

## **Mother Tongue Education as Agency of Decolonisation: Implications for National Development in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

This paper focuses on mother tongue system of schooling as an instrument of decolonisation and a catalyst for sustainable national development in Nigeria. It seeks to determine the extent to which mother tongue disability of the Nigerian school child is a product of neocolonialism and explore the possibility of re-inventing mother-tongue education system as agency of decolonisation. This thesis derives from the fact that the national development or its sustainable development of any given nation is strongly tied to developed human capital, which is the driving force of all other resources. Against the backdrop of Language-in-Education Policies, which are long in glorifying the pedagogic value of mother tongue but short in implementation strategies, the paper identifies mother tongue disability of the Nigerian school child as the ‘dividend’ of colonialism and neocolonialism through the instrumentality of the English language. This calls for a radical paradigm shift in language teaching methodology that supports the revalorisation of the indigenous languages as the standard medium of instruction in early childhood education in Nigeria. For the purpose of rolling back the deculturalisation process and ensure proper early childhood development, the paper calls for re-invention of mother tongue system of schooling. In this way, the Nigerian school child would be eminently predisposed to human capacity building process that ultimately leads to sustainable national development.

**Keywords:** mother tongue, colonisation, neocolonialism, decolonisation, development, Nigeria

### **1. Introduction**

Mother tongue education is a system of schooling, which encourages teaching and learning process in the school child’s First Language (L1). The primacy of mother tongue and its indispensability in early childhood education might have inspired a number of national and international legislations, declarations, conventions, and resolutions aimed at promoting mother tongue education as one practical step at upholding and protecting the children’s linguistic rights. These include the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 44/25 on 20 November 1989, the Declaration of Children’s Human Linguistic Rights” initiated by Finnish sociolinguist Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2009) as part of an ongoing “linguistic human rights” campaign directed at the United Nations and UNESCO, World Declaration on Education For All (1990), Dakar Framework for Action (2000), the Nigerian Child’s Rights Act (2003). Even the language provisions of Nigeria’s National Policy on Education (1981) revised up to 2004 recognise the importance of mother tongue when it stated *inter alia*, that “Government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother-tongue or the language of immediate community and, at a later stage, English.” The common themes that run through all these statutory provisions are (i) Every child should have the right to identify with her original mother tongue and have her identification accepted and respected by others; (ii) Every child should have the right to learn her mother tongue fully; and (iii) Every child should have the right to choose when she wants to use the mother tongue in all official situations.

In spite of all these explicit statutory provisions, the typical Nigerian school child is denied the access to mother-tongue education in the light of the ‘English-only’ policy, which fails to appreciate the mother tongue as a cognitive and pedagogic resource but finds absolutism in the dogma of monolingualism, as a language teaching methodology. This practice, which goes against the grains of the language-in-education policy in Nigeria, invests the Nigerian school child with the inglorious toga of linguistic disenfranchisement as it disconnects him from a clear and concise understanding of himself, his world, his culture, his community, and indeed his whole human essence. As a hapless victim of linguistic robbery, the school child is terminally disabled from utilizing the immense linguistic arsenal offered by his mother tongue to prosecute the war of decolonisation.

In this paper, we seek to determine the extent to which mother tongue disability of the Nigerian school child is a product of neocolonialism and explore the possibility of re-inventing mother-tongue education system as agency of decolonisation. This thesis derives from our conviction that the national development or its sustainable development of any given nation is strongly tied to developed human capital, which is the driving force for the development of all other resources. The key to human resources development is education. The UNESCO Report (1953) and similar benchmark studies have established the fact that the key to quality education is mother tongue schooling system. Therefore, investing in young children's education is an essential component for the development of any nation. This underscores the indispensability of proper early childhood education to human capital formation.

## 2. Language-in-Education Policy in Nigeria

According to Emenanjo (1985), it is common knowledge that Nigeria does not have a well-articulated and explicit national language policy that can be found in one document. But it is also common knowledge that Nigeria does have a national policy for languages in education and, by default and implication, in the polity. This policy is, sometimes, explicitly and, sometimes obliquely, stated in: (a) Sections (and for the types levels of education specified) of "The Federal Republic of Nigeria: National Policy on Education, Lagos: Federal Ministry of Information, (1977, revised 1981)" thus:

Section 1: Philosophy of Nigerian Education

2: Paragraphs 9 and 11, for Pre-Primary Education

3: Paragraphs 14 and 15(4) for primary Education

4: Paragraphs 18, 19(4) and 27 for Secondary Education

5: Paragraphs 32 and 37 for Higher Education, including professional Education

6: Technical Education

7: Paragraphs 51 and 52: Adult and Non-formal Education.

(b) Chapter X 'Special Issues in Nigerian Politics' Paragraphs 270 - 272, pp. 62 - 63 entitled: 'National Language' of the Government Views and Comments on the Findings of Recommendations of the Political Bureau (1987).

(c) Sections 19(4); 21; 53; and 95 of The Constitution of The Federal Republic of Nigeria (1989).

(d) The Cultural Policy for Nigeria (1988: 16-17).

Continuing, Emenanjo notes that the de facto National Policy on Languages (in Education) recognises the multidimensional, multilingual three tier political-polity, which tries to capture the multi-ethnic and, ipso facto, multilingual polity, which Berlin and the British have hammered into a rough-hewn existence. The Policy provides for:

(i) Mother-Tongue (MT) and/or Language of the immediate community (LIC) as the Language of initial literacy at the pre-primary and junior, primary levels, and of adult and non-formal education.

(ii) The three major (national) Languages - Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba at L2 as the languages of national culture and integration.

(iii) English - the official language - as the language of formal literacy, the bureaucracy, secondary and higher education, the law courts, etc.

(iv) Selected foreign languages especially, French, and Arabic, as the languages of international communication and discourse. The NPE policy on languages:

(i) Advocates multilingualism as the national goal.

(ii) Recognises English as the de facto official language in the bureaucracy and all tiers of formal education.

(iii) Treats Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as potential national languages which are to be developed and used as LO and L2 all through the formal educational system.

(iv) All Nigerian languages as meaningful media of instruction in initial literacy, and in life-long and non-formal education.

### 2.1 Critique of the L.i.E policy

A number of studies (cf. Bamgbose, (ed.) 1973; Brann, 1977; 1980; 1982; Chumbow, 1986; Jibril, 1986; Emenanjo, 1985; Agbedo, 1998) have criticized the language aspect of the National Policy on Education (NPE). Of particular relevance are the following problematic questions asked about the provisions of the Policy concerning the mother tongue:

- (i) If the mother tongue (MT) or the language of the immediate community is considered so important at the pre-primary level as an integral part of the child's culture and the link between the home and the school, why should it be "principal" and not "solely" used at this level?
- (ii) If the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community is considered a very important medium for achieving initial and permanent literacy and numeracy, why should it be only used 'initially' and not throughout the whole of primary education?
- (iii) What is the relationship between mother tongue and English?
- (iv) Why should there be a changeover from mother tongue to English only after three years of pre-primary education?
- (v) Would the transition not create a psychological gap detrimental to all the cognitive maturation and intellectual development of the child?

These and other similar unstated questions mirror the worry of scholars about the ambivalences, inconsistencies, haziness, obtuseness and vagueness of the policy as it relates to the pedagogic status of mother tongues in child education and the education system generally in Nigeria.

### *2.2 Factors militating against effective implementation of the L.i.E policy*

It goes without saying that while there are many factors involved in delivering quality basic education; language is clearly the key to communication and understanding in the classroom. Nigeria, like most ex-colonial Anglo-phone states is characterized by individual as well as societal multilingualism; yet, she continues to allow a single foreign language - English - to dominate the education system. According to Emenanjo (1985) and Okon (1982) have correctly identified the many barriers, which militate against effective education in West African languages in general and Nigerian languages in particular. One of the concrete examples of the 'barriers' is the assumption held on to with fanatical tenacity (especially among southern Nigerian elite) that literacy is the ability to speak and/or write English. However, this generational folly manifests ingloriously in the light of the fact that only less than 20% of Nigerians have demonstrable linguistic and communicative competence in English after over 200 years of the English language in Nigeria. In spite of this folly, the mother tongue instruction policy has failed largely due to poor attitude towards mother tongue.

According to Ndamba (2008: 175), scholars (cf. Ngugi wa Thiongo, 1986; Roy-Campbell, 1996; Adegbija, 1994; Robinson, 1996) are of the opinion that the colonial and the post-colonial language and educational policies obviously provide a solid basis of the explanation of attitudes towards African languages, and English L2. The colonial language policies either adopted the use of English from the first grade or only used indigenous languages as a medium of instruction in the lower classes of the primary school. Postcolonial language policies have maintained the status quo, thus perpetuating the existence of an elite group, which is characterized by relatively high economic status, high educational level and high competence in English as attested to by some studies (Robinson, 1996; Granville, Janks, Joseph, Mpahlele, Ramani, Reed and Watson, 1998). Consequently, African nations, as Bamgbose (1991) avers, remain "prisoners of the past" since they are so overwhelmed by established practices to such an extent that it is virtually impossible to break away from them. It is then not surprising that the colonial and neo-colonial subjects tend to undermine their own language, as pointed out by Adegbija (1994:33):

This attitude of denigration towards one's own language and the exaltation of European languages has not been easy to remove in Africa. Its scars are still very visible today, particularly in the education system.

The negative impression of the local languages is further reinforced by functional differentiation perceptions of the Nigerian elite. In the African context, Robinson (1996) is of the opinion that official and local languages are regarded as opposed to each other, rather than as complementary as evidenced by the fact that one of the two languages may be regarded as a more suitable language for certain domains, and the characteristic functions are seen in dichotomous terms. The official language is English as an official language has been associated with success, power, prestige, progress and achievement because it is characterized by institutional usage, written usage, functional use, economic advantage and national communication. And as Adegbija (1994) argues, such associations have generally resulted in English getting a high positive evaluation. On the other hand, the local languages are associated with low prestige because they are characterized by oral usage, individual/community usage, emotional attachment, village solidarity and personal loyalties.

### 2.3. *The CALP-BISC dichotomy*

Cummins in Otto (1997) introduces the CALP-BISCS dichotomy. Language can be used in the form of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), which requires sound literacy skills, vocabulary that is broad to allow for subject-matter mastery, concept development and skill in formal oral and written expression. And by virtue of it being used in formal education, CALP is regarded as a prestigious form of language usage and in the Nigerian context like all other commonwealth nations of Africa, English is accorded the role of CALP. On the reverse side of the coin is a form of language use considered as the Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). It is a form of L1, which is acquired in early childhood and meant for social access due to its relatively limited vocabulary. In the post-colonial context of Nigeria, all the local languages are accorded the role of BICS, one that has not only invested them with debilitating social liability but robbed them of pedagogic utilitarian value for not being used as CALP during the initial years of schooling. The direct consequence of this form of language use is subtractive bilingualism, which as Mwamwenda (1996) contends, arises out of a situation where the second language is acquired without accommodating the linguistic skills that have already been developed in the first language. A number of scholars (cf. Jeffreys, 1996; Hornby, 1977; Roy-Campbell, 1996) agree that such situations are evident in societies where one language is considered as having a more prestigious socio-economically determined status than a set of other languages, which are regarded as inferior.

In subtractive bilingualism, the learners' L1 skills are replaced by the L2, thus shutting off the window of useful pedagogic opportunities offered by additive bilingualism. Also, a number of researches on L2 acquisition (cf. Hawes, 1979; Obanya, 1985; Dawes, 1988; Krashen, 1985 in MacLaughlin, 1987) indicates that if a child masters the first language, then learning another language becomes less problematic in that acquired language skills such as speaking, listening, reading and writing can be transferred to the learning of the second language with effortless ease. There are other pedagogic issues, which derive from this form of language use in the neo-colonial Nigerian context, which shall be discussed in subsequent sections.

## 3. Mother tongue disability as 'dividend' of neocolonialism

### 3.1. *The English Language as instrument of neocolonialism*

Perhaps, it is axiomatic to contend that an appreciable degree of political emancipation of Africa from the hegemonic claws of colonialism has been achieved since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Nonetheless, the denotation of the 'cultural bomb' intended by the neocolonial overlords as an insurance against the possibility of an African renaissance in linguistic and cultural terms has continued to take its toll on the African psyche. The renewed struggle for re-colonisation of the African mind remains unabated not so much in terms of open combat, but as a propaganda war. As an undeclared war of culture, of icons, symbols and language struggling over world-views, the prized cause of sustaining the eternal overweening colonial flame and the frustration of lighting an African eternal flame has served a profound psychological purpose. Given that language, as Foucault has repeatedly explained, is power, and those who control the channels of discourse or language, also hold the power, it becomes less surprising that Nigerians, like the rest of Africans firmly hemmed in by the corroding tentacles of neocolonialism are inadvertently investing their children with the inglorious garland of mother tongue disability.

In examining the dominance of English as the problematic in international communication, Tsuda, (1986, 1990, 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1994, 1996) avers that the dominance of English causes serious consequences which include: (1) linguistic and communicative inequality to a great disadvantage of the speakers of languages other than English; (2) discrimination against the non-English-speaking people and those who are not proficient in English; and (3) colonisation of the consciousness of the non-English-speakers, causing them to develop linguistic, cultural, and psychological dependency upon, and identification with, the English, its culture and people. 'Colonisation of the consciousness,' which is one of the ultimate consequences of the hegemonic dominance of English, refers to the mental control of the colonised by the coloniser. Colonisation of the mind occurs as a result of the domination of the coloniser's language over the language of the colonised. Ngugi wa Thiong'o describes how colonialism takes control of the mind of the colonised as follows:

Colonialism's most important area of domination was the mental universe of the colonised, the control, through culture, of how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world... For colonialism this involved two aspects of the same process: the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture, their art, dances, religions, history, geography, education, orature and literature, and the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser. The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonised. (Ngugi, 1986:160)

As Ngũgĩ clearly points out, linguistic domination leads to mental control, which is made possible by a combination of “the destruction or the deliberate undervaluing of a people's culture” and “the conscious elevation of the language of the coloniser.” In the face of this mental controlling, the colonised/dominated usually are coerced into complying with the forces of this psychic ‘seasoning,’ which facilitates the execution of the colonisation of the mind. The impact of this linguistic domination has transformed into a fossilized kind of neocolonial legacy, which parents, emboldened by the post-colonial educational system, have been bequeathing to their children.

### 3.2. *Mother tongue disability of the Nigerian school child*

The results of the national language survey on the pedagogic status of mother tongues in Nigeria (Agbedo, et. al. 2012) clearly demonstrate the cognitive and linguistic disabilities of the Nigerian school child as over 95% of the teachers, parents and pupils not only preferred English to mother tongues as the language of instruction but were also strongly opposed to the teaching of the indigenous languages as a subject. Also, over 95% of the pupils preferred English to their MT either as a medium of instruction or subject. Lack of mother tongue development has been discovered by researches to cause the following pedagogic difficulties: (i) inconsistencies with learning; (ii) difficulty with higher level thinking and skills of analysis and synthesis; (iii) simplistic vocabulary; lacking wide vocabulary in any language; (iv) difficulty retaining information to transfer into long term memory; (v) minimal cohesion of central ideas; (vi) requires additional time to complete tasks; and (vii) problems following through with multi-step tasks. To roll back this mother tongue disability and its pedagogic difficulties, it becomes pertinent to put in place intervention strategies aimed at revalorizing the mother tongues in Nigeria as an agency of decolonisation.

## 4. **Mother tongue education as agent of decolonisation**

### 4.1. *Education and colonisation: The banking model*

The urgency of institutionalizing an effective mother tongue-based system of education derives from the optimistic projections about the realistic prospects of rolling back the encumbering manacles of neocolonialism through the agency and instrumentality of indigenous Nigerian languages. According to Dascal (2009), the metaphor ‘colonisation of the mind’ highlights the following characteristics of the phenomenon: (a) the intervention of an external source – the ‘coloniser’ – in the mental sphere of a subject or group of subjects – the ‘colonised’; (b) this intervention affects central aspects of the mind’s structure, mode of operation, and contents; (c) its effects are long-lasting and not easily removable; (d) there is a marked asymmetry of power between the parties involved; (e) the parties can be aware or unaware of their role of coloniser or colonised; and (f) both can participate in the process voluntarily or involuntarily. This ‘colonisation of the mind’ may take place through the transmission of mental habits and contents by such means of social systems other than the colonial structure as the family, traditions, cultural practices, religion, science, language, fashion, ideology, political regimentation, the media, education, etc.

From the perspective of education as a social means, the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire has analysed a typically mind-colonizing educational paradigm, which he termed the ‘banking’ model. In this paradigm, a commodity (knowledge) is ‘deposited’ by those who have it (the teachers) in the minds of those (the pupils) who don’t have it; the task of both is basically passive: the former’s, to transmit and the latter’s to absorb ‘knowledge’. In his words:

Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. ... In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing. ...The teacher presents himself to his students as their necessary opposite; by considering their ignorance absolute, he justifies his own existence. The students, alienated like the slave in the Hegelian dialectic, accept their ignorance as justifying the teacher’s existence – but, unlike the slave, they never discover that they educate the teacher” Freire (2004: 72).

The ‘banking’ model, continues Dascal, displays the characteristic *epistemic* nature of mind colonisation: What grants the coloniser (in this case the teacher) the right to intervene in the pupil’s mind, thereby colonizing it, is the fact that the former possesses and the latter lacks *knowledge*. This is a commodity that everybody is presumed to

desire by virtue of its epistemic properties, namely *truth* and *universality*, from whence its *applicability* and *utility* derive. In the like manner, parents have the *experience* their children lack, customs and traditions embody *proven methods* of survival in natural and social environments, religion grants *transcendental validity* to human behavior, language provides *reliable tools for mental operations* such as identification, conceptualization, classification, and inference, science supplies the basis of *technologies that work*, and ideologies, of *policies that are presumed to work*. These epistemic properties constitute the epistemic warrants, which yield epistemic legitimacy and thereby endow teacher, family, tradition, religion, language, science or ideology each with its brand of *epistemic authority*.

To become an effective vehicle of mind colonisation, these sources of authority obtain the support of power structures capable, by a variety of means, of transmuting epistemic authority into *social* authority and so to ensure its enforcement. Nonetheless, social authority requires its epistemic authority counterpart for the business of mind colonisation to succeed. The basic constituent of epistemic authority is the implicit acceptance by the colonised of a 'rule of inference' that automatically grants superiority to the coloniser's epistemic warrants or reasons when they clash with those of the colonised. By virtue of this rule, when comparing the coloniser's and his own grounds for holding a specific belief, the colonised will usually tend to prefer the former's reasons and consequently adopt the coloniser's belief. In other words, colonisation of *the mind* is achieved when the colonised adopts the coloniser's epistemic principle of 'invidious comparison'. This means his implicit acceptance of the coloniser's asymmetric distinction between a 'primitive' mind – that of the colonised – and a 'superior' or 'civilized' one – that of the coloniser. It is this acceptance that establishes a sort of implicit agreement between colonised and coloniser which justifies the recurring inference by both to the effect that, in any matter involving cognitive abilities, the former's performance must be presumed to be inferior to the latter.

#### 4.2. Colonisation as deculturalisation

Colonisation, in the dialectical framing of Hotep, is a method designed to gain control of the African mind through "disconnecting Africans from their heritage and culture", which would achieve the colonisers' purposes "because people who are cut off from their heritage and culture are more easily manipulated and controlled". This process of 'deculturalization', alias 'seasoning' (in American slaveholders jargon) and 'brainwashing' (in today's vernacular), comprises three main steps: feel ashamed of yourself, admire and respect the whites, and be rewarded with more indoctrination if successful in the former steps. The main instrument, though not the only one, of deculturalization is 'mis-education', responsible for "destructive effects on the African mind by schools that use a pedagogy and curriculum that deliberately omits, distorts or trivializes the role of African people in and their seminal contributions to world history and culture".

#### 4.3. Approaches to decolonisation

In the typical African setting, the colonisation of mind has been successful because it has yielded acceptance and resignation by the colonised African. However, this success can be reversed by a kind of 'decolonisation movement,' whose hallmarks are outright rejection and resistance. In essence, decolonisation presupposes *inter alia*, (i) the refusal of the colonised to acknowledge the epistemic superiority of the coloniser, (ii) the denial of the alleged asymmetry as groundless because it is based on an 'invidious comparison' procedure that is necessarily biased, (iii) the emphasis on the incompatibility of adopting the coloniser's conceptual framework with the preservation of the colonised identity to guard against the expulsion of the original mind of the colonised, and obliteration of the latter's true or authentic identity. In essence, the aim of decolonisation is to replace the colonizing mental scheme by the original, authentic, pure, ante-colonial mental scheme of the native population. For Fanon (1965; 1967), nothing short of "organized revolt" and violent struggle can upturn the coloniser's epistemic authority and put an end to the colonisation of his mind. It is the fight for national existence, which sets culture moving and opens to it the doors of creation. This fight is decisive not only because it is a fight for "the national consciousness, which is the most elaborate form of culture", but also because it is through it that the nation will free its mind from colonisation and thus pave the way for recovering its epistemic autonomy.

Unlike Fanon, Hotep's (2008) radical decolonisation of the colonised mind focuses on the mental aspects of colonisation, whose central concern "is to overthrow the authority which alien traditions exercise over the African... This requires the dismantling of white supremacist beliefs and the structures which uphold them, in every area of African life". For him, decolonizing the African mind means reversing the 'seasoning' process, which is a constructive way to "frame a psycho-educational approach for cleansing African minds of European or Arab cultural infestation". Carruthers (1999), who calls this war 'intellectual warfare', stresses that it must begin within the mind of the young warriors. As Hotep puts it, "the freedom-seeking African youth must stand up and declare total war on their own colonial thinking. They must attack mercilessly its instruments and agents, deconstruct its intellectual base, and thereby break out of conceptual incarceration".

Rolling back this deculturalization process follows a certain procedure: remove the occupier; cleanse the ground; design an authentic African new-old structure and install it in the freed space to unleash genius and thwart re-colonisation efforts; fill the liberated spaces with those life-sustaining social values, beliefs and customs that enabled their ancestors to establish stable, autonomous families and communities prior to the Arab or European invasions and conquest of their societies. Chinweizu's (1987) view of decolonisation distinguishes between rejecting the allegiance to 'foreign traditions' and advocating that they shouldn't be learned at all. His words: "It must be stressed that decolonisation does not mean ignorance of foreign traditions; it simply means denial of their authority and withdrawal of allegiance from them".

In spite of this subtle dialectical difference, the ultimate aim of decolonisation is the complete demolition of the coloniser's conceptual system, which signals the onset of epistemic revolt that announces the end of mind colonisation. Once the colonised mind realizes that it is the whole system, with its principles, categories, argumentation practices, values, and attitudes that crumbles, rather than just some of its components, it loses its architectonic coherence and can no longer be trusted. Herein lies the value of mother tongue education and revalorisation of indigenous languages.

#### *4.4. Revalorisation of mother tongues*

Revalorisation refers to the new ideology, which brings fresh dimensions to the mother tongue schooling system whereby indigenous languages of ex-colonial states of Africa and Asia are given added impetus in terms of value. It is a kind of deliberate linguistic policy aimed at re-inventing the indigenous languages that hitherto had been relegated to the background by the dominant (linguicist) language policy and investing them with socioeconomic and political powers, which were originally the exclusive preserve of the ex-colonial masters' languages (English, French, Spanish, etc.). A typical case is the implementation of South Africa's post-apartheid policy of 11 official languages. This, according to Benson, (2004) can be seen in the context of a continent-wide movement for revalorisation of indigenous knowledge now known as the African Renaissance (Alexander, 2003), which holds that "cultural freedom and African emancipation...cannot be cultivated, expanded or developed" where the languages in which people are "most creative and innovative" are not languages of instruction (Prah 2003: 17).

The same revalorisation exercise has equally caught on in some Latin American and Asian countries as reported by von Gleich (2003) and Kosonen (2004) respectively. The essential objective has been to invest local languages with added value and by so doing guarantee their development and practical use in education and other official purposes. This presupposes linguistic and material developments, which requires a serious investment of time and resources, along with a commitment to collaboration between linguists, educators and community members. Revalorisation involves expansion of language functions as an aspect of corpus planning, which according to Cooper (1989), has three elements: harmonisation, which determines the degree to which a range of varieties can be considered one language; standardisation, which selects a norm and determines its orthography and grammar; and elaboration or intellectualisation, which adapts the language for more abstract forms of expression like those needed for school learning.

Adapting local languages for pedagogic purposes presupposes that they must go beyond just describing the legends of the forest and be able to handle things such as scientific and technological discourses. In this regard, terminological databases need to be compiled to review all the words and expressions in it and invent new ones to describe the legal, commercial, diplomatic and technological aspects of modern life. The job, no doubt, is huge and costly, but it requires political will to pull through. The main thing is to respect local languages and legitimize them within the school system as well as giving pupils access to a national and foreign language. This requires renewed resource allocation, political will and clearer policy objectives in the direction of revalorisation of local languages to achieve the ultimate end of an effective mother tongue-based education system in Nigeria. As Emenanjo (1985) surmised, if we want education for values and literacy that is functional, all Nigerians have to be re-educated on the place of language in the teaching/learning process. This psychological war has to be waged simultaneously at many fronts in the spirit of the NPE and the 1989 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and the Government Views and Comments on the Findings and Recommendation of the Political Bureau and The Cultural Policy for Nigeria.

#### *4.5. Language and decolonisation*

The major thesis of this work presents functional mother tongue education as a framework for decolonisation and demonstrating its overriding primacy in dismantling what Jirgens (1998) refers to as "a catatonic sense of Kierkegaardian shuttuppedness," which typifies the apocalyptic mindset of the African psyche as a result of centuries of colonialism and neocolonialism. The value of this dialectical perspective derives from our

endorsement of the Foucauldian notion that discourse constitutes itself as power, and those who effectively control a society's discourse, also exert power throughout that society. Also Fanon (1967) in Jinadu (1980: 52) alludes to the cognitive power of language thus:

A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language. What we are getting at becomes plain: Mastery of language affords remarkable power.

Given a typical colonial situation, Fanon, as Jinadu (53) further notes, is of the opinion that in adopting and using the language of the coloniser, colonised individuals not only assume the coloniser's culture, but also reject their own culture. This argument represents a dialectical variant of the linguistic *Weltanschauung* hypothesis traceable to Herder's philosophy of history and which also harks back to the basic notions of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf's *Linguistic Relativity Hypothesis*. The grave semantic import of this premeditated psychic onslaught on Africans becomes even clearer when one overlaps Foucault's theory with Sapir-Whorf's notions of *linguistic relativity* and *linguistic determinism*, which captures the unassailable connections between language and world-view. In the light of this, the implication is that the colonised individuals who willingly or compulsorily accommodate the speech behaviour of the coloniser are *ipso facto* assuming the latter's culture and indeed general world-view. As the chief facilitator and promoter of cultural and political domination, Fanon (1967: 28) illustrates the primacy of language in the colonial situation in the following words:

To speak means to be in a position to use certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but also to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization... Every colonised people – in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the language of the civilizing nation; that is, with the culture of the mother country. The colonised is elevated above his jungle status in proportion to his adoption of the mother country's cultural standards.

Given the foregoing, we strongly believe that the political, economic, and socio-cultural reclamation and reinvention of Nigeria, and indeed Africa would not witness any appreciable progress until the people awaken to the reality of an inescapable option, which Chinweizu (1987) believes, requires outright dismantling of white supremacist beliefs and structures that upholds them, in every area of the black man's life. Our contention in this regard is that language, which encapsulates these 'structures' lies at the heart of the matter. This heart is the arena of struggle for the black man's self-rediscovery. Essentially, it is in this linguistic realm that the decolonisation of the African psyche will occur. To argue to the contrary is to advertise one's ignorance of the fact that language viewed as a cognitive system, is one medium through which the coloniser unleashes cultural alienation and psychological violence on the colonised. From the standpoint of useful ecclesiastical insights, we commend Nigerians (nay, Africans) to seek yee first the Kingdom of linguistic re-awakening and every other thing including decolonisation shall be added unto them.

## 5. Implications for national development

The concept of national development is said to be the ability of a county or countries to improve the social welfare of the people in terms of providing such social amenities like quality education, potable water, transportation infrastructure, medical care, etc. A variant term - sustainable development - is a pattern of economic growth in which resource use aims to meet human needs while preserving the environment so that these needs can be met not only in the present, but also for generations to come (sometimes taught as **ELF**-Environment, Local people, Future. According to United Nations (1987), Brundtland Commission, which coined the term 'sustainable development', conceives 'national development' in terms of development that "meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." Also, sustainability educator, Michael Thomas Needham referred to 'sustainable development' "as the ability to meet the needs of the present while contributing to the future generations' needs." The concept of sustainable development is often broken out into three constituent parts: environmental sustainability, economic sustainability, and sociopolitical sustainability.

In any nation, the national development or its sustainable development is strongly tied to developed human capital, which is the driving force of all other resources. In other words, the socioeconomic and political developments, which are solely dependent on the total input of such a state to human capital capacity building, determines the eventual physical output in planning, development and control mechanism that ultimately give a state an edge over the others in the global economy. The key to human resources development is education. Indeed, the primacy of education in building human capacity as first priority in the fundamental scheme of national policy planning and implementation for the attainment of equitable redistribution of scarce resources and utility maximization to yield greater output for the overall good of the nation, is incontestable. Therefore, investing in young children's education is an essential component for the development of a national economy. Early



opportunities for learning in combination with improved nutrition, increases the likelihood that a child will attend school and become an adult with higher income, better health, lower crime rates, and lower levels of welfare dependence than those who do not receive early childhood development support.

This brings into sharp focus the indispensability of proper early childhood education as the key to success in life. According to Nelson Mandela, “Education is the greatest engine to personal development. It is through education that the daughter of a peasant can become a doctor, that the son of a mineworker can become the head of the mine that the child of a farm worker can become the president of a great nation.” The famous Japanese violin teacher and educationist, Shinichi Suzuki, once expressed a great truism when he said, “The destiny of children lies in the hands of their parents.” The direction and the quality of this destiny are largely determined — by the parents — in the first seven years of the child’s life.

Given that education has been found to have a positive impact on human development, concerted efforts to make it available to all have been a priority for development agencies and governments since the United Nations declared it a human right in 1948. At the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, the international community committed to ensuring the universal right to education for ‘every citizen and every society’, with developing countries making constitutional commitments to provide universal primary education for all (World Declaration on Education For All, 1990). The essential goal of EFA in developing countries is access to basic literacy and numeracy as well as other skills that will improve their lives. According to the EFA Summary Report (2010:4), the six EFA goals are: (i) comprehensive early childhood education and care; (ii) free and compulsory quality primary education for children, especially girls, children in difficult circumstances and those from ethnic minorities; (iii) life skills training for young people and adults; (iv) basic and continuing education for adults, particularly women, and improved adult literacy by 50% by 2015; (v) gender equality in provision of education; (vi) improving the quality of education for improved learning outcomes, particularly in numeracy, literacy and life skills, UNESCO (2000: 15-17).

Herbert Vilakazi defined the function of education thus:

Education serves, first, society; second, the individual person; and, third, the civilization, of which both the person and society are members. It serves society by producing the labour skills needed by society to survive, to reproduce itself, and to develop. Education serves the individual by equipping the person with skills and knowledge that shall enable one to make a living within a particular society. However, the human being “cannot live by bread alone”. Each person has biological, spiritual, social, and cultural needs, including the need for art; the human being also has a need to be developed, not for socio-economic, cultural, or political reasons, but as an end in itself. Education also helps to shape and to add a unique quality to the civilization to which both society and the individual belong. Civilization is the totality of the creations of masses of people who have been living, and intimately linked, together, over a period of many decades and centuries.

These three functions of education, according to Vilakazi, should be the sources and major reference points of any policy on education. In his opinion, correct and effective education policy must deal convincingly with the salient issue of the development of the economy and society towards eliminating underdevelopment and poverty in the lives of all people. Any such meaningful education policy should have as its basic component a language-in-education policy that breathes fresh impetus into mother tongue education.

This disposition, notes Agbedo (1998:78), “draws inspiration from the observations of Oyeleran (1990) and Ansre (1976) about the crucial position, which language, like a pivotal integer in quadratic equation, occupies in the life of a nation.” according to Oyeleran (1990:29), “...no nation has had a breakthrough through the instrumentality of an alien language. Nigeria cannot be an exception. Not to heed this warning can only mean continued stripping of the people of Nigeria to a slave nation, satellite to any nation in whose language the minority controllers process information to the enrichment of their paymasters. Plucking from the same strand of logic, Ansre (1976:6) avers that “any country, which takes seriously the need to deploy its human resources maximally cannot to under-use such resources. Much less can it afford to do so on linguistic grounds. If the language or languages selected to be used for resource exploitation and wealth acquisition are those mastered only by a small minority of the population, the under-development and emergence of an exploiting and wealthy minority can be the only result.”

## 6. Conclusion

It has been established that by using the mother tongue, learners learn to think, communicate, and acquire an intuitive understanding of grammar. The mother tongue opens the door, not only to its own grammar, but to all grammars, given that it awakens the potential for universal grammar that lies within all normal human beings. Appropriate language-in-education (LiE) policies that enable teachers to instruct in the language a child speaks most at home and understands well enough to internalize the academic knowledge improves pupils' critical engagement with content, foster an environment of mutual learning and improve inclusion. Learners who understand the language they are instructed in are more likely to engage meaningfully with content, question what they do not understand and even enjoy the challenge of new things. Among other things, the Ife SYPP, according to Emenanjo (1985), has proved the UNESCO axiom that people learn faster and better in their L1.

The Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) (2006:3) notes that people learn best when they are taught in a language they understand well. UNESCO (2005:1) adds that, "...one of the biggest obstacles to *Education For All* remains in place: the use of foreign languages for teaching and learning". Most supporters of mother tongue-based learning are agreed that a child's home language can effectively be used as a language of instruction in the early years of their schooling as a bridge to learning a foreign language. Mother tongue-based bilingual education not only increases access to skills but also raises the quality of basic education by facilitating classroom interaction and integration of prior knowledge and experiences with new learning. It was against this backdrop that a UNESCO paper (2003), urged schooling systems to strike a balance between enabling people to use their local languages and providing them with access to literacy in the national language.

Nonetheless, a national survey research on the status of selected local languages reveals that they 'enjoy' zero pedagogic significance. The respective school authorities build the English language island, which is feared to be in constant danger of being flooded by the surging sea of the mother tongues. The explicit pedagogic policy has been to fight back this sea, build dams against it, and stem its overreaching tide. This 'English-only' policy diminishes the established gains of mother tongue education; contravenes the statutory provisions of Nigeria's Child's Rights Act of 2003, the Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in Resolution 44/25, World Declaration on Education For All (1990), and therefore constitutes a grave pedagogic challenge to early childhood development of a typical Nigerian school child. This development necessitates a rethink of the language teaching methodology, which fails to appreciate the mother tongue as a cognitive and pedagogic resource but finds absolutism in the dogma of monolingualism. This calls for a radical paradigm shift in language teaching methodology that supports the revalorisation of the indigenous languages as the standard medium of instruction in early childhood education in Nigeria. In other words, this necessitates a rethink of the submersion schooling system with a view to replacing it with an immersion system, an educational model that encourages mutual learning and validates a child's home knowledge, culture and language.

In so doing, it would be desirable to dismantle a model that in the words of Kuper (2003:89) "disregard the experiences of learners, censor their knowledge and confirm them as objects for manipulation" and enthrone one that not only revalorises the Nigerian school child's mother tongue but also, as Obama (1995:258) avers, gives a child "an understanding of himself, his world, his culture, his community...that's what makes a child hungry to learn – the promise of being part of something, of mastering his environment". In this way, the Nigerian school child would be eminently predisposed to human capacity building process that ultimately leads to sustainable national development.

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