
FACTORS IMPACTING EFFECTIVE TEACHING OF MOTHER TONGUE BASED INSTRUCTION IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM

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Abstract

The paper reviews literature on the use of mother tongue in teaching in a multilingual setting that affects the way pupils learn. It discusses the concept of mother tongue and defines Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MT-based MLE). The paper further explores the discussion of the positive benefits of Mother Tongue-based MLE. Specifically, this paper identified some problems that teachers encounter in implementing Mother Tongue-Based Instruction in a multilingual classroom and analyzed the strategies of teachers in implementing them.

Key words: Mother tongue, mother tongue-based instruction, first language, second language and multilingual classroom

Introduction

Mother tongue (first language) has a great influence on children, particularly in their second language acquisition. This is corroborated by Behaviourist theory by Gacheche (2010), which argues that language is the result of stimulus-response. Thus, when children learn their mother tongue, which in Nigeria are mostly local languages or vernacular, it will facilitate the children in learning other languages. It is also because the local language has a rich vocabulary that does not exist in any language, so that children who master the mother tongue as a first language tend to have more vocabulary than their national language. Moreover, the use of local languages contains norms that make up the speaker. For example, in the local language each word will be used differently in accordance with to whom the speaker talk to. If it is to show respect or when

speaking to older people, a more polite language tend to be used, and the same statement will be delivered differently to closer relatives or younger interlocutors. This makes the speaker understand the importance of respecting their interlocutors.

Notwithstanding the use of vernacular or local language as mother tongue is becoming obsolete in society. Holmes, Liden and Shin (2013) notes in his book that there are several factors of why the use of local language begins to wane; among others are the minorities, cross-marriages, and immigration or population movements. Not to mention, young families affected by trends which tend to adopt national language into daily language of instruction with their children, whereas there are lots of positive impacts the children could obtain from the use of local language as their mother tongue. The author concludes that mother tongue play an important role both in preserving the local language and facilitating children to acquire second and third languages, and even establishing attachment between the children and their mother.

Mother Tongue

The first ever functioned of the five senses is auditory. A sound that a new-born baby hears for the very first time is his mother's voice (Gacheche, 2010). This is because the mother used to talk to her baby in her womb, hence the term mother tongue. According to Wa-Mbaleka (2014), "The mother tongue is the first language that a person obtains right after he was born through the interaction from his society, family and his surroundings". Dea, Abera, Basha and Abera (2014) proclaimed that the child can only acquire certain language by mastering the mother tongue in the first place.

There are several controversies regarding the very definition of the mother tongue itself. Some people believe that the mother tongue is part of local language, while some others do not. Gacheche, (2010) conceived that people commonly define the term of mother tongue as vernacular or local language. However, he believes that vernacular language is not quite appropriate in referring to the mother tongue. This is due to the fact that those languages, the mother tongue, do not belong to a particular domain. This leaves vernacular as the language that belongs to certain regions. Again, this vernacular, which is supposed to be used in certain area, has also been exercised outside the domain. In other words, that particular society has practiced their mother tongue instead of vernacular language. Skutnabb-Kangas (2013) stated that the mother tongue is the language that has been acquired through social interaction that involves the speaker's family and neighborhood. This suggests that the first language (L1) is an early process gained from identifying the sound and sign called language. Quite on the contrary, some people reckon that the mother tongue is different from the first language. Dea et al (2014) distinguishes the two terms: mother tongue and mother's language. He said, the mother tongue is the first language that the child learns; be that it is English, French, or even vernacular. While the latter, mother's language, is the language used by adults or parents to communicate with their children, whom are trying to acquire the mother tongue.

Therefore, according to the aforementioned theorists, it can be said that the mother tongue is the basic language that is first introduced by the parents to their children through daily interactions. In Nigeria, the mother tongue tends to be identified as vernacular or local language. This comes as a result of ethnic diversity. The vernacular language has become more attached to Nigeria daily life, making the mother tongue to merge with the vernacular language. The first language itself here defined as the language that could unite or unify various regions from different vernacular languages.

Defining Mother Tongue-based Multilingual Education (MT-Based MLE)

Discussions relating to MT-Based MLE in Nigeria tend to use the term in one of two ways. In some contexts, MT-based MLE refers to the use of students' mother tongue and two or more additional languages as Languages of Instruction (LoI) in school (Gacheche, 2010). In other contexts, the term is used to describe bilingual education across multiple language communities—each community using their own mother tongue plus the official school language for instruction (Gacheche, 2010). In the non-dominant language communities, multilingual education usually follows the first definition: learning and using multiple languages in school. In some South African countries, MT-based MLE includes four languages—the students' mother tongue or first language, a regional language, the national language and an international language.

Advantages of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education

The advantages of Mother Tongue-Bases MLE are enumerated as follow:

Using Students' Mother Tongue as the Foundation for Life-long Learning

MT-Based MLE programs enable students from non-dominant language communities to build a strong educational foundation in the language they know best—their MT or first language (L1)—and a good bridge to the official language—the school L2—and other languages of learning (L3, L4, etc.) and then encourage them to use both/all their languages for life-long learning. Strong and well-planned MT-Based MLE programs help students to build a strong educational foundation when they:

- 1) enable and encourage students to develop oral fluency in their L1;
- 2) introduce reading and writing in the L1;
- 3) help students to become fluent and confident in L1 literacy and;
- 3) build their capacity to use the L1 for everyday communication and for learning in school.

MT-Based MLE programs help learners build a "good bridge" when they:

1. introduce oral L2 through meaningful, non-threatening activities;

2. introduce reading and writing in the L2 by building on what the children have learned about the oral L2 and their foundation in L1 literacy;3
3. build fluency and confidence in using oral and written L2 for everyday communication and for academic learning.

MT-Based MLE programs ensure that students achieve educational competencies or standards established by education officials for each grade when they:

1. use the L1 only for teaching in the early grades, as students are learning basic communication skills in the L2;
2. use the L1 with the L2 for teaching in later grades, as students gain fluency and confidence in using the school language for learning academic concepts.

Challenges Associated with Teaching Using the Mother Tongue Medium in a Multi-lingual Environment

Mother tongue-based bi/multilingual and indigenous language education programs remain challenged by a number of variables. Studies report a lack of educational resources (Burton, 2013; Ball, 2010) and competent teachers, translation of academic language (Burton, 2013); a multilingual environment, lack of incentives for teachers (Burton, 2013; Ball, 2010), lack of lexical capacity to express authenticities of science and technology, inadequacy of vocabulary and writing system (Gacheche, 2010; Dea et al, 2014), new terminology for modern discourse and few speakers of the language, low status of the minority language which points to the unwritten L1 (Ball, 2010) or what Gacheche (2010) would describe as the local languages' limited geographical significance and the last being the participants' self-denial or a feeling of shame when using the mother tongue and lack of political commitment (Milambiling, 2011). Without disregard for the previous indicators, Ball (2010) believes that the greatest factor that could weaken the MTB MLE policy is the pressure from parents who want their children taught in international languages for economic gains. With the increased status of English as a ticket for global prosperity in trade, many parents would want their children to study English early (Burton, 2013; Dea et al, 2014).

For decades, many scholars have debated how language policies should be implemented and which language should be used for instruction. For instance, Burton (2013, p. 9) suggests that when considering the language of instruction, it is essential to examine the objective and subjective characteristics of the language. He defines objectivity as being standardized, written, codified, elaborated and organized into a system or code to eradicate variations and apply more functions. Subjectivity of the language is associated

with being teachable and rich in resources and taught in a natural, informal, non-threatening language environment. Ball (2010) then proposes that L1s can be developed following those standards. However, Gacheche (2010) contradicts Stern's argument saying it would be best to "leave the languages alone," and just 'allow them to play their part in a diversified, multilingual environment' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013).

The analogy used in explaining this context is the state of global biodiversity which diminishes as a result of eliminating the other species in order to preserve the 'chosen ones' (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013). This suggests that focusing on one language would exterminate the rest of the languages (Phillipson, 2009). From a different angle, Wa-Mbaleka (2014) proposes that, without removing the mother tongues from the classroom, the Nigerians can use English as the official language of instruction due to its collective global implications added to the fact that currently it is the only intellectualized language in Nigeria (Wa-Mbaleka, 2014). Nonetheless, Burton (2013) disagrees by echoing India's most renowned environmentalist, Wa-Mbaleka, (2014) who uttered, 'In any crisis, uniformity is the worst way to respond; diversity is resilience,' which means we should allow our languages to flourish in the classroom regardless of their identities.

Also, the following review highlights specific challenges often faced in minority and indigenous language-based bi/multilingual education initiatives. According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2013) the key challenges include:

1. students, parents, and teachers may resist schooling in L1;
2. a multiplicity of languages in the community may exacerbate the challenge of providing mother tongue schooling for all children;
3. people may disagree about which one of several different trade languages should be taught as the 'majority' language;
4. minority language community may have low status and be subject to discrimination and prejudice, making acceptance of mother tongue instruction difficult to win and creating reluctance among mother tongue learners to use and demonstrate proficiency in the language;
5. appropriately trained teachers may be in short supply, and there may be few speakers of the language who are proficient for academic instruction who can be recruited to teach;
6. lack of incentives for teachers;
7. educational resources in the language may be lacking;
8. L1 may be an unwritten language;
9. L1 may not be generally recognized as a legitimate language.
10. New terminology for modern academic discourse may need to be developed.

Discussing the problems encountered by teachers in implementing mother tongue based instruction in a multilingual classroom; Skutnabb-Kangas (2013) enumerates the following:

Underutilization of Human Resources

Children whose first language is not used at school experience lower levels of learning and are much less likely to be able to contribute to a country's economic and intellectual development (World Bank, 2006, p. 4).

Loss of Languages, Cultures and of Knowledge Systems

More broadly, the loss of language is part of the loss of whole cultures and knowledge systems, including philosophical systems, oral literary and music traditions, environmental knowledge systems, medical knowledge, and important cultural practices and artistic skills. The world stands to lose an important part of the sum of human knowledge whenever a language stops being used. Just as the human species is putting itself in danger through the destruction of species diversity, so might we be in danger from the destruction of the diversity of knowledge systems (Hinton, 2001, p. 5.)

Ineffective and Inefficient Use of Human Resources

We have a few hundred years of evidence that submersion in the L2 is "highly inefficient," if not downright wasteful and discriminatory, since such school systems are characterized by low intake, high repetition and dropout, and low completion rates. The overall costs to the society are clearly astronomical, and must be seen as at least partially to blame for the lack of inclusive, participatory governing in post-colonial countries (Benson, 2001, p. 7).

These quotations—and there are many more like them—indicate the concerns that are being raised in Asia and Africa, about the negative consequences of exclusionary language and education policies.

Difficulty implementing mother tongue based bi/multilingual programmes in the early years is a circular one. As long as there is a lack of political will to create and implement a policy allowing these programmes, the human resource capacity, curriculum and learning resources, and popular demand for these programmes will be lacking. The key step of formulating a national policy allowing mother tongue based bi/multilingual programmes and the implementation process for that policy will set in motion the gradual development of capacity, and resources as the languages are used in family centred programmes, early childhood development programmes, pre-primary, and throughout primary schools (Malone, 2007). Pressure from parents to have their children taught in international languages for perceived economic gains is perhaps the

greatest factor undermining the will of policy makers to push for mother tongue based bi/multilingual education. As long as children's first languages are not promoted in parent education and support programmes and in learning curricula and materials for young children, many parents will understandably persist with their perception that their home languages are not suited to contemporary economic, technological and educational processes, and they will not give priority to their home language as the primary language in raising their children to be ready for school and for life. At the same time, the cost of school failure among minoritized and indigenous children is immense. As reviewed earlier, high rates of failure are attributable in large part to offering education in languages that children do not speak, often using curriculum content and learning materials that children cannot relate to their everyday experiences (Boles, 2006).

Awareness raising campaigns can help parents to understand the fundamental antithesis between valuing education for their children and devaluing mother tongue based education. In many families and communities, young children grow up in multilingual environments. The challenge for education systems is to adapt to the complexities of multilingual children, families and communities, and to provide quality education that is responsive to children's needs, while balancing individual needs with the family's goals for children's development, as well as economic and political demands.

Strategies Employed by Teachers in Implementing Mother Tongue-Based Instruction in a Multilingual Setting

These shall be discussed under the following sub-heading: (a) translation from target language to mother tongue, (b) utilization of multilingual teaching, (c) utilization of lingua-franca, (d) improvisation of instructional materials written in mother tongue, (e) remediation of instruction, and (f) utilization of literary piece written in mother tongue as motivation, (g) absence of books written in mother tongue, (h) lack of vocabulary, and (i) lack of teacher- training.

Translation of Target Language to Mother Tongue

Translation is very beneficial to learning when it comes to learning through the use of the students' mother tongue because it serves as a bridge to connect students to the lesson. Translation is sometimes referred to as the fifth language skill alongside the other four basic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. "Translation holds a special importance at an intermediate and advanced level: in the advanced or final stage of language teaching, translation from first language (L1) to second language (L2) and from L2 to L1 is recognized as the fifth skill and the most important social skill, since it promotes communication and understanding between strangers" (Kavaliauskiene,

2009). It is commonly believed that translators are better at translating into their native language than into a second language.

Utilization of Multilingual Teaching

Multilingual teaching is when teachers use varied languages in the whole duration of teaching for the reason of accommodating students who do not speak a particular language and including them in the discussion. This is defined as speaking two or more languages in a growing worldwide phenomenon (Milambiling, 2011). Since the people who live in Nigeria are speakers of different languages, the teachers need to explore and use all possible languages in order to cater for the needs of the learners having different mother tongues. This means that the teacher is versatile in making ways to cater for the needs of the students. Therefore, being a multilingual teacher is an advantage in teaching pupils with different languages. The teacher's flexibility in using other languages means that there are fewer problems in translation. In line with translation of the different mother tongues, being a multilingual teacher is needed to match the skill of translating. If the teacher knows every language of his/her pupils then the demands of every learner to use his/her own language will be met. The teacher can cater to the individual needs of the learners by translating the lessons he/she is teaching in the different mother tongues of the learners in the classroom.

This is in line with Milambiling (2011), that multilingual language awareness is a necessity for teachers of multilingual students. Besides knowing about languages, subject matter, and teaching methodology, teachers should have an understanding of the political struggles and social circumstances of pupils. This strategy also allows the students to explore and learn the language of others. Milambiling (2011) further states that those who speak more than one language are also generally more aware of sociolinguistic variables and functions than those who speak one language, and they are adept at switching between different regional varieties, registers, and formal and informal language styles. This same author stated that the advantage of being a multilingual is that it creates different kinds of connections in the brain, which gives multilingual individuals an advantage in some respects compared with monolingual individuals.

Utilization of Lingua-Franca

Lingua-franca is a language that is widely used as a means of intercommunication among speakers of different languages. Seeing that the dominant language that is being used for instance in Northern States, the students will prefer using Hausa as their medium of instruction since it is the language that is widely used by the learners in the school and at the same time at home. According to Boles (2006), lingua-franca is a folk

language; it can be used with all the advantages of any other mother tongue as an effective instrument of instruction in the areas where it is the folk language. The fact that the language may be 'pidginized' will not detract from this value on the lower level of instruction; a pidginized mother tongue is nonetheless a mother tongue. For more complex purposes than elementary instruction, there may be problems of adapting the medium to the subject matter. Finally, using common language in a multilingual setting allows the learners to become active participants during class discussion and activities since they understand each other.

Improvisation of Instructional Materials Written in Mother Tongue

Instructional materials are the basic channel of communication in the classroom for the purpose of bringing about effective teaching and learning. Instructional resources in teaching and learning make students learn more and retain better what they have been taught and that these instructional resources also promote and sustain students' interest. These resources also allow the learners to discover themselves and their abilities. These instructional materials are entertaining at the same time educational and can cater for the different senses. This is one way of motivating the class to participate during the discussion. Instructional materials are vital to teaching-learning process (Sunday & Joshua, 2010). Teaching can only be effective when adequate and relevant instructional materials are used.

With the use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction, instructional materials should also be written in mother tongue to achieve consistency. These instructional materials are prepared based on the interests and needs of learners. The poems, songs, and stories used should be translated by the teacher in case there are no books written in the mother tongue. Thus, the use of instructional materials written in mother tongue enhances students' awareness of their own language which can lead to their proficiencies of the said language. This is also a way of appreciating their own language, using it in the class and making materials with it. Instructional resources in teaching and learning make students learn more and retain better what they have been taught and that they also promote and sustain students' interest (Sunday & Joshua, 2010). These instructional resources also allow the learners to discover themselves and their abilities.

Remediation of Instruction

Some pupils who have challenges in any area of language learning may require staying after class hours for an extra learning especially for those pupils who have difficulty with the lessons and for those who are behind in their lesson. This means that the teacher will tutor to accommodate all the learners despite of their levels of intelligence. In conducting remedial classes, the teacher uses mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Also, a remedial class is a learner's opportunity to ask the teacher about his/her difficulties in understanding the lesson especially when the problem has something to do with the mother tongue the teacher is using during the class discussion. In this case, it will also help the pupils learn most, from utilizing their mother tongue.

Utilization of Literary Piece Written in Mother Tongue as Motivation

Literary pieces are used by teachers as a springboard to teach other concepts or ideas that are beneficial to the pupils. Teachers integrate literature within the discussion and these literary pieces are already translated in preferred mother tongue. There are four main reasons that lead a language teacher to use literature in the classroom namely: valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment, and personal involvement (Hişmanoglu, 2005).

In addition, using songs written in mother tongue allow the students to understand the meaning of the song or poem because they are mother tongue users inside and outside the school. Literature of any kind can be important for children of other cultures and it is a powerful tool to weaken and dissolve racism. Multicultural literature can also play a very important role for teachers. This serves as an instrument for the teachers to see first in themselves the importance of being a multicultural person in order to appreciate the different cultures found or emanating from the literature that they are reading or they are teaching. Through this, they can impart to their students the importance of having a multicultural literature so that in turn the students will also understand and appreciate different cultures. The teachers must be very keen in selecting the different literatures that can show the diversities of cultures of the pupils especially those that are found in the classroom. Multicultural literature can be used as a tool to open pupil's minds. It helps to stimulate an understanding of diversity in the classroom and helps to build an understanding of and respect for people from other cultures (Boles, 2006). Also, multicultural literature can be used to eliminate racism (Boles, 2006).

Absence of Books Written in Mother Tongue

This is the condition of having no textbooks or dictionaries in the mother tongue that are needed to accommodate the needs of the learners having different mother tongues. Although one of the strategies in implementing Mother Tongue Based-Multilingual Education is the improvisation of instructional materials written in mother tongue, still teachers need books that are accurate and reliable. The absence of books written in mother tongue affects the teaching specifically when translating since their pupils are speakers of different languages. This is paralleled to the statement of Hişmanoglu, (2005) that is, no teacher can teach effectively without appropriate materials that are based on two components: established government curriculum goals and pupil's prior knowledge, culture, and value systems. With few books available for most of the languages, materials development appears a daunting task (Dekker, 2008). Books are one of the most needed materials in the learning process of the pupils. Teaching and learning cannot be effective without adequate and relevant use of instructional materials (Sunday & Joshua, 2010).

In implementing MTB-MLE, goals are not being attained if there is deficiency of materials needed; hence, there is a need for the provision of the books and instructional

materials that are helpful to the learning of pupils which will increase their understanding. Malone (2007) stated that literacy can only be maintained if there is an adequate supply of reading materials. This problem can be a hindrance in the success of the implementation of mother tongue-based instruction since the teachers are not that literate in all the different languages of their learners; thus, the production of mother tongue textbooks and dictionaries is a must in Nigeria.

Lack of Vocabulary

This is the dearth of words to use when delivering a message or information. There is no wide range of the words or phrases used in discussing the lesson using mother tongue; therefore, it could be considered as one of the problems being encountered by the teachers. This implies that the teachers need to be a linguist and/ or polyglot in order to address the needs of the pupils. This makes their learning interactive and meaningful. This means that the task of educating children becomes much more difficult when teachers have to face a heterogeneous group with multilingual and multicultural background (Pai, 2005).

Lack of Teacher-Training

Lack of adequate training could lead to unpreparedness of the teachers to teach their learners with the use of mother tongue as their medium of instruction considering that their pupils have different mother tongues. This lends support to Burton (2013) who stated that teachers need training in using first language in the classroom and that the materials have to be appropriate, available, and interesting to the pupils, as well used. If the teaching materials are not being used, learning is not progressive. Most teachers need training in pedagogy so that they can exploit the advantages of teaching in the language that children can understand (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013). This means less emphasis on rote learning, repetition and copying, and more on peer-to-peer interaction and on encouraging students to think for themselves, read, and come to their own conclusions (Sunday & Joshua, 2010). Training and seminars are important for teachers who are teaching multilingual learners because they need to be oriented and guided on how to handle learners with different languages. Also, through training and seminars, the teacher's knowledge is enriched because they are being involved in the different workshops during seminars. Seminars and training also served as an opportunity for the teachers to learn from and interact with the different participants.

Finally, this suggests training programs for teachers to enhance their skills and to enrich their knowledge regarding the implementation of mother tongue-based instruction and to improve their vocabulary with the use of mother tongue they are using. With pupils who are not all speakers of the same mother tongue, teachers have difficulty when they are not expert of the different mother tongues. In this situation, the teacher would rather use the language that is understandable to the pupils. This weakens the implementation of mother tongue.

Conclusions

If teachers can employ the strategies mentioned above, they will be able to effectively implement the use of MTB- MLE in helping their pupils acquire the necessary information and learning in the classroom. These innovative strategies will help the

students attain the maximum learning and helps build firm foundations, valuing and developing the oral and written skills that young children bring to school without rushing literacy. The problems indicated the major attention and effort necessary to be considered so that it will not hinder the meaningful learning and will not affect the way the teachers deliver their lessons. The above affirms the vital role of teachers in supporting pupil's learning relative to the implementation of the MTB- MLE through their innovative strategies and overcoming the barriers. Hence, the government is challenged to initiate a mechanism by which the teachers' innovative strategies and problems are assessed, monitored and evaluated at the same time design an effective program or model of MTB-MLE that is geared towards supporting these teachers' role in its effective implementation.

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