

MOTHER TONGUE FOR THE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Teaching and learning of pre-school children (below primary level of Education) goes beyond just getting to classroom and teaching like grown up learners because teaching of these young ones should not be formal, rather it should be inform of play which is informal way of learning. The medium of instruction should be mother tongue. Mother tongue is part and parcel of the people therein and it is used to pass cultural norms and value of individual societies from one generation to another. This paper critically examines dimensions of mother tongue. Early childhood education, and the use of mother tongue can facilitate and at the same time motivate these children to learn at pre-school level

Introduction

Making impact in teaching and learning process requires a qualified as well as competent teacher who is regarded as a very important factor if not most crucial in the process of education at the early years of life.

There is a proliferation of "teaching methodologies" all around the system of education, each claiming to be more successful than the others. The claim and the measures are usually based on average result from a large group. Within any group, though, there is not a single average learner. The education program that best develops any individual's potential is the one that best assesses his particular style. Again, teaching of these young children should not be seen as normal routine teaching like other level of education which is formal, but should be informal, that is, play way method as well as mother-tongue method have been stipulated medium of instruction in the classroom as outlined in the national policy in education

Mother-tongue Policy

Mother tongue policy is a traditional term for a person's native language learned from birth. Also called a first language, dominant language, home language, and native language, although these are not necessarily synonyms [Nordquist,2011]. Contemporary linguists and educators commonly use the term L1 to refer to a first or native language or a foreign language that is being studied.

The general usage of the term mother tongue denotes not only the language one learns from one's mother, but also the speaker's dominant and home language, that is, not only the first language according to the first actuation, but the first with the regards to its importance and the speaker's ability to master it's linguist and communicative aspects. For example, if a language school advertises that all it's teachers are native speakers of English, we would likely complain if we later learned that although the teacher do have some vague childhood memories of the time when they talked to their mother in English, they, however grew up in some non-English speaking country and are fluent in a second language only. Similarly, in translation theory the claim that one should translate only into one's mother tongue, is in fact a claim that one should only translate into one's first and dominant language [Benjamin, 2005]

The Concept Of Early Childhood Education

National policy on education [1998, 2004, 2013] refers to pre-primary education as the education given in an education institution to children aged 3-5 plus, prior to their entering the primary school. in other words, might not be concerned much with the day cares or crèche. Although, we may still have to refer to them, yet our attention will focus more on primary school which is for children who are within the age range of three and five.

Education begins from birth sometimes from womb that is fetus to when the child starts to attend playgrounds and kindergarten. The learning capabilities of man continue to the rest of his life, but not at the intensity that is demonstrated in the pre-school years. With this in mind, babies and toddlers need positive early learning experience to help their intellectual, social and emotional development and this lays foundation for latter school success [Akande, 2014]

When children are left in nursery school, the parent can have peace of mind and be sure that their children are not only safe, but under the care of experts. Therefore, for security reasons, the nursery school is good to keep the children when their parents are away at work. Another important reason for having the nursery school is the fact that it provides children with very good environment for socialization. There is no home however wealthy, that can provide the type of environment which the school provides for the proper education of children. For example, no home can have as many as twenty or more children of the same age group. There is also no home that can provide the different experts in education as well as the live experience which the school can provide. Therefore, since children need a environment for their proper social and emotional development, it has become necessary for parents to keep their children in the nursery school.

As stated by Akinbote [2001], the ability of a child to realize his potentials depend on the type of stimulation and encouragement the child receives. However, as a result of the socio-economic problem in Nigeria for example, many parents can no longer provide their children necessary stimulation which they need for their all round development. Therefore, in order to promote achievement, attending the nursery school is necessary for opportunities which are not available at home. There are also some children with some problems, which the parents may not actually notice or identify in their children early.

Oladebinu and Adejobi in Orenuga (2014) noted that early childhood education is the over-all development of the child socially, physical, and intellectually. The government interest has given a boost with the introduction of early childhood education bias in innovation component of its UNIVERSAL BASIC EDUCATION [UBE] which was introduced in September 1999

Okorowa [2014] emphasises that there is no better time when the foundation for several transformation and good citizen ought to be laid than in the early years. Education and skills unlock the potential of individual and shape the quality of their lives. Learning take place in all stages of life, the biggest impact happens early in life. While it is well acknowledged that primary, secondary, and post-secondary schooling develop and enhance key life skills and abilities, the learning that occur during the last few years of life can have important, long lasting effect that are often under estimated. It is in the early years that children develop basic values, skills, attitudes, behaviors and habits which usually follow into adulthood but the question remains how best these children can be taught.

Why using mother tongue to teach/facilitate

As stated in national policy on education on pre-primary education that early childhood education is education given in an educational institution to children prior their entering the primary school and the level of government [state and local] are required to establish and enforce educational laws that will ensure that the established pre-primary schools are well run. Pre-primary teachers must also be well trained as qualified personnel. Other appropriate academic infrastructure are provided with the following policy statement put in place to achieve the aims and purpose of early childhood education [PRE PRIMARY EDUCATION] as specified.

As stated in the guidelines for implementation of National Policy Education [2013] by the government in order to achieve these objectives are as follows;

- a. To establish pre-primary section in existing public schools and encourage both community and private efforts in the provision of pre-primary education.
- b. To make provision in teacher education programs for specialization in early childhood education [pre-primary education]

- c. To ensure that the medium of instruction is principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community; and to this end effort should be made to.
 - i. Develop the orthography of many more Nigerian languages
 - ii. Produce textbooks in Nigerian languages
- d. To ensure that the main method of teaching at this level shall be through play and that the curriculum of teacher education is oriented to this regulate and control the operation of pre-primary education. To this end the teacher, the pupil ratio shall be 1; 25.
- e. Set a minimum standard for early childhood Centre in the country
- f. Ensure full participation of government communities and teacher association in the running and maintenance of early childhood education.

As the policy statement that the use of mother-tongue should be used as medium of instruction, in pre-school setting, it is therefore imperative to note that truly at this stage, has pointed out earlier that learning at this stage should be informal, thereby method of teaching that should take cognizance that he is facilitating learning and not teaching them. Although English language is the preferred in all level of education, i.e the model/medium of communicating and instruction, and not at pre-primary level

With the aforementioned, as there is a stimulated guideline for medium of instruction in pre-primary class as it is generally agreed that the national policy on education [FRN,2013] stipulates that early childhood education should be included in mainstream education. Formal education begins from pre-primary education as provided in day-care center and nursery schools to children aged 3 through 5 it is enriched by the informal traditional upbringing given to children from aged 0-3 years which makes them ready for school. Although the government is not directly involved in the establishment of day-care center and nursery schools, it maintains oversight for the;

1. Provision and distribution of policy guidelines for the establishment and management of pre-primary
2. Production and development of appropriate national curriculum and textbook in Nigerian language;
3. Approval of relevant supplementary reading materials and teachers/instructions manual;
4. Provisions and approval of appropriate certification of work done and training received (Obiweluozor,2015)

According to Kioko, 2014, using mother-tongue or home language otherwise known as language of immediate environment has to be used in facilitating learning for the following reasons:

Firstly, learning does not begin in school. Learning starts at home by learning home language. Although the start of school is a continuation of this learning, it also prevents significant changes in the mode of education. The school system structures and controls the content and delivery of a pre-determined curriculum where previously the child was learning from experience. On starting school, children find themselves in a new environment. If, in addition to these things, there is an abrupt change in the language of interaction, then the situation can get quite complicated indeed, it can negatively affect a child's progress. However, by using the learner's home language, schools can help children navigate the new environment and bridge their learning at school with the experience they bring from home.

Secondly, by using the learners' home language, learners are more likely to engage in the learning process. The interactive learner-centered approach - recommended by all educationalists thrives in an environment where learners are sufficiently proficient in the language of instruction. It allows learners to make suggestions, ask questions, create and communicate new knowledge with enthusiasm. It gives learners confidence and helps to affirm their cultural identity. This in truth has a positive impact on the way learners see the relevance of school to their lives. But when learners start school in a language that is still new to them, it leads to a teacher-centered approach and reinforces passiveness and silence in classrooms. This in turn suppresses young learner's potential and liberty to express themselves freely. It dulls the enthusiasm of young minds, inhibits their creativity, and makes the learning experience unpleasant. All of which is bound to have a negative effect on learning outcomes.

It has also been shown that skills and concepts taught in the learner's home language do not have to be re-taught when they transfer to a second language. A learner who knows how to read and write in one language will develop reading and writing skills in a new language, foster knowledge acquired in one language. For example, if you teach learners in their mother tongues that seeds need soil, moisture and warmth to germinate. You do not have to re-teach this in English. When they have developed adequate vocabulary in English, they will translate the information. Thus, knowledge and skills are transferable from one language to another. Starting school in the learner's mother tongue does not delay education but leads to faster acquisition of the skills and attitudes needed for success in formal education.

Use of the learner's home language at the start of school also lessens the burdens on teachers, especially where the teacher speaks the local language well (which is the case in the majority of the rural schools in multilingual settings). Research has shown that in learning situations where both the teacher and the learner are non-native users of the language of instruction, the teacher struggles as much as the

learners, particularly at the start of education. But when teaching starts in the teachers and learners home languages, the experience is more natural and less stressful for all. As a result, the teacher can be more creative and innovative in designing teaching/learning materials and approaches leading to improved learning outcomes (Kioko,2014).

The risks of a foreign language of instruction

It is not hard to grasp all that is at stake: parents not enrolling their children in school at all, children not able to engage successfully in learning tasks, teachers feeling overwhelmed by children's inability to participate, early experiences of school failure, and so on. Some children do succeed, perhaps through a language transition program that helps them to acquire the language of instruction. But there is the risk of negative effect whereby children fail to become linguistically competent members of their families and communicates and communicate and lose the ability to connect with their cultural heritage.

While some children continue to develop proficiency in their first language while succeeding in school in a second language, this does not happen automatically.

Increasingly, it leads to a inability to communicate about more than mundane matters with parents and grandparents, and a rapid depletion of the world's repository of languages and dialects and the cultural knowledge that are carried through them

Preserving mother-tongue

Many linguistic groups are becoming vocal about the need to ensure that the youngest members of their communities keep their linguistic heritage. Some governments, such as in the Philippines, have recently established language-in-education policies that embrace children's first languages. A compendium of examples produced by UNESCO (2008) attests to growing h interest in promoting mother tongue-based education, and to the wide variety of models, tools, and resources now being developed and piloted to promote learning programs in the mother tongue.

Benson (2002) also emphasizes that children learn better in their mother tongue. UNESCO has encouraged mother tongue instruction in primary education since 1953 (UNESCO, 1953) and UNESCO highlights the advantages of mother tongue education right from the start children are more likely to enroll and succeed in school parents are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning girls and rural children with less exposure to a dominant language stay in school longer and repeat grades less often some educators argue that only those countries where the students first language is the language is the

language of instruction are likely to achieve the goals of education for all. Research also suggests that engaging marginalized children in school through mother-tongue based, multilingual education (MTB--MLE) is a successful model.

Conclusion

In summary, the use of learner's home language in the classroom promotes a smooth transition between home and school. It means learners get more involved in the learning process and speeds up the development of basic literacy skills. It also enables more flexibility, innovation and creativity in teacher preparation. Using learner's home language as a mother-tongue concept to teach is also more likely to get the support of the general community in the teaching/learning process and creates an emotional stability which translates to cognitive stability. In short, it leads to a better educational outcome

Recommendations

Based on the opinions and evidence abound, the following recommendations are made as suggestions proffered among other;

- (i) Schools need to teach the curriculum in a language children understand. A bilingual approach that combines continued teaching in a child's mother-tongue with the later introduction of a second language can improve performance in the second language as well as in other subjects.
- (ii) There should be orientation inform of seminars and workshops for pre-school teachers at pre-primary education level and reminding them on the use of mother-tongue as part of implementation of mother-tongue as medium of instruction for pre-school children. By this, workshops and seminars may be organized occasionally by school authorities in case of public school or school owners i.e. proprietors and proprietress for private school teachers. With this they become familiar with mother-tongue as medium of instruction in pre-school sitting.
- (iii) There should be awareness for the general public through different media programmer on the place and importance indigenous ways of teaching pre-school children as part of mother-tongue as medium of instruction, likewise importance government place on the policy statement and on the implementation in schools. This will remove the indictment i.e. wrong perception and gross miscommunication about indigenous and mother-tongue concept for pre-school children
- (iv) Monitoring and supervision should be set up to keep asserting and monitoring the full implementation of mother-tongue in facilitates learning of pre-school children. This is because main method of teaching at this level should be through play, as stipulated in the policy statement.

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