christian hymns and the Bible; which contains what was alien to Africans as at the time of the conquest and partition of Africa, have been translated to over one thousand African languages despite their "undevelopment". For example, Samuel Ajayi Crowther translated the Bible to Yoruba language in 1843; a time the Yoruba language and the Yoruba people were considered primitives, as a result of perceived racial superiority. Thereafter, writers like Fagunwa, Odunjo, Durojaye followed suit with literary creativities. The same can be said of Chichewa (Malawi) language translated into the bible by William Percival Johnson in 1912; Igbo language translated by Thomas John Dennis in 1913 and it contributed immensely to the successful diffusion of the Christian reality among Africans. Thus, one will ask if African languages can be used to diffuse the gospel of Christ and even the name "Jesus Christ" changed into African languages. Then, why should textbooks, teaching materials, formulae, concepts, ideas from western world be different?. Why should the validity of African languages in ensuring our Africans' betterment be put in doubt?. It is difficult to understand where this belief comes from: that science is better learnt in English than in other languages and that English is the language of science and technology as reflected in Wedikkarage in Brock-Utne (2013). Why on earth would one believe that there is monopoly to the linguistic representation of universals facts, concepts and ideas? As a matter of fact, there is no concept that cannot be expressed in any language provided the need to do so arises (Bamgbose, 2011). Kalu (1990) raised a reasonable point, but one should remind him that there is always a higher price to pay (which is being paid now) when things come cheap, as noted by Bamgbose (2011) then the real cost is a comparison between denying a citizen the right to be heard in his or her language as opposed to the so-called economy of operating in a language in which one is not competent. Apparently, to think that acquisition of knowledge through indigenous language would be too expensive would only amount to being pound foolish, penny wise (Ogunwale, 2013). Thus, nothing should be considered expensive; so far it will yield positively. What comes to mind is the famous Yoruba saying that "Nkan ti a ba fe, ko kin won" that is, what we truly want is never expensive.

Brock-Utne is known for her unequivocal standpoint on mother tongue education in Africa. In her publication in 2009 titled "Multilingualism – an African Advantage", she reinstated that without mother-tongue education at all levels of education, there is no future for African development (Prah and Brock-Utne in Brock-Utne, 2013). This is because "the prosperity and economic prowess of modern Asia is, in no small measure, attributable to the use of languages confidently understood, spoken and written by

the overwhelming masses of the people” (Brock-Utne, 2013). This view is also supported by Mohochi (2003) who posited that for Africa to maintain its identity and attain meaningful development, African nations must use their languages to empower their people who will then be able to contribute to their full potentials.

In sharp contrast, Gupta (1997) is of the view that focus should be on to the development of the child instead of the language of instruction. Also, he stated that the empowerment of individuals should have primacy over the development of an individual’s mother tongue, and even over the preservation of a language. In the same vein, Phillipson (1992) posited that mother tongue as medium of instruction does not in itself provide a guarantee of enlightened education.

In reaction, Brock-Utne discarded the notion that the use of mother tongue in education is the absolute determinant for development; according to the researcher, it is only sacrosanct to the development of any society. She clarified that there are other factors which contribute to development, but development cannot occur in the post-colonial circumstances of Africa and Asia without using the languages of the masses as languages of instruction and learning in schools (Brock-Utne, 2013). This opinion finds support in Alexander (2000) who pontificated thus;

The fact that the languages of scientific and technological innovation are foreign to the common people of Africa necessarily restricts the layer of creative people from whom recruits to the modern sector can be drawn. One of the unintended consequences of this situation is that the economy is necessarily orientated towards the European, and other Northern metro poles from which the “experts” always come (Alexander, 2000: 20).

The experience of Pattnayak is an enough basis to react to Gupta. He says;

When I was browsing in the small library of a non-governmental organisation, I found 45 meanings of ‘development’: child development and global development, urban development and rural development, economic development and cultural development. These terms do not mean one and the same thing. Language through development and development through language mean different things to different people (Pattnayak, 2017: 13).

That is, development could mean different things to different people. However, no matter how narrowly or widely one defines “development”, there is no way in which issues relating to political systems and democracy, juridical and educational systems, the human rights situation, economy and social mobility, the role of electronic and print media in society, issues of cultural autonomy and the status of minority groups, etc, can be seriously analysed and discussed without reference to “language” as an important factor (Wolff, 2006). Thus, development in its true nature is no more than the continuous improvement of all aspects and elements, including the linguistic aspect that make up the society through the child via teaching. The relationship between language (an essential aspect of the society) and education; which determines the shape of the society, as its healthiness is the society’s healthiness is the development of the child through language and language through the child and the most suitable language for this purpose is the language of the immediate environment. Mother tongue education is not only for the purpose of language preservation as perceived by Gupta, instead it is for the purpose of putting the African child in a position that will ensure his/her all-round development like his/her western and orient counterpart.

Reacting to Phillipson's position, one should remind him that mother tongue is "the language one thinks, dreams and counts in" (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1981). Then, what else will guarantee enlightenment, if not the use of the language with which the child thinks, dreams and counts in to equip his/her mind to become a functional and productive member of the society, so that he/she can preserve, maintain and improve reality. As a matter of fact, if not for mother tongue in education, which contains "the ingredients for understanding, interpreting, and harnessing the resources of an environment and mastering it is fundamental for effective harnessing of those resources" (Anulunkor, 2013), how else do we explain the economic and technological hegemony of first world countries? Or if Phillipson's position is that the concern of educationists should be content of instruction and not the medium, then one will ask how appropriate will it be to teach the Chinese child Confucianism with English language? After all, China is a former British colony.

Having amassed a lot of experience in the African linguistic terrain, Bamgbose (2011) observed that modernization was a strong factor in diminishing the status and roles of African languages; the general belief was that modernization was best achieved in an imported official language. To the adherents of this erroneous belief, one should note that, there is no basis to justify the position, either empirically or philosophically. It becomes expedient to enlighten, that it is a blunder to equate modernization with westernization. Kishimoto in Naofusa (1999) used his native Japan to give a clear cut difference between the two concepts. According to him, westernization would mean that a certain indigenous cultural element of the traditional east is replaced by the penetrating western element, and the functional role of the former is taken over by the latter. Modernization, on the other hand, basically means to remould a cultural system into a new mode. Reflecting on this, modernization would mean an open-ended process of making progress and continuous refining of the nation's heritage and social reality, including language, from generation to generation. In the normal sense, the refinement most often come from within. Therefore, the reliance on a foreign language for "modernization" can be likened to a cargo-cult mentality, which pathetically is superfluous, unneeded and unnecessary optimism. Moreover, "what is often ignored in this argument is that only a small part of the populace can be involved in a development strategy based on the use of an imported official language. Besides, it is a fundamental misunderstanding of the purpose of development to equate it narrowly with physical and economic development" (Bamgbose, 2011).

Also, the 1953 endorsement of mother tongue by UNESCO stated that;

It is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue. Psychologically, it is the system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. Sociologically, it is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium (UNESCO in Fasold, 1984:293).

Laconically, therefore, the present researchers aligns with the likes of Fafunwa and Bamgbose, which is on the basis that separating the home and the school linguistically is like an embolus in the child's internal universe. Put differently, it is inimical to the teaching-learning process, as the child's ability to internalize the content of instruction is affected and this has been validated by several empirical studies, such as the Ife six year project, the Rivers' readers project, the Iloilo experiment in Senegal, etc. Although, the use of mother-tongue instruction in and by itself will not guarantee success, without real commitment to the use of mother tongue in education and widespread effective strategies (Djite, 2008), but the genuine effort and commitment to mother tongue in education would be beneficiary to the child and by extension, the society. At this juncture it is expedient to x-ray some

practical/experimental research works which have been conducted by experts on the relevance and use of mother tongue in education. Names such as Babatunde Fafunwa, Ayo Bamgbose, Debi Prasanna Pattanayak, Martha Qorro, *inter alia*. For page constraints, the researchers will present the position of the first scholar:

Fafunwa & Six Year Primary Project

Prof Babs Fafunwa posited that the Nigerian child will benefit immensely if schooled with the indigenous language and he went as far as using empirical experiment to affirm his stand. The famous Ife Six Year Primary Project (SYPP) which was conducted between 1970 -1979 was the brain child of Fafunwa. The basic assumption of the project was that it would be beneficiary for the child culturally, linguistically and cognitively if schooled with his indigenous language. The successful outcome of the experimental and the control groups in the project validated the position of Fafunwa on the relationship between mother tongue and academic performance. Fafunwa diagnosed Nigeria's education system and discovered one of its major ailments, to which he proposed a cure. Fafunwa (1990) stated that one of the most important factors that militate against the dissemination of knowledge and skills and therefore of rapid social and economic well-being of the majority of people in developing countries is the imposed medium of communication. Ayeni and Adeleye (2015) gave an appraisal by stating that Fafunwa believed that the colonial pattern of teaching has robbed the child of inventiveness, originality and creativity since he is forced to think in English instead of in Yoruba, Hausa, Igbo or any other Nigerian Language. This means that the linguistic medium through which knowledge is imparted in the third world countries, especially in Nigeria, is faulty. This has adverse effects on the learners, as their cognitive abilities would be measured based on determined perimeters and the outcome will be used for the placement of the child. Thus, it can be best described as a case of standardized tests without standardized language. Another important aspect of Fafunwa's standpoint is that learning becomes a natural activity to the child if it is through the indigenous language. In his own words, "the child learns better in his mother tongue and his mother tongue is as natural to him as his mother's milk" (Fafunwa, 1983).

Fafunwa (1977) believed that the use of mother tongue in education develops the cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of learners in class. Put differently, only education through the medium of mother tongue guarantees the all-round development of the child. This simply goes to say that for every inch of the fabric that constitutes the make-up of the child's mind to get to the desired level of sophistication, then, there is need for the child to be taught in his/her mother tongue. The bye product of this desired level of sophistication will therefore bring about an excellent academic performance in school. Thus, the researcher's conviction is that if the Nigerian child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, initiative and the co-ordination of hand and eye, he should acquire those skills and attitudes through the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Mother tongue to Fafunwa (1989) will offer the child opportunity to explore his natural environment, develop curiosity, communicate in the nature language, develop reasoning ability, and engender self-confidence. Apparently, this would afford the child the necessary degree of luxury and liberty to excel academically. Hence, Fafunwa postulated that if a child's education is to help him develop his natural abilities by creating the necessary environment that will stimulate him intellectually and emotionally in the art of learning and doing, then the child has to be introduced to an education system which will enhance learning by creating the ideal situation for the child to discover things for himself (Ayeni & Adeleye, 2015). From this, one is then compelled to ask if teaching the child with a foreign language is not some sort of miseducation? The summary of the argument of Babs Fafunwa is that for the child to develop the psychomotor and cognitive domain and thus perform excellently in school as expected, there is need for the stakeholders to stimulate the learning environment

linguistically; this will ensure that the response of the child will be nothing other than academic excellence.

At this juncture, one must begin to wonder that, despite the huge success of Fafunwa's experiment which has been replicated by Bamgbose in Nigeria, and by other scholars like Debi Prasanna Pattnayak, Martha Qorro, etc, in other climes, why does Nigeria still find it difficult to implement the use of mother tongue in Nigerian schools?. There have been some bottlenecks which shall be discussed as challenges.

Challenges Militating Against the Use of Mother Tongue in Nigerian schools and Possible Solutions

There are various factors militating against the achievement of mother tongue usage in Nigerian schools. It is expedient that these factors are examined critically in order to proffer working and lasting solutions. These factors, *inter alia*, include:

1. One nation-one language myth

As far as language is concerned, the concept of national integration is linked to multilingualism and the myth of division, which is that one language unites and many languages divide (Bamgbose, 2011). Benson (2004) identified colonialism as the source of this, when he stated that the colonial concept that a nation-state requires a single unifying language has influenced policy-makers in many parts of the world. He further lamented that the imposition of a so-called "neutral" foreign language has not necessarily resulted in unity. Faulting the colonial masters is like reminding the blind man of his blindness; it is obvious that such impairment cannot be forgotten. It is like reinstating an existing fact over and over again. What should be our concern as Africans is the inability of African countries to proceed beyond colonial realities and sadly, language, which is an integral aspect of our existence. One will notice that "of all the heritage left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of the colonial administration probably none is more important than the English language" (Bamgbose in Teilanyo, 2001). One must acknowledge the fact that contemporary African countries are of colonial creation, which necessitated the use of colonial languages for the purpose of governance and the language of instruction and the scramble and partition of Africa was not done with careful consideration of the existence of ethnical or specifically linguistic boundaries. However, a critical examination of Africa reveals that the major setback is not the colonial fabrications, but the insistence to continue with the colonial edifice and the attitude of ignoring the basic ingredients that make up the contemporary society, which are multilingualism and multiculturalism. Wolff (2006) painted a clearer picture of this when he stated that at home, in the street and community, Africans celebrate their multilingualism everyday. But, ironically, multilingualism is viewed as a problem in administration and formal education. Also, Djite (2008) observed that while multilingualism is the most prominent feature of speech communities in Africa, the education of the African child is still locked into a monolingual policy of language substitution. In Nigeria alone, there are over three hundred indigenous languages spoken in different societies. Societies that make up Nigeria today were existing within their own sovereign rights prior to the colonial conquest and later on, the 1914 amalgamation. For example, individual societies such as; Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Bornu, Tiv, Nupes, etc, constituted the northern part, and in the southern parts were the Yorubas, Igbos, Edos, Efiks, Ibibios, etc. We have sacrificed this important factor on the altar of national unity, as we keep overlooking the linguistic plurality in the official quarters, which is responsible for the day to day administration of the country, Nigeria, sadly education is not immuned. One must acknowledge that the outbreak of the civil war and its consequences have necessitated the need for the promotion of national sentiments, but the use of English language for this purpose has not yielded much, if it has yielded any and this is as a result of ethnical sentiment promoted consciously and unconsciously with the use of indigenous languages. The tribal basis for the purpose of deducing

meaning and judgement to happenings and occurrences in the country is enough evidence and this is a threat to national unity. However, the tides can be turned with the use of mother tongue as the language of instruction. There is a saying that things function according to their definition. Relating this to multilingualism, one would assert that multilingualism is functioning as a liability because it is perceived to be. It would become a solution if it is perceived to be so. This means that if indigenous language is used instead of the foreign language, especially at the basic level (basic 1 – 9) or for the entirety of primary and secondary education for the purpose of imbuing into the child the spirit of “national unity” as stated in the national policy on education (NPE, 2013), then the mystery and misery in which Nigerians have put themselves, for the sake unity, will vanish into oblivion.

2. Perception of English Language as a Global Language

The world has shrunk, but without any physical evidence of contraction. This explains the assertion of Tomlison (1999) that the time necessary to connect distinct geographical locations is reduced; distance or space undergoes psychological and cultural compression. In other words, the technological progress man has recorded over the years has shrunk the once-a-very-big-world to the extent that when one country sneezes, others will catch cold. One must note that coupled with technology, language has played a vital role in this compression. In the case of Nigeria, it is English language that is sneezing and all indigenous languages are catching cold, there is no other reason for this, other the perception by most Nigerians that English language is most suitable for formal education because it is widely spoken in the global scene. As noted by Awonusi in Adegolu (2008), the notion of hegemonic English implies the perception of the English Language as a significant linguistic superstructure that has a wide usage and acceptance as well as influence. Ngugi (1986) fingered colonialism to be the source of this. In his own words, he stated that during colonial times, African children learnt to associate their mother tongues with stupidity, barbarism, humiliation and low status, and the language of the colonisers, English, with intelligence and success.

Ngugi’s assertion explains the concern of Bamgbose, who stated that with years of indoctrination, many people have come to accept that ‘real’ education can only be obtained in a world language such as English. Even the idea that a child will benefit if his or her initial education is given in the first language is disputed by many so-called educated parents (Bamgbose, 2000). What Nigerians owe themselves as a people is not holding on to a belief or an assumption that in the true sense of it is not yielding the result that is desired, but a continuous examination of the situation, and to do this, “we must keep on asking whether education in European language(s) is the only way, or the best way, to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger (MDG 1) in sub-Saharan Africa”(Djite, 2008).

One can state that one of the things that is serving as a burning fuel for this belief among Nigerians is the failure to implement the three years use of indigenous language policy, as most people have not witnessed or experienced the use of mother tongue in instruction in formal setting and have unconsciously downplayed it in the informal setting where they have witnessed it. Whereas, they entrust their vehicles, electronic appliances and gadgets to artisans who have acquired the skills through the use of mother tongue and purchase furniture, shoes, etc, made by these sets of people with their money. Yet, they argue vehemently against the use of mother tongue in class. Thus, the best approach to solve this is by implementing the three years use of indigenous language policy, extending it to the entirety of the primary and secondary education and then organize an “enlightenment campaign designed to explain in terms that the layperson can understand, the arguments in favour of the policy” (Bamgbose, 2000). Countries like Japan, Finland, Norway, Malaysia, etc, could be cited as references (Akinsanya, 2012) and if the concern of parents and stakeholders is how the Nigerian child would function in the global

society, one must inform them that the Nigerian child will function the same manner the Norwegian, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, etc, is functioning in the international environment.

3. Absence of Orthography of Some Nigerian Languages

One of the major criticisms levelled against the use of mother tongue in Nigerian education is the lack of orthography of minority languages. This explains why “there have been reservations about the lexical capacity of indigenous languages to express the realities of modern science and technology, and thus be effective in classroom instruction” (Gacheche, 2008). One cannot exactly estimate the number of indigenous languages in Nigeria, as different literatures do not give a uniform figure, but one can say for certain that “only about a hundred Nigerian languages have been fully developed with standard orthography as at the year 1978” (Brann and Max in Olagbaju and Akinsowon, 2014). This is a strong bane to the use of mother tongue in the country. However, this fact provides little reason to generally object to the use of African languages in education; it is a job easily to be achieved by trained linguists in much less time and for much smaller costs as is generally assumed by the uninformed public (Wolff, 2006). As a matter of fact, even the colonial languages have existed long before people started writing them down. It should be noted that studies have shown that the language of instruction plays a vital role in the cognitive function of the child and the society is a beneficiary. Indeed, the lack of orthography is a bane, but it is not a bane that cannot be removed and this can be done by standardisation; that is, to make a suitable language of instruction, a local language should be codified/organised into a system or code – to minimise its variations; elaborated to enable it to be adapted to a wide range of functions; and, written down so people can have material to read in it (Gacheche, 2008). As a matter of fact, the use of mother tongue as a language of instruction in a particular society would galvanise other societies to call for the development of orthography of their indigenous languages.

4. Lack of Trained Teachers

Ngu (2004) conducted an assessment of teacher training institutions in Africa on behalf of UNESCO. He submitted that teacher training programmes were developed before most African countries got their political independence. This implies that student-teachers are being prepared to teach in languages which are unfamiliar to children (English, French, Spanish and Portuguese) (Alidou and Brock-Utne, 2006). In other words, the problem in Africa and Nigeria in particular is the lack of pedagogical competence in the use of mother tongue. As a matter of fact, it poses a great danger to the teaching-learning process, as explained by Benson (2004) that when teachers “lack sufficient training on how to carry out mother tongue-based teaching, they avoid the ‘unknown good’ and regress to the ‘known bad’”. This means that the teacher will adopt the call-response technique and allow limited opportunity for questions. Thus, the role of the teacher in the teaching- learning process, especially in the use of mother tongue in classroom instruction, cannot be overemphasized. What can be done to solve this problem is to train teachers in other to ensure that they are competent to use the language of the immediate environment to dispense their pedagogical functions.

5. Lack of Political Will

Functionalists have described the society as a complex whole with interconnected parts which function independently to maintain a state of balance and social equilibrium for the whole (society). To them, whether simple or complex, developed or underdeveloped, societies share a common feature, which is the presence of social institutions such as family, economy, religion, politics and education. These social institutions serve as parts keeping the society whole. In particular, politics is the machinery responsible for the day to day administration of the society; meaning that other social institutions are at the mercy of its decision and will. In Nigeria, education can be best described as a victim of politics. The use of mother tongue was first championed in 1953 by UNESCO; it could be said that Nigeria accepted the

idea when it included the use of mother tongue instruction in the 1977 policy, which was revised in 1981, 1998, 2004, 2007 and 2013. Yet, the language of instruction in many primary schools remains English language. A visit to some of these schools will confirm this observation. The reason for this is not far-fetched - it is the absence of will on the side of the political machinery to enforce the written laws. Thus, it is time for intellectuals, concerned citizens and stakeholders who are advocates of the use of mother tongue in classroom instruction to form an organization that will educate members of the public and put pressure on the government to actually and pragmatically implement the policy.

Conclusion

The major argument of this paper is that it is beneficial for the society and the child in particular, to be instructed formally with the mother tongue. The use of English language as the language of instruction is traced to establishment of schools in Nigeria, which is a consequence of Afro-European colonial relationship; which actually interrupted Africa's own developmental progress. This explains why it is widely viewed as the genesis of Africa's impasse in terms of eco-political discomfort of today, extending or reflecting in the education system, as the child experiences linguistic difficulty because of the linguistic gap between the two pillars of socialization, the home and the school. This can be likened to the Polish city of Warsaw, which was a beautiful and serene city until it was invaded and brought to its ruins by the Germans in 1939 and 1944. Thus, the famous saying that "Warsaw never saw war, until war saw Warsaw". Relating this to this paper, the Nigerian child can be likened to the city of Warsaw, wherein the child acquires mother tongue at home, processes and co-ordinates his/her thoughts with it; while in the school, the child is instructed with a different language, which is the German invasion on the cognitive processing of the child. This common ground explains why scholars such as Fafunwa went as far as using empirical studies to justify the relevance of the use of mother tongue in education of the child. Brock-Utne, like Fafunwa, has been involved in several studies wherein she demonstrated her conviction that the use of mother tongue in education is the only genuine effort to educate the African child. Their research works amplify that language is the heartbeat of any educational activity, as planning and its execution towards the achievement of the pre-determined goals will be futile without it. This paper submits that the burning fuel for the linguistic deficiency in Nigerian education system is the erroneous belief among the populace that the use of colonial language, or in Bamgbose's (2011) term, the "imported language" as the language of instruction would bring about modernization; which in the actual fact, most have equated with westernization. Hence, the non-involvement of African languages in the formal educational processes of the African child despite the continent's multilingual nature. The implication of this is that the child is not rooted in his/her indigenous culture, thereby defeating the major purpose of education. The researchers are not suggesting that mother tongue education is a guarantee of development; their position is that use of mother tongue in education contributes in no small measure to right development of the child, which could consequently precipitate meaningful and sustainable national development.

Suggestions

The researchers contend that for education in Nigeria to function as it should, as elsewhere, her language policy should be revisited; and to actualize this, the researcher recommends that teacher education in Nigeria be revitalised, while adequate training is given to teachers, so as to enable them to comfortably and conveniently teach their subjects in the indigenous languages. Efforts should also be made to enlighten members of the public on the relevance and benefits of use of mother tongue in education. Government, on his part, should not adopt the lips-service approach, as many policies have been victims. Monitoring agencies should be setup to ensure that schools, private and public, adhere strictly to the policy.

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