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CONTEMPORARY ISSUES
IN
CURRICULUM
AND
EVALUATION
RESEARCH



Edited by:

Folajogun V. Falaye

Joseph A. Adegbile

Adams O. U. Onuka

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MOTHER-TONGUE AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: WHAT HOPE FOR NIGERIA?

Adeyemi A. Adeyinka

Introduction

The issue of whether the mother tongue or what is equally tagged Language of immediate environment or community is relevant for scientific and technological advancement of any nation is not debatable because scholars and researchers have stoutly supported this (UNESCO 1987; Afolayan 1976; Fafunwa 1989; Awoniyi 1978; Elugbe 1987; Adeyinka 1997). What should be advocated for now is how to implement the teaching of this Language. Again, the definition of mother-tongue is no longer a subject of controversy among scholars because the apt definition of it as being the Language that a child first came into contact with within the linguistic environment that it finds itself suffices. Eminent scholars in the field of Language and or mother-tongue education have offered definitions and the points are noted and accepted.

Having settled the issue of meaning, the next important issue to be looked into is the issue of scope or extent to which the mother-tongue of a child should be used as a medium of instruction in School and this, objectively speaking, has generated and is still generating a lot of controversies amongst scholars. While the UNESCO report and other eminent scholars are of the opinion that it should be used throughout education up to University Level, some educated elites perceive of the mother-tongue as being inferior or substandard to English and would always antagonize its continued use as a medium of instruction throughout education (Solarin 1991; Ajayi 1994; Adeyinka 1996).

Coupled with the above opposition from parents, is the stiff/strong opposition being received from teachers of English Language. To some English Teachers, the advocates of mother-tongue education are enemies who would want their jobs terminated because they thought the adoption of the UNESCO resolution would mean that teachers of English may have to look elsewhere in order to earn their living or that there would no longer be employment for fresh graduates (Bepo 1991; Okafor 1985). While it would be unfair to say English should be eliminated from the School

Curriculum, which no one is advocating for anyway, Emerson's (1963) observation that English is suitable for the efficient running of government machinery in an age of complex political and administrative organization holds true of Nigeria today.

In the same objective manner, the truth must be told of the alienation and hampering of the flow of thought which the continued use of English as our official Language has brought to citizens of this great country, Nigeria. For example, Fafunwa (1989) has asserted that the continued underdevelopment of Nigeria as a nation can be attributed to our continued use of Foreign Language - English and French. Obisesan (1980) Bamgbose (1990) and Elugbe (1997) also belong to this School of thought.

The Mother-Tongue at the Primary School Level

The objective of Primary Education as stated in the National Policy on Education (2004) in paragraph 13 is for 'the inculcation of permanent literacy and numeracy and ability to communicate effectively'. There is no doubt that the easiest way to impart this in the pupil is through the mother-tongue because the child, being a member of the society and who had his informal education in his mother-tongue, would feel alienated if he has to be instructed in a Language that he is not used to before coming to School.

Added to the foregoing is the fact that the strangeness of coming into the four walls of a building with well-arranged desks and chairs and some instructional materials pasted on the wall constitute a phobia to the new comer. One potent factor of making him feel a sense of belonging is to speak the Language of his home to him and instruct him in the same.

It must however, be pointed out that researches like those of the Ife Six-Year Primary Project (SYPP), the Rivers Readers Project (RRP) and many others that were carried out and which supported the use of the mother-tongue as a medium of instruction all through primary education did not go down the drain. This is because some State Governments went ahead to practise it and found it worthwhile (Fafunwa 2008:10). For example, the tenure of Babs Fafunwa as the Minister of Education witnessed Federal Government support of the policy and this led to the provision of text materials written in Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa the mother-tongues. The text materials for Mathematics, Social Studies and Elementary Science have been produced and given phonological transformational titles such as '*Matimatiki*' '*Ibagbepo Eda*' and '*Sayenisi*' in Yoruba.

In Oyo State for instance, pilot Schools were identified in the early 1980s in each of the Local Government areas. Three Primary Schools in each Local Government area were selected for study in the mother-tongue. The procedure then was that an arm of a class, this time around, primary one, was selected for mother-tongue instruction in all the subjects except English, while pupils in another arm continued their instruction in the conventional way of using the mother-tongue to teach all the subjects. The English Language is used at the Junior Level to teach all the subjects, except Yoruba, at the upper primary level.

At the end of each session, the pupils were subjected to the same examination because they were running the same curriculum. The only difference is that the teacher transited with the pupils to the next class up till primary six. Reports in the course of the experiment revealed that pupils instructed in Yoruba in all subjects except English performed better than their controlled group. Unfortunately, this laudable exercise was abandoned and could not be widened due to lack of funds and proper monitoring.

Mother-Tongue Instruction at the Secondary Level

According to the NPE, at this level, the policy stipulates in paragraph 19 (4) that a student must offer two Nigerian Languages as part of the core subjects. This is explained to mean the Languages—Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, subject to the availability of teachers. There is no doubt that the major Nigerian Languages have been enjoying patronage in this area while the percentage of those who combine two Languages is still very low. The truth is that most minority languages have not been developed orthographically to the extent of being used as a medium of instruction at this level of education. (Emenanjo 2004:5).

In addition to the above point, there is still dearth of textbooks in most of these minority Languages and this emanates from the above point that they have not been graphically represented. Added to this is that there are no teachers for most of the minority Languages of Nigeria because they are not being offered in the Universities and Colleges of Education. What obtains in Secondary Schools today is the teaching and learning of two major Nigerian Languages at the expense of the Language of the immediate environment. For instance, the Egun people of Ogun and Lagos States can only be taught Yoruba and one other major Nigerian Language because of the problems identified above, while most of the minority Languages of the North are not taught in Schools.

The Mother-Tongue in Tertiary Institutions

Institutions of higher learning like College of Education and Universities have departments of Linguistics and African/Nigerian Languages where both majority and minority Languages are offered even though only a few of these minority Languages are still being offered (Arohunmolase 1997). Olaofe (1990:53) also points out that only eleven of about four hundred indigenous Languages of Nigeria are offered in the Universities, although Yolofo (1994:76) remarks that orthographies have been developed in thirty of them. In these institutions of higher learning, where these Languages are offered, the medium of instruction is in that same Language. This is because the trainee teachers are going back to the classroom to teach the Languages. During teaching practice, they are expected to teach the students in the Nigerian Languages and this helps to enable them have encounter with the School system.

Mother-Tongue and Adult Literacy

Efforts at reducing the high illiteracy rate in Nigeria is not limited to formal educational system of education alone because world bodies like the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme and UNESCO are funding adult and non-formal education with a view to reducing drastically the illiteracy rate in developing countries. As a step towards making every citizen literate, the Federal Government established the National Commission for Adult and Non-formal Education and saddled it with the responsibility of organizing adult literacy classes in towns and villages where prospective illiterate citizens can contact the agencies while posters, radio and television announcements and one-to-one contacts are employed to create awareness and interest in the people.

The medium of instruction at this level is basically the Language of the immediate environment. This programme has been adjudged appropriate and timely especially when text materials are either highly subsidized or given out freely. This programme today is beset with its own problems.

The Inhibitions

Starting from the Primary School level up to the University, the use of the mother-tongue as a medium of instruction has been meeting with one problem or the other and some of these problems will be highlighted here. The Federal Government's stand on the role of the mother-tongue in education is not clear-cut. This is because there is no enforcement of the clause that recommends the use of the mother-tongue as a medium of instruction for the first three years in private schools. Government does not have total control of what these private schools teach as most schools

teach pupils using English Language with Yoruba or the major Languages of the area being taught as a subject; some even do not teach the major Languages at all.

Similar to the foregoing is the fact that the policy on education has made provision for what Bamgbose (1990:4) calls 'escape clauses'. One of these clauses is the teaching of the major Nigerian Languages 'subject to availability of teachers'. This clause, Elugbe (1997:8) observes, does not show commitment and this accounts for the low turnout of teachers in these major Languages up till today. Similarly, the fact that most of the minority languages are yet to be developed while the few that are developed are not given encouragement. Worse still is the fact that many educated elites who should advocate the development of the minority Languages are slaves to their cultures because they are advocates of the continued use of English as Nigeria's official Language.

The society we live in today does not yet recognize teaching as a profession unlike in the forties and fifties when teaching and teachers were revered as demigods in their environment. It is sad to note that some students are better dressed and are more financially buoyant than their teachers. There have been cases of students buying shirts, shoes and other things for their teachers. The higher institutions are not left out of this as there was a case of an institution where four students bought a car for one of their Lecturers.

While the Government and society play their roles in inhibiting the use of the mother-tongue in education, teachers themselves are potent factors that cannot be ruled out. Most teachers are not willing to disclose their identity in the public while those who teach Nigerian Languages at times prefer to regard themselves as graduates of linguistics rather than of the Nigerian Languages in which they specialize. This, to a greater extent, does not allow the students to develop interest in the Languages.

What Hope for the Future?

We are already in the twenty-first century and while other countries are advancing technologically through their mother-tongues, are we to spend more of our-God-given resources on transfer of technology? While developing nations like India and Pakistan are testing their nuclear weapons and manufacturing heavy machines, are we to keep on relying on them for importation of raw materials and manpower? It has been established that the secret behind technological breakthrough in Japan, Germany, China, Taiwan and what have you is the development of their mother-tongues and that education received in the mother-tongue would enable the learners think rationally and would develop inventiveness, originality and creativity in them.

The above point being the case, all hope is not lost because we still hold our destiny in our hands. If the seven-point agenda of the present administration is vigorously and honestly pursued, there is no doubt that we can truly attain the position of being one of the twenty world leading economies by the year 2020. The question now is: what has happened to the previous lofty and laudable programmes of previous governments? Why have they not succeeded? If everybody will see the work as a corporate one in which everyone will share in the blame or commendation, there is no doubt that the situation will improve.

Recommendations

In view of the various comments made by Language scholars as well as our discussion in this paper, the following recommendations are made:

- The inspectorate division of the Ministry of Education should ensure that it lives up to expectation by ensuring that schools are inspected regularly with a view to ensuring that the mother-tongue is used as a medium of instruction in the Primary Schools.
- Beyond the first three years, it is hereby recommended that the mother-tongue should be used as a medium of instruction throughout primary education as this will help to concretize learning. It is hereby recommended that the use of the mother-tongue be encouraged as a medium of instruction at the Junior Secondary School level. This doubt will propel our drive toward technological advancement.
- Instructional materials in the major and minor Nigerian Languages should further be produced by government aiding publishers through the reduction of tariff on printing materials while teachers should be encouraged to write textbooks. Teaching aids should also be made available to schools.
- In addition, it is hereby recommended that teachers of indigenous Languages be encouraged by being sponsored through their studies to higher institutions. Coupled with this is the fact that teaching should be professionalized at all levels while the implementation of Teachers' Salary Structure should be enforced in all the States of the Federation without further delay.
- More of the minor Nigerian Languages should be reduced into writing and children from these linguistic communities should be encouraged to go for further studies in them. This means that more institutions of higher learning should be encouraged to introduce these minority Languages into their curriculum.

- Governing agencies like the National Primary Education Commission, Ministry of Education, National Commission for Colleges of Education and the National Universities Commission should ensure that the various curricula for their levels of education are reviewed regularly while they should encourage their institutions to use the mother-tongue in education.
- Associations and Linguists should be encouraged to develop the metalanguages of these languages especially in the Sciences so that there will be speedy and better grasp of them which will help Nigeria to develop scientifically and technologically. In this case, a Nigerian Educational Research and Languages Commission would be an advantage.

Conclusion

Beyond all reasonable doubts, the mother-tongue is needed now than ever before for the future development of Nigeria and all hands should be on deck to ensure that it is given a full support at all levels of our education. This paper will be laid to rest with the submission of Fafunwa (1989) when he writes:

If the Nigerian child is to be encouraged from the start to develop curiosity, manipulative ability, spontaneous flexibility, initiative, industry, manual dexterity, mechanical comprehension and the coordination of hands and eyes, he should acquire these skills and attitudes through the mother-tongue as the medium of education, which after all is the most natural way of learning.

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