



## INTEGRATING MOTHER TONGUE WITH ENGLISH FOR SUCCESSFUL TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NIGERIA.

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### Abstract

Mother Tongue is a real tool for fundamental education for many reasons. It is crucial for framing peoples' thoughts and feelings. For a child's overall growth, learning to communicate in their mother tongue is essential. The child gains several advantages from speaking it well because it is their original language. It connects her to her culture, promotes better cognitive growth, and aids in the learning of other languages. Although English is the official language and the medium of instruction in schools in Nigeria, many students come from different language origins and have variable degrees of English competence, which frequently makes it difficult for them to communicate and understand one another in class. Mother tongue languages, which are the main tongues used in students' homes and communities, can be integrated into the educational framework to close the achievement gap. However, there are certain difficulties with this integration. Concerns about ignoring English competence, a lack of standardized teaching materials in native languages, and insufficient teacher preparation are still major problems. To address these issues, extensive changes must be made to language policy, funding must be put into programs for teacher preparation, and instructional materials must be created that are sensitive to cultural differences and contextually appropriate. The author suggests that in order to overcome the difficulties and create an atmosphere where both languages may coexist peacefully for the benefit of Nigerian education, legislators, educators, parents, and communities must work together.

**Key Words:** Mother Tongue, English Language, Teaching and Learning, Secondary Schools,

### Introduction

Language and education are inseparable because the use of language as a medium of instruction in the teaching/learning situation goes a long way in determining the success achieved by the learner. A medium of instruction is the language used in

imparting knowledge and inculcating values and norms of society in the young ones in the formal school system. Language performs different functions including a means of communication, expression, and conceptualization. It can also be used as a means of domination and discrimination; an instrument to give or block access to economic and political processes (Salawu, 2005). Above all, the role of language in education is very significant. Learning a foreign/second language differs from learning other academic subjects. Brown (1995) theorized that learning another language requires such devotion on the part of learners that “your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting”

The use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction during one’s early years of schooling, results in improved acquisition of knowledge by pupils (Byram & Fleming, 2008). It has also been established that the use of the mother tongue as a language of instruction is effective in helping with the acquisition of a second language (Heugh, 2006). Experiences in Africa and many parts of the world have shown that cognitive development is achieved faster by using the mother tongue as the language of instruction in primary education (Bunyi, 2009).

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) stated that language and culture are inseparable. Hence, a child who has been in contact with the mother tongue will imbibe cultural values that will guide him to respect the basic values of the society where he lives. Although English language usage is relevant to our modern living and Nigerian children must learn it in schools, the point remains that the best medium for starting off the child’s education is the mother tongue, and it is after a sound linguistic foundation has been laid, that there can be a change to use a foreign language (English) as a medium of instruction at later stages. However, the reverse is the case as many parents take delight in sending their children to nursery schools to learn the English language so that their dreams of wanting them to become doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers will be realized as fast as possible. Results have shown that professionals in the various fields of life who are fluent in the English language can hardly express themselves in their mother tongue (Musa & Musa, 2007).

## **CONCEPTUALIZATION**

### **Mother Tongue**

Mother tongue has been in existence since the creation of the world because everybody has a particular language that he/she is accosted to. This is the language that you were born into, you grew up speaking it, seeing people around you speak it too. It is mostly used in your environment to pass across information for better

understanding amongst people around them. It can also be regarded as L1 i.e. the child's first language.

Khan (2014) recorded that André Martinet, the French linguist, once said that the 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.

Several questions have arisen about what constitutes a Mother Tongue, especially in such urban centers such as Port-Harcourt, Lagos, or Abuja in Nigeria where inhabitants come from different parts of the country. In some places, the term has taken on more of a culturally symbolic definition, so that an individual might say, 'I don't speak my mother tongue'. Language and identity are linked, as the term Mother Tongue implies. A healthy identity balances different aspects of our personalities. A community expresses part of its identity through its languages and a healthy society makes choices that promote harmonious communities and confident individuals. One of the popular criteria used to define the mother tongue is that it is "the language one thinks, dreams and counts in" (Skutnabb-Kangas).

Recently, some people have begun to use the English Language place of their mother tongue which is causing problems and discrimination among us. In academics, some schools are trying to eradicate the use of the mother tongue in the environment which is very wrong because that is the child's main language. English Language was accepted in Nigeria because we felt that it would be easier for everyone to communicate freely without fractions but that shouldn't mean that our mother tongues should go on extinction in educational settings.

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

There have been claims and counterclaims 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 their 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 indigenous languages are not developed to welcome new concepts, ideas, formulae, theories, 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.

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 BrockUtne 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 Patrick O. Akinsanya, Ph.D & Damilare G. 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 potential.

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)

### **Prof. Fafunwa’s View on the Use of Mother Tongue in Academic Setting**

Fafunwa & Six Year Primary Project Prof Babs Fafunwa posited that the Nigerian child will benefit immensely if schooled in the indigenous language and he went as far as using empirical experiments to affirm his stand. The famous Ife Six Year Primary Project (SYPP) which was conducted between 1970 -1979 was the brainchild 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 impacted in 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 the 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 a need for the child to be taught in his/her mother tongue. The by-product of this desired level of sophistication will therefore bring about 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 coordination 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 the opportunity to explore his natural environment, develop curiosity, communicate in the natural language, develop reasoning ability, and engender self-confidence. 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 a foreign language is not some sort of miseducation. The argument of Babs Fafunwa summarizes that for the

child to develop the psychomotor and cognitive domain and thus perform excellently in school as expected, there is a 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.

### **English Language**

The English language is a part of the legacy left behind in Nigeria by the British at the end of the colonial administration (Bamgbose 1971). Its importance and role as a second language in national issues cannot be overemphasized. It is the language of government and administration. Thus, it serves as the official language in Nigeria. It is used during national occasions and celebrations such as Children's Day, Independence Day, and every national forum. English language cuts across ethnic groups, as well as social and regional boundaries. It is, therefore, the language of inter-ethnic communication. The position of English in Nigeria as a second language and a language used in all facets of life – politics, society, religion, education commerce – has contributed to its being taken as the national language in Nigeria. There is no doubt that there is a great diversity of varieties and functions of English in Nigeria. It is widely used in both the electronic and the print media, in the judiciary, the police, the armed forces, the legislative, etc., and as a lingua franca in political mobilization, ethical orientation, and population education. This confirms the entrenchment of English as the main official language of Nigeria (Oluwole, 2008). Nevertheless, English exists alongside indigenous languages which serve as the mother tongue of most Nigerians.

Nigeria with her numerous indigenous languages has adopted English as the official and second language for communication within and the outside world (Awobuluyi, 1998; Deji-Afuye, 2000; Olofin, 2012). There are different factors responsible for this. The language has sufficient and available orthographies for effective teaching and learning at all levels of education in the country. It has been discovered that some indigenous languages such as Efik, Ibibio, Nupe, etc. have little orthography and few qualified and adequate teachers to handle the languages efficiently. Furthermore, Nigeria is characterized by the diversity of languages and dialects which are not intelligible to all the indigenes. To promote unity and peace; easy access to national information; and make communication among the various speakers of various languages and dialects possible, a common language is needed. English is readily serving these purposes. The majority of Nigerian novelists, short story writers, poets, and playwrights depend entirely on English to express their literary views. Works on the three major literary genres are also found in indigenous languages, but it is the writings of literary works published in English that are more widely read and known

in Nigeria and also in the international community. The Nobel Prize for literature was won by Wole Soyinka who writes in English. Equally, Chinua Achebe's literary works in English are widely known and read not only in Nigeria but also throughout the world. The Federal Government of Nigeria regards education as an instrument of national development. The role of education in the empowerment of people is very crucial (Ayeni, 2011). English has been widely used in the promotion of education in Nigeria. Even though scholars, such as Fafunwa (1987), Emenanjo (1990), and Bamgbose (1991) among others, believe that the mother tongue or language of the immediate environment should be the medium of instruction in Nigerian schools the fact remains that none of the indigenous languages has the linguistic capacity to handle the teaching of all subjects. Therefore, English is used in all facets of education and this seems to be the most important role of English. Without any gainsaying, wherever education plays a role, English as the language of education and medium of instruction in Nigerian schools also plays a role. Furthermore, the national policy on education has featured English as a subject on the curriculum for students to undertake. A credit in the English language is a prerequisite for admission into Nigerian tertiary institutions. Effective use of the language in running political activities such as campaign rallies, and delivering political manifestoes and lectures is highly crucial. English plays an important role in the acquisition of political skills. It is also an important instrument in the hands of politicians as far as handling political issues and people is concerned. English is a major language through which politicians can educate their followers. For a politician to be able to influence and convince his followers, his ability to think effectively should not be in doubt. Language enhances people's ability to think. The participation of Nigerians in politics in both national and international politics can hardly be possible without the English Language. In the area of national security, a high priority is placed on proficiency in the English Language. Operational instructions for all the gadgets used in the maintenance of security such as pistols, rifles, and machine guns are written mostly in English.

### **Teaching And Learning in Secondary Schools**

Okpala (2023) defined teaching as the ability to assist learners in organizing, directing, and maximizing the stream of developing life experiences. Without teaching, learning cannot take place, they must work hand in hand for a successful knowledge to be achieved. Learning is also the accumulation of knowledge, ideas, and teachings from one another to exhibit positivity in the environment. For teaching



and learning to be performed there must be two parties involved (the teachers and the learners).

Integrating the mother tongue with the use of English will help teaching to be successful because it brings down the subject to the root i.e. allowing the children to associate the teaching with their environments which makes learning easier and better. It takes children back to their foundation and enables them to have a sense of belonging concerning their culture and tribe.

The benefits of Mother Tongue as a medium for instruction in schools Children learn better if they understand the language used as a medium for instruction. Even in situations where the main goal of learning is for children to acquire a second language, this too is facilitated by beginning with language children already know.

### **The Benefits of Using Mother Tongue with English in Teaching and Learning in Classrooms.**

- i. More use of the mother tongue Speaking of equity and access, the employment of mother tongue as a medium of teaching, particularly in schools in rural regions, will be very advantageous to the rural population. It will be crucial in ensuring that kids from low-income families stay in school. If Mother Tongue is employed as a medium for instruction, children from underprivileged families with limited exposure can feel supported as well as a sense of belonging. This is due to the fact that they are able to recognize the different components of the instruction as well as comprehend the instruction being given.
- ii. Better learning outcomes: Using a language that kids can understand enables teachers to employ more interactive and fruitful teaching techniques as well as educational materials. The cognitive growth required to quickly pick up a second language is supported by encouraging the mastery of the first language. The use of regional languages also makes sure that the knowledge students already possess is used as a foundation for new learning.
- iii. Benefits to society and culture: Every society has certain values that inspire or direct education in that society and are made explicit in the curricula. After that, the curriculum is utilized to guide the institution's or school's educational procedures. The inclusion of more local content in the curriculum and the higher involvement of parents and community members as classroom resources are two common outcomes of teaching in local languages. Involvement in the school and a sense of worth for their knowledge and culture among parents will be improved. Legitimization of local languages that comes from their use in schooling can strengthen children's, families, and communities' sense of inclusion in schooling. The use of local languages in formal



education has a positive impact on adult literacy as well. As parents see their children successfully learn to read and write in their language, the parents are often motivated to attend literacy classes as well.

iv. Education expenditures are reduced: Repetition and dropout rates are significantly reduced, which has a positive financial impact on local language use in education. Additionally, it is simple to find and produce local educational resources.

v. Promotes creativity and improvisation: Using the mother tongue as a teaching tool will significantly improve the students' creative and improvisational abilities. This is due to the fact that students will improvise in order to complete any task that is required of them, especially when faced with the difficulty of a lack of instructional materials.

vi. It's Fun: By using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction, students will have the opportunity to actively engage in the teaching and learning process. The students can also help find the materials required to improve instruction and learning.

vii. It gives a better Understanding: The use of Mother Tongue as a medium for instruction enables the pupils to develop creativity skills. This is because they can identify instruments that can be used to produce instructional materials in their immediate environment, and can equally assist in the production of these instructional materials.

viii. The use of the Mother Tongue will also enable the teacher to draw examples and inferences from the real-life experiences of the children as well as that of their immediate environment. Assimilation and recall of information and instruction will be easier for the students.

### **Challenges Of Integrating Mother Tongue in Teaching and Learning**

1. Society disregards speakers of local languages
2. Non-availability of the necessary textbook can affect the usage of Mother Tongue for effective teaching and learning English Language
3. Teachers do not use appropriate teaching aids to teach the English language through the usage of indigenous language
4. Love of the foreign culture discourages the usage of indigenous language/MT as a medium of instruction in English Language class.
5. Developing interest in learning the language only without using it as a means of instruction or communication kills our culture
6. Lack of Parents' proficiency in the indigenous language reduces the interest of the learner in understanding learning English Language in the school

7. The Fear that learning my mother tongue or indigenous language can cause mistakes in my use of the English language
8. 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 a cold. One must note that coupled with technology, language has played a vital role in this compression. In the case of Nigeria, it is the English language that is sneezing and all indigenous languages are catching a cold, there is no other reason for this, other than the perception by most Nigerians that the English language is most suitable for formal education because it is widely spoken in the global scene.
9. Lack of Trained Teachers Ngu (2004) conducted an assessment of teacher training institutions in Africa on behalf of UNESCO. He submitted that teacher training programs were developed before most African countries got their political independence. This implies that student-teachers are being prepared to teach in languages that 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 the mother tongue. 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’.
10. Lack of Political Will Functionalists have described society as a complex whole with interconnected parts that 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 of 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.

### **Conclusion**

It has long been established that Nigeria, being a nation characterized by a diversity of languages, has national language problems. There is a need for a common language that has the capacity of international intelligibility, inter-ethnic intelligibility, and equally the ability to foster peaceful co-existence among the entire people. Choosing this common language has been a very difficult task as there abound a handful of native languages existing alongside English. Several reasons have been cited for this loss of choice among the native languages. Some of the reasons have been described by Bamisaye (2006) as multifaceted controversies which, include; politics, economics, and linguistic questions. Other linguistic groups rightly suppose that the selected language will gain superior prominence and that all other languages will now function in a subordinate capacity. Besides this, our indigenous languages are so incapacitated in terms of human development in all spheres of human interaction, technological advancement, and international value, and also the inability to explain concepts and ideas in science, politics, education, economics, and security-related issues. However, it cannot be concluded that the use of English, without the complement of the native languages, has solved the problems of equal access to knowledge, divisiveness, grounding poverty, and underdevelopment in Nigeria. The fact remains that the mother tongue is a language in which many Nigerians have more intuitive knowledge. Akmajian et al (2001) believe that the usefulness of any language lies precisely in its capacity to meet the needs of a person for self-expression and communication, especially in his/her daily interaction with the world around him/her. Hence, languages are not only needed for communication of experiences but also to enhance a person's cognitive abilities and functioning relevant to his/her survival and personal development. Without any doubt, this can be better achieved through the use of the mother tongue. The need for a unifying neutral language as an official language should not send our indigenous languages to oblivion. It is the responsibility of every stakeholder to work towards developing these indigenous languages to serve us better.

## **Suggestions**

Given the findings from the study, the following suggestions are made.

- 1) Pupils should be encouraged to learn and speak their mother tongues.
- 2) Teachers should periodically organize quizzes, essay writing competitions, games, etc. among students to develop their communication skills and interest in mother tongue languages in related subjects.
- 3) The home and community should affect the child's effort to imbibe the essence of their mother tongue by encouraging communication in their native language
- 4) Teachers of the English language should ensure the use of the mother tongue as a medium of instruction in classroom teaching.
- 5) Parents should change their perception towards the native languages and discontinue enforcing their children to communicate in foreign languages.
- 6) The language provision of the national policy on education which states that students in secondary schools should register the mother tongue or indigenous language of the immediate environment and any other Nigerian language (making two) should be implemented.
- 7) The government should create a monitoring unit through the Ministry of Education that will monitor schools in implementing the indigenous language provision policy of NPE.

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