

Mother Tongue Education and Pedagogic Disability of the Nigerian School Child

Chris Uchenna Agbedo¹* Larry I. Abata-Ahura², Ebere Celina Krisagbedo³ Chijioke Edward⁴

1. Department of Linguistics Igbo & Other Nigerian Languages, University of Nigeria, Nsukka Nigeria

2. Department of Tiv Language Studies, College of Education, Katsina-Ala, Benue State Nigeria

3. Department of English & Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka Nigeria

4. Department of English & Literary Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka Nigeria

*E-mail of the corresponding author: info@linguisticsafrikana.com Tel: +2348(0)36868498

Abstract

This paper examines the status of mother tongues in pre-primary and primary schools in Nigeria, the attendant pedagogic disability of the school child, and the need to formulate and implement intervention strategies for the revalorization of the local languages as medium of instruction in classroom environment. The results of a national survey research on the pedagogic status of a sample of Nigerian languages in selected pre-primary and primary schools in seven States reveal that they 'enjoy' near zero pedagogic significance. This 'English-only' policy diminishes the established gains of mother tongue education; contravenes the statutory provisions of Child's Rights Act of 2003; and constitutes a grave pedagogic challenge to early childhood development of a typical Nigerian school child. This paper argues for an L1-based system that provides a bridge to acquiring literacy in languages of wider communication.

Keywords: Mother-tongue, school child, revalorization, languages, submersion, immersion, Nigeria

1. Introduction

UNESCO defines early childhood as the period from birth to eight years old. As a significant period of remarkable brain growth, these years constitute the critical foundation for cognitive, linguistic and general developmental milestones. UNESCO advocates Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programmes that attend to health, nutrition, security and learning and which provide for children's holistic development. 'Good start, grow smart' is the catchy slogan of the Bush Administration's Early Childhood Initiative, which stresses the overriding importance of early childhood cognitive development. A child's cognitive development during early childhood, which includes building skills such as pre-reading, language, vocabulary, and numeracy, begins from the moment a child is born.

Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development equally refers to experts' emphasis on the importance of early childhood development. According to James Heckman, "Learning starts in infancy, long before formal education begins, and continues throughout life. Early learning begets later learning and early success breeds later success, just as early failure breeds later failure. "Early childhood interventions of high quality have lasting effects on learning and motivation." For Fraser Mustard, "The early years of human development establish the basic architecture and function of the brain." In the opinion of Clyde Hertzman, "The interplay of the developing brain with the environment is the driving force of development." The 5-point key facts of the fact sheet on early child development released in August, 2009 suggests *inter alia* that, early childhood is the most important phase for overall development throughout the lifespan; brain and biological development during the first years of life is highly influenced by an infant's environment; early experiences determine health, education and economic participation for the rest of life; every year, more than 200 million children under five years old fail to reach their full cognitive and social potential; and there are simple and effective ways for families and caregivers to ensure optimal child development.

Many factors can disrupt early child development. One of the four risk factors that have been identified to affect at least 20–25% of infants and young children in developing countries (Nigeria inclusive) is inadequate stimulation or learning opportunities. Considerable evidence exists that high-quality early childhood education programmes for children from birth to age five can have long-lasting, positive consequences for children's success in school and later in life. The more stimulating the early environment, the more a child develops and learns. When children spend their early years in a less stimulating, or less emotionally and physically supportive environment, brain development is affected and leads to cognitive, social and behavioural delays. Later in life, these children will have difficulty dealing with complex situations and environments. The foregoing, which derives largely from 'submersion' system of education in most commonwealth African nations, imposes mother tongue disability on the school child and by extension poses grave challenges to early childhood development in such nations such as Nigeria.

According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2000), instruction through a language that learners do not speak has been called 'submersion' because it is analogous to holding learners under water without teaching them how to swim. Learners in submersion classrooms, as Benson (2004:2) notes, "are forced to sit silently or repeat mechanically,

leading to frustration and ultimately repetition, failure and dropout". The use of a foreign language in schools, in Freirian terms (Freire, 1973:47-9), "makes children objects of their world, rather than subjects."

Yet, despite the poor learning outcomes associated with submersion education, it is wrongly regarded by some researchers (notably, Trudell 2005:239; Kosonen and Young 2009:13) as the fastest way to teach children the L2. The foregoing has always informed the policy thrust of submersion system of education being implemented in nearly all pre-primary and primary schools in Nigeria as revealed by the national language survey research undertaken to determine the extent to which mother tongues are used as medium of instruction and/or taught as a subject. This prevailing situation imposes pedagogic constraints on the school child and by extension poses grave challenges to the early childhood development of the Nigerian school child.

In the sections that follow, we examine the concept of mother tongue education and its pedagogic significance, the implications for early childhood development in Nigeria, present and discuss the national language survey research, and recommend possible intervention strategies for redressing mother tongue disability, which submersion system of education imposes on the Nigerian school child.

2. Mother tongue system of education

In this section, we examine the concept of mother tongue education, statutory supports for the L1 schooling system, and some benchmark studies.

2.1 Mother-tongue education: Conceptual explications

Jean Paul Friedrich Richter (1806) had in a statement, rated the power of mother tongue and its inestimable pedagogical value: "All the praise that is heaped on the classical languages as an educational tool is due in double measure to the mother tongue, which should more justly be called the 'Mother of Languages'; every new language can only be established by comparison with it..." Mother tongue refers to the language that a human learns from birth. In other words, it is the language in which the child undergoes language acquisition process. It is possible for a child to be exposed to two languages from birth in which case the child would likely grow up to acquire two languages simultaneously. These two languages so acquired and developed through early childhood then become the child's mother tongues or first languages.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) uses several definitions of "mother tongue" in her arguments for the Children's Declaration of Human Rights, and notes that the particular definitions used by institutions can affect the type of recognition and legislation that minority groups will receive. "The definition," according to her, "gives us an opportunity to assess whether minority and majority tongues have the same rights, or whether dominant mother tongues are granted more institutional support." She defines mother tongue from four perspectives: (i) origin ("the language one learned first (the language one has established the first long-lasting verbal contacts in), (ii) identification ("the language one identifies with as a native speaker, or the language one has been identified with as a native speaker, by others."), (iii) competence ("the language one knows best"), and (iv) function ("the language one uses most"). Skutnabb-Kansas recognizes three theses concerning these definitions: (i) the same person can have different mother-tongues, depending on which definition of the term is used; (ii) a person's mother tongue can change during his/her lifetime, even several times, according to all definitions except that of origin; (iii) the mother-tongue definitions can be organized hierarchically according to the degree of linguistic human rights awareness of a society.

In the light of the ensuing fluidity and amorphousness that tend to characterize the definitions, Skutnabb-Kansas calls for a redefinition "so as to allow for situations where parents and children may not have the same mother-tongue by origin; for situations where lost languages are being reclaimed as mother-tongues by identification; and for fluid multilingual situations where multilingualism is the mother-tongue, rather than one or two discrete languages." In addition, what is accepted as somebody's mother-tongue is crucially dependent on who has the right to define it. Mother-tongues are relations to be negotiated, not only characteristics that people possess, and relations depend on who has more power to define, and, later, legislate according to those definitions, she further argues.

2.2 National and international legislations and conventions

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 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 recognises 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.

2.3 Benchmark studies of mother tongue schooling system

A review of literature (Baker, 2001; Cummins, 2000; CAL, 2001; Benson, 2004a&b; Trudell, 2005; SIL, 2006; UNESCO, 2006; Kosonen, 2009; Young, 2009; Baker, 2001; Modiano, 1973; Fafunwa et al., 1975; Akinnaso, 1993; Williamson, 1976; Gonzalez & Sibayan, 1988; Dutcher, 1995) shows that mother tongue-based bilingual as opposed to monolingual schooling offers more significant pedagogical advantages, the summary of which is provided by Benson (2004)

In effect, the learners’ outcomes of the mother tongue-based bilingual schooling aforementioned indicate the progress made by traditionally marginalized pupils in the process of becoming literate in a familiar language; gaining access to communication and literacy skills in the L2; having a language and culture that are valued by formal institutions like the school; feeling good about the school and the teacher; being able and even encouraged to demonstrate what they know; participating in their own learning; having the courage to ask questions in class (students) or ask the teacher what is being done (parents); attending school and having an improved chance of succeeding (all children and especially girls); and not being taken advantage of (all children and especially girls).

It equally needs to be pointed out that empirical studies of mother tongue-based bilingual system of education in developing countries began appearing in the 1970s and still form the basis of what is being done in the field in contemporary times. Modiano’s (1973) study in the Chiapas highlands of Mexico found that indigenous children efficiently transferred literacy skills from the L1 to the L2 and out-performed monolingual Spanish speakers. The Six-Year Yoruba Medium Primary Project (Fafunwa et al., 1975; Akinnaso, 1993;) demonstrated that a full six-year primary education in the mother tongue with the L2 taught as a subject was not only viable but gave better results than all-English schooling. The Rivers Readers Project (Williamson, 1976) showed how mother tongue materials of reasonable quality could be developed even where resources were scarce and even for previously undeveloped languages with small numbers of speakers. Large-scale research on Filipino-English bilingual schooling in the Philippines (Gonzalez & Sibayan, 1988) found a positive relationship between achievement in the two languages, and found that low student performance overall was not an effect of bilingual education but of other factors, especially the low quality of teacher training.

More recent works demonstrate similar findings and goes beyond these to illustrate the positive aspects of mother tongue-based schooling system listed above. Specifically, it has been shown that (i) it facilitated bilingualism and biliteracy (See Ouane, 2003; Komarek, 1997; Dutcher, 1995; Ramirez et al., 1991; Thomas & Collier, 2002; Williams, 1998; CAL, 2001; Hovens, 2002; 2003); (ii) facilitated classroom participation, positive effect, and increased self-esteem (see ADAE, 1996; Dalby, 1985; Dutcher, 1995; Richardson, 2001; Krashen, 1999; Urzagaste, 1999); (iii) engineered valorization of the home language and culture (see d’Emilio, 2001; Benson, 2001); (iv) increased girls’ and parental participation (see Cummins 2000; Dutcher, 1995; Benson, 2002; Hovens, 2003; Chowdhury, 1993).

3. The national language survey

3.1 Purpose of study

The national survey research was intended to ascertain the status of mother tongues in the teaching and learning process in the pre-primary and primary levels of education in Nigeria; determine the extent to which they are used either as medium of instruction or subject; ascertain the attitude of parents, teachers, and pupils towards the mother tongue and the extent to which they value it as the medium of instruction. The study drew inspiration from the empirical findings, which indicate the pedagogic primacy of the mother tongue in the education of bilingual children during the early years of schooling. Items in the questionnaire are designed to elicit answers from the teachers, parents, and pupils.

3.2 The sample study

This study utilized interviews and questionnaires in eliciting data from teachers, parents, and pupils. A sample of 156 teachers, parents/guardians, and pupils respectively drawn from 39 pre-primary and primary schools across Nigeria was used for the national survey research. Respondents were purposively selected from urban and semi-urban schools in the states of Bayelsa, Benue, Cross River, Enugu, Katsina, Kogi, and Ondo. A sample of indigenous languages used included Bette, Ebie, Efik, Hausa, Idoma, Igala, Igbo, Igede, Izon, and Yoruba. For Bette and Efik, the following schools in Obudu Cross River State were used: Demonstration/Nursery & Primary School, Federal College of Education; The Rock Foundation

Nursery/Primary School; and Handmaid International Nursery/Primary School. (Only this school offers Efik from Transition – Primary one – five as a subject). Six schools in Yenegoa Bayelsa State were used for Ebie and Izon. They include Community Primary School, Etegwé; Community Primary School, Okutukutu; Community Primary School, Agudama-Ebie. These three schools are in Ebie-speaking communities of Yenegoa but none of the schools use it as medium of instruction or teach it as subject. Even Izon, which is a more developed language than Ebie is not used to teach or is taught as a subject. Other schools include Winners International Academy, Agudama, Fun-Akpo Academy, Okutukutu; and Ebisam Group of Schools, Akenfa. None of these schools except one featured Izon in their time-table. In Fun-Akpo Academy, Izon has one slot of 40 minutes on Wednesday for Primary 1-3 and the same time frame on Friday for Primary 4-6.

In Katsina Katsina State, three schools - Saldefi International School, Kiddies International School; and Hazel International School – were used to ascertain the status of Hausa. For Idoma, the following schools in Otukpo, Benue State were used: Unique School & Nursery Primary School, Holy Child Nursery/Primary School; and Foundation Nursery/Primary School. None of the schools featured Idoma as a subject or medium of instruction in the timetable. For Igede, three schools in Oju Benue State were used. They include Emmanuel International Academy, Shalom Kids Academy, and Future Ambassador Nursery/Primary School. Six schools in Ankpa and Idah Kogi State were used for Igala. They include Ufedojo Nursery/Primary School, Olujo, Iqra Nursery/Primary School Owele, Redeemer Nursery/Primary School, (all in Ankpa), Baba Yade Nursery/Primary School, Bekky Nursery/Primary School, and Victory Nursery/Primary School, (all in Idah). None of these schools use Igala as medium of instruction or teach it as a subject at all levels of pre-primary and primary schools.

In Nsukka Enugu State, six schools were used. They are University Staff School, University of Nigeria, Hillcrest Nursery/Primary School, St Cyprian's Nursery/Primary School, Shalom Academy, NAUW Daycare/Nursery School, and Graceville Elementary School (all in Nsukka). A total of nine schools in Makurdi, Aliade, and Gboko Benue State were used to ascertain the status of Tiv. The schools are: Tiny Tots School, Nativity Nursery/Primary School, International School, (all in Makurdi), Anty Ayam Nursery/Primary School, and Living Seed Academy Glory Nursery/ Primary School (all in Gboko), Mt. Saint Michael's Nursery/Primary School, L.K. Anja Memorial Nursery/Primary School, and Trinity Nursery/Primary School (all in Aliade). Again, none of these schools offer Tiv as a subject or use it as medium of instruction. The case of schools in Gboko is peculiar given that a greater percentage of the teachers are Ghanaians. This rules out the possibility of adopting Tiv as medium of instruction even if the managements of these schools are favourably disposed to mother tongue (Tiv)-based bilingual schooling.

Finally, in Ondo town of Ondo State, three schools were used to determine the extent to which Yoruba is used as medium of instruction and/or taught as a subject. The schools used are Confib Nursery/Primary School, Alliac Nursery/Primary School, and St. Raphael's Nursery/Primary School. At the Nursery/Kindergarten level, Yoruba does not feature in the time-table as a subject nor used as medium of instruction. At the Primary level, Yoruba features in the lesson schedule as a subject.

On the whole, forty-three pre-primary and primary schools were used. Convenience sampling method was used to select three pupils aged between 4 and 8 from each school, totaling 129. The same method was used in selecting the parents and teachers of equal number, that is, 129. Questionnaires were used to elicit responses from the parents and teachers. For non-literate parents and pupils who were yet to develop reading and writing skills, direct face-to-face interviews were used. The interview schedule for pupils that were yet to develop reading and writing skills was structured and intended to find out children's language preferences in speaking, reading and writing. It was meant to answer the research question on the perceptions and attitudes of pupils on the use of L1 as a medium of instruction. Interviews, note Best and Kahn (1993), are particularly appropriate in getting responses from young children. Given the data sample and respondents, the structured questions enabled data to be analyzed and compared easily. Reliability was ensured because the questionnaire was structured to allow for greater uniformity in the way questions were asked. Similar questions were asked of teachers, and parents and responses were compared, thereby catering for reliability.

3.3 Results

The results of the analysis showed that 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. Specifically, virtually all the 129 teachers in the 43 schools used agreed that the mother tongues (MTs) are neither used as the medium of instruction nor taught as subjects in their schools. Also, most parents agreed that they do not use the MT as a medium of interaction at home and would not support its use in the school for their children. Over 90% of the pupils preferred English to their MT either as medium of instruction or subject. Most striking of the findings is that all the pupils testified that they are given various types of punishment by their teachers whenever they spoke their MT in the class. In essence, the picture, which emerges from this survey, suggests that the mother tongue is of very low value and therefore has no pedagogic significance.

4. Mother tongue disability and pedagogic implications

Ntaeshe is a 7-year old girl brought up in an English-Igbo bilingual home in Nsukka urban area. However, she developed greater proficiency in English than Igbo because her parents communicated with her most often in English. Later, the parents realized their mistakes and made efforts to redress the anomaly by providing her opportunities to use not only Igbo but their own Ezikeoba variety of the language. For Ntaeshe, the transition from English to Igbo was quite turbulent as all her spirited attempts to grasp the basics of the mother tongue came off too diffidently to make any meaning. When sent on an errand in Igbo as medium of instruction, she would start off only to detour shortly after and demand for interpretation of the message in English. One day, Ntaeshe's infantile tantrums stirred the ire of her father to no end. In anger, the man scolded her sternly in the Ezikeoba variety of Igbo thus: 'An, o shin g we?' In simple language, the man wanted to know from which lineage Ntaeshe inherited stupidity that predisposed her to behave in such a foolish manner. Ntaeshe could not decode the message on the spot. Hours later in her quiet and sober moment, she sat down ruminating over what her father's question: An, o shin g we – 'This meat in you is from where?' Obviously, this literal translation was meant to probe into the meaning of the sentence without success.

The foregoing speaks volumes of mother tongue disability of Nigerian school children and the concomitant pedagogic implications. 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.

Conversely, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) refers to research results, which affirm that mother tongue-based bilingual education fosters higher general intelligence, cognitive flexibility, divergent thinking, creativity, sensitivity to and capacity to interpret feedback cues, nonverbal cues and meanings, metalinguistic awareness, and efficiency in learning further, additional languages. To roll back this mother tongue disability and its pedagogic difficulties, it is pertinent to initiate a number of intervention strategies, including but not limited to revalorization of indigenous languages, and mother tongued-based family language plans.

5. Intervention strategies

Given that the 'English-only' policy diminishes the established gains of mother tongue education; contravenes the statutory provisions of Child's Rights Act of 2003; and constitutes a grave pedagogic challenge to early childhood development of a typical Nigerian school child, it becomes necessary to hammer out possible intervention strategies to re-invent the mother tongue as a cognitive and pedagogic resource.

5.1 Revalorization of indigenous languages

Revalorization 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 revalorization 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 revalorization 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. Revalorization involves expansion of language functions as an aspect of corpus planning, which according to Cooper (1989), has three elements: harmonization, which determines the degree to which a range of varieties can be considered one language; standardization, which selects a norm and determines its orthography and grammar; and elaboration or intellectualization, which adapts the language for more abstract forms of expression like those needed for school learning.

5.2 Family language plan

This mother tongue-based family language blueprint provides some tips for families such as Ntaeshe's that can support the development and strengthening of the mother tongue, which will ultimately also enhance additional languages that are learned. By implementing, and remaining consistent with a chosen Family Language Plan (FLP), one is guiding his/her child (or children) in a positive language learning direction. Before implementing, and remaining consistent with a chosen Family Language Plan (FLP), one is guiding his/her child (or children) in a positive language learning direction. Before deciding on a particular FLP, it is pertinent to determine the number of languages that the family has; the linguistic goals, which the children are meant to achieve; the values, which the language(s) have for the children; and what one foresees for his child educationally in the future. Also, determine the language plan that works best for the family and put it into action, thus including everyone who is affected into the decision-making process and execution of the plan. In specific terms, Heather Vlach has recommended certain language learning tips:

5.2.1 Make a plan and set a goal

Decide which FLP suits your family situation and your child. Think about your mother tongue and the research that supports preserving and enhancing this language. Determine the level of language ability you want your child to develop in both the mother tongue and language learned at school.

5.2.2 Your commitment

After you have chosen Family Language Plan strategy, please be consistent with it! Changes will not occur overnight, and you may even find that your child will rebel at the linguistic plan. Be persistent, perseverant, and patient!

5.2.3 Speak your language properly

When talking to your child, speak your language articulately, using rich vocabulary, and without the use of 'baby talk'. Use the appropriate names and create whole, articulate sentences. Children can handle this, and develop stronger language skills (In multiple languages) as a result. You can develop Mother Tongue skills by reading, talking and writing in your native language.

5.2.4 Different topics

Talk about everything (In your mother tongue, of course)! Speak with your child about what is happening around you, encourage your child to ask questions, and take the time to answer them too. Remember, knowledge, skills and concepts that are learned in the native language can easily be transferred into another language. However, if no concepts are learned in the mother tongue, the vocabulary and literacy of the child will be very limited - in all the languages that he/she is studying.

5.2.5 Different means

Follow up your Family Language Plan with music, books, stories, tapes and computer software in your mother tongue language. You can also create native language games according to your child's development, and make your own collection of rhymes and riddles that can be used over and over again.

5.2.6 Broad range of conversation partners

Show your child that other people speak your language too. Your child needs to hear the language from many different speakers (Old, young, male and female voices, various accents and dialects, and in different media such as the telephone or radio). Enlist the help of family members to help support this. Also, mix with other people from the community who speak your language to expose your child to different situations and environments. This allows the child to learn how adults communicate, as he/she has the opportunity to listen to communication between same language speakers.

5.2.7 Take your language to school

Let teachers, other parents and children at your school know what language(s) your family speaks. It is important to know that teachers support your mother tongue, and often encourage parents to participate in creating a multicultural climate with global students through projects and information about your culture and language. Children feel a deeper sense of cultural pride and self-awareness when they know that their mother tongue is valued both at home and school.

5.2.8 Praise your child and have fun

Continue to positively nurture and praise your child's growth and development both at home and school. Support your child at his/her own pace. Focus on the fun involved and avoid stress. Enjoy and praise every little progress and focus on small success.

5.3 *The gains of a functional family language planning*

The long-term net-effect of adopting and implementing a functional FLP such as Vlach's paradigm is to achieve age-appropriate competency in both the mother tongue and the L2, that is, English language. By fully developing both languages, our children will become 'balanced bilinguals' and reap such positive cognitive benefits as strong level of creativity; solid problem-solving ability; superior awareness of language properties; greater capacity for inventiveness and creativity with oral and written language; greater sensitivity to grammatical functions; heightened respect for different languages and cultures, creating learners with a more global approach to life; higher performance rate than monolinguals on tests of intelligence and tests of fluency, flexibility, and originality; and greater marketability in the professional world. Furthermore, such family language plan creates opportunity to maximize the utilitarian and pedagogic values of mother tongue as has been attested to by a number of researches, (Alba *et. al.*, 2002; Cardenas-Hagen, *et. al.*, 2007; Cummins, 2003; 2007; Guiberson, *et. al.*, 2006; Konhert, *et. al.*, 2005; Kuo & Lai, 2007; Lemhofer *et. al.*, 2008; Paneque, 2006; Papatheodorou, 2007; Restrepo & Gray, 2007; Weigel, Lowman & Martin, 2007).

6. Conclusion

It is an established fact that appropriate language-in-education (L.i.E) policies that enable teachers to instruct in the language a child speaks most at home and understands well enough to learn academic content through, that is their mother tongue, as they learn a different language 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. 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.

Teaching in a child's home language however means that the learning of new concepts does not have to be postponed until learners grasp L2. As a result, teachers and learners are able to negotiate meanings together, thus competency in L2 is gained through mutual interaction rather than memorisation and rote learning. Cummins (1979: 233) proposes the interdependence theory to explain the positive transfer of literacy skills from L1 to L2. He argues that the level of literacy competence in L2 that a child attains is partially a function of the level of competence the child has in L1 at the time L2 teaching begins intensively. Thus, if an education system submerges learners in L2 without first trying to further develop the skill they already have in L1, the school risks impeding their competency in L2 for years to come, while also limiting continued, autonomous development of their L1. This is because the sustained use of a foreign language of instruction in schools negatively impacts the way children learn to think, thus interfering with their cognitive development. 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. The use of a mother tongue elevates indigenous languages' status and usefulness, which, as Benson (2004b) observed, has the potential to improve social relations and political participation as well as education.

The results of the national language survey research on the pedagogic status of local languages speak volumes of mother tongue disability of typical Nigerian school children. The prevailing situation imposes pedagogic disability on the Nigerian school children and by implication constitutes formidable challenges to early childhood development in Nigeria. This calls for a radical paradigm shift in language teaching methodology that supports the revalorization 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. Such model, as UNESCO (2006:2) observes, "provides long-term benefits like higher self-esteem, greater self-confidence and higher aspirations for schooling and life". According to Cummins (1979:225), "the immersion teacher is familiar with the child's language and cultural background and can therefore respond appropriately to his needs..." The role of educators, as Gacheche (2010) observes, is to offer children instruments to enable them to critically understand the value of their experiences and express them through reading and writing. To adequately express their experiences and articulate their knowledge, children require an environment that uses the language they speak. It is in this regard that we call on the Federal and State Governments and indeed all major stakeholders in education to rethink the submersion model of schooling. In so doing, it would be desirable to effect a paradigm shift from 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" to one that not only revalorizes 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”.

References

- ADAE (1996). A synopsis of research findings on languages of instruction and their policy implications for education in Africa. Working paper for the Meeting of African Ministers of Education and the Seminar on Languages of Instruction, Accra, Ghana, August 26-30 1996. Accra: Association for the Development of African Education/Working Group on Educational Research and Policy Analysis.
- Akinnaso, F. (1993). Policy and experiment in mother tongue literacy in Nigeria. *International Review of Education* (43), 18-29
- Alba, R., Logan, J., Lutz, A., Stults, B. (2002). Only English by the third generation? Loss and preservation of the mother tongue among the grandchildren of contemporary immigrants. *Demography*, 39(3), 467-484
- Alexander, N. (2003). *The African renaissance and the use of African languages in tertiary education* PRAESA Occasional Papers No. 13. Cape Town: PRAESA.
- Baker, C. (2001). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (3rd. edition) Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Benson, C. (2001). Final report on bilingual education. Results of the External Evaluation of the Experiment in Bilingual Schooling in Mozambique (PEBIMO) and some results from bilingual adult literacy experimentation. Education Division Documents No. 8. Stockholm: Sida.
- Benson, C. (2002). Bilingual education in Africa: An exploration of encouraging connections between language and girls' schooling. In M. Melin (Ed.). *Education—a way out of poverty?* Research presentations at the Poverty Conference 2001. New Education Division Documents No. 12. Stockholm: Sida, 79-95.
- Benson, C. (2004). The importance of mother tongue-based schooling for educational quality. Commissioned study for EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, Centre for Research on Bilingualism, Stockholm University
- Benson, C. (2004a). Bilingual schooling in Mozambique and Bolivia: From experimentation to implementation. *Language policy* 3, 47-66.
- Benson, C. (2004b). Do we expect too much from bilingual teachers? Bilingual teaching in developing countries. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 7: 2, Special issue: (Re)writing bilingualism and the bilingual educator’s knowledge base.
- Best, J. W. and Kahn, J. V. (1993). *Research in education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Butzkamm, W. (2003). We only learn language once. The role of the mother tongue in FL classrooms: death of a dogma. *Language Learning Journal*, Winter, No. 28, 29-39
- CAL (2001). *Expanding educational opportunity in linguistically diverse societies*. Washington DC: Center for Applied Linguistics. [Online] Available: <http://www.cal.org/pubs/ford/eeolds.html> (June 29, 2010)
- Cardenas-Hagen, E., Carlson, C.D, Pollard-Durodola, S.D.. (2007). The cross linguistic transfer of early literacy skills: The role of initial I1 and I2 skills and language of instruction. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 38(3), 249-259
- Chowdhury, K. (1993). Barriers and solutions to closing the gender gap. *Human Resources Development and Operations Policy* No. 18. [Online] Available: <http://www.worldbank.org> (March 13, 2009) Washington: World Bank.
- Cooper, R. (1989). *Language planning and social change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Cummins, J. (1991). Interdependence of first- and second-language proficiency in bilingual children. In E. Bialystok, (ed), *Language processing in bilingual children* (pp. 70-89) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cummins, J. (2007). Promoting literacy in multilingual contexts. [Online] Available: from <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/Cummins.pdf> (March 31, 2008)
- Cummins, J. (1979). Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Educational Research* 49 (2), 222-251. [Online] Available: <http://rer.sagepub.com/content/49/2/222.full.pdf+html> (June 26, 2010).
- Cummins, J. (2003). *Bilingual children’s mother tongue: Why is it important for education?* SPROG Forum, (15-20)
- Dalby, D. (1985). *The educational use of African languages in Sub-Saharan Africa: The state of the art* Paris: UNESCO.
- d’Emilio, L. (2001). *Voices and processes toward pluralism: Indigenous education in Bolivia*. Education Division Documents No. 9. Stockholm: Sida.

- Dutcher, N. (1995). *The use of first and second languages in education: A review of international experience*. Pacific Island Discussion Paper Series No.1. Washington DC: World Bank.
- Fafunwa, A., Macauley, J. & Soyinka, J. (Eds.). (1989). *Education in mother tongue. The Ife primary education research project (1970-1978)*. Ibadan: University Press.
- Fishman, J. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Freire, P. (1973) *Education for critical consciousness*. New York: The Seabury Press.
- Gacheche, K. (2010). Challenges in implementing a mother tongue-based language-in-education policy: Policy and practice in Kenya. *POLIS Journal* Vol.4, Winter, 1-45
- Grossmann K. G. (2005). *Encyclopedia on early childhood development* Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development
- Guiberson, M.M., Barrett, K.C., Jancosek, E.G., Itano, C. Y. (2006). Language maintenance and loss in preschool-age children of Mexican immigrants: Longitudinal study. *Communication Disorders Quarterly*, 28, (1), (4-17)
- Gonzalez, A. & Sibayan, B. (1988). *Evaluating bilingual education in the Philippines (1974-1985)*. Manila: Linguistic Society of the Philippines.
- Hovens, M. (2002). Bilingual education in West Africa: Does it work? *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 5: 5, 249-266.
- Hovens, M. (2003). *Enseignement primaire bilingue: Deux expériences ouest-africaines. [Primary bilingual instruction: Two West African experiences.]* Niamey: Albasa.
- Kohnert, K., Yim, D., Nett, K., Kan, P.F., Duran, L. (2005). Intervention with linguistically diverse preschool children: A focus on developing home language(s). *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, 36, 251-263.
- Komarek, K. (1997). *Mother tongue education in Sub-Saharan countries: Conceptual and strategic considerations*. Bildungsreport nr. 74. Eschborn: GTZ.
- Kosonen, K. (2004). Local languages in education in Southeast Asia: Comparative analysis. Paper presented at annual conference of CIES, Salt Lake City UT, March 9-12. [Online] Available: <http://cies.byu.edu/papers.aspx> (April 13, 2012)
- Kosonen K. and Young, C. (2009). Introduction. In M. Redmond, (Ed.). *Mother tongue as bridge language of instruction: Policies and experiences in Southeast Asia*. Bangkok: The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Secretariat, 8-21.
- Krashen, S. (1999). *Condemned without a trial: Bogus arguments against bilingual education*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.
- Kuo, M.M. & Lai, C.C. (2007). Linguistics across culture: The impact of culture on second language learning. *Journal of Foreign Language Instruction*, 1-10.
- Kuper, W. (2003). The necessity of introducing mother tongues in education systems of developing countries. In A. Ouane (Ed.). *Towards a multilingual culture of education* (pp. 89-102) [Online] Available: <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/publications/uiestud41.shtml> (May 2, 2012).
- Lemhofer K., Dijkstra, T., Schriefers, H., Baayen, R.H., Grainger, J., Zwitserlood, P. (2008). Native language influences on word recognition in a second language: A mega-study. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory, and Cognition* 34(1), 12-31.
- Modiano, N. (1973). *Indian education in the Chiapas Highlands* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Ndamba, G. T. (2008). Mother tongue usage in learning: An examination of language preferences in Zimbabwe. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.2, no.4, June 2008, 170-188
- Obama, B. (1995). *Dreams from my father: A story of race and inheritance*. New York: Times Books.
- Ouane, A. (ed) (2003). *Towards a multilingual culture of education*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education. [Online] Available: <http://www.unesco.org/education/uie/publications/uiestud41.shtml> (May 4, 2012)
- Paneque, O.M. (2006). Good intentions, bad advice for bilingual families. *Childhood education*, 171-174.
- Papatheodorou, T. (2007). Supporting the mother tongue: Pedagogical approaches. *Early child development and care*, 177(6 & 7), 751-765.
- Prah, K. (2003). Going native: Language of instruction for education, development and African emancipation. In Brock-Utne, B., Desai, Z. and M. Qorro (Eds.). *Language of instruction in Tanzania and South Africa (LOITASA)*, 14-34. Dar-es-Salaam: E & D Limited.
- Ramirez, J., Yuen, S. & Ramey, D. (1991). *Final report: Longitudinal study of structured English immersion strategy, Early-exit and late-exit transitional bilingual education programs for language-minority children*. Washington DC: United States Department of Education.
- Restrepo, M.A. & Gray, S. (2007). Optimizing literacy in English language learners. *Seminars in Speech and Language*, 28(1), 25-34

- Richardson, V. (Ed.) (2001). *Handbook of research on teaching* (4th edition) Washington DC: American Educational Research Association.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic genocide in education – or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2009). The stakes: Linguistic diversity, linguistic human rights and mother tongue-based multilingual education or linguistic genocide, crimes against humanity and an even faster destruction of biodiversity and our planet. Keynote presentation at Bamako International Forum on Multilingualism, Bamako, Mali, 19-21 Jan 2009. [Online] Available: <<http://www.tove-skutnabb-kangas.org/>> (February 19, 2012)
- Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) (2006). *Multilingual education*. Texas: SIL International.
- Thomas, W. and Collier, V. (2002). *A national study of school effectiveness for language minority students' long-term academic achievement*. Santa Cruz CA: Center for Research on Education, Diversity and Excellence. [Online] Available: http://www.crede.ucsc.edu/research/llaa/1.1_final.html (March 18, 2012)
- Trudell, B. (2005). Language choice, education and community identity. *International Journal of Educational Development* 25, (237-251)
- Urzagaste Pantoja, N. (1999). Levantamiento linea de base: Educación Intercultural Bilingüe. [Baseline survey: Bilingual Intercultural Education.] La Paz: UNICEF.
- UNESCO (2003). *Education in a multilingual world* [Online] Available: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0012/001297/129728e.pdf> (12 May 2012)
- UNESCO (2005). *Advocacy brief on mother tongue-based teaching and education for girls*. Bangkok: UNESCO.
- UNESCO (2006). *Challenges of implementing free primary education in Kenya: Assessment report* [Online] Available: www.unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0015/001516/151654eo.pdf (May 10, 2012)
- von Gleich, U. (2003). Multilingualism and multiculturalism in Latin America: Matters of identity or obstacles to modernization? In A. Ouane (Ed.). *Towards a multilingual culture of education*. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education. [Online] Available: <http://www.unesco.org/education/ue/publications/uiestud41.shtml> (May 4, 2012)
- Weigel, D.J., Lowman, J.L., Martin, S.S. (2007). Language development in the years before school: A comparison of developmental assets in home and child care settings. *Early childhood development and care* 177(6 & 7), 719-734.
- Williams, E. (1998). *Investigating bilingual literacy: Evidence from Malawi and Zambia* London: DFID.
- Williamson, K. (1976). The Rivers Readers Project in Nigeria. In A. Bamgbose (Ed.). *Mother-tongue Education: The West African experience*. London: Hodder & Stoughton.
- Wink, J. (2004). *Critical pedagogy: Notes from the real world*. New York: Longman
- Young, C. (2009). Good practices in mother tongue-first multilingual education. In: M. Redmond, (Ed.). *Mother tongue as bridge language of instruction: Policies and experiences in Southeast Asia*. (pp. 120-135) Bangkok: The Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Secretariat.

Appendix

National Survey Research on the Status of Indigenous Languages in Pre-Primary and Primary Education System in Nigeria

Purpose of Research

The national survey research is intended to ascertain the status of mother tongues in the teaching and learning process in the pre-primary and primary levels of education in Nigeria; determine the extent to which they are used either as medium of instruction or subject; ascertain the problems militating against their use; and suggest solutions to the problems. Items in the questionnaire are designed to elicit answers from the teachers, parents, and pupils. The research is meant to achieve no other aims(s) other than these stated objectives. Your honest answers would not only be greatly appreciated but also treated with strict confidentiality. Thanks.

A. Questionnaire for Teachers

Items Responses: SA (Strongly Agree) A (Agree) D (Disagree) SD (Strongly Disagree)

1. The mother tongue (mt) is the medium of instruction (mis) in the school. SA A D SD
2. The mt is only a subject taught in the school
3. The mt does not have any pedagogic role to play in the school system
4. The mt needs not play any role to play in the school system
5. Mt is taught as a subject on a daily basis
6. Mt is taught twice a week
7. Mt is taught once a week
8. Mt is not taught at all

9. Mt is not used or taught due to lack of teachers
10. Mt is not used or taught because administrators/proprietors do not support it

B. Questionnaire for Parents

1. Mt is the medium of interaction at home
2. Mt should be introduced to children after they had acquired English
3. Mt has no place in our home
4. Mt should play role both at home and school
5. Mt needs to be used by the children freely always at home
6. Mt needs to be taught daily as a subject at school
7. Mt needs to be taught once a week at school
8. Mt should be used in teaching all subjects in school
9. Lack of parental support hinders the teaching and learning of mt
10. Lack of administrator's/proprietor's support hinders mt teaching and learning

C. Questionnaire for Pupils

1. Mt is the mis in my school
2. The mt is taught as a subject in my school
3. Mt is neither the mis nor a subject in my school
4. Mt should be used as mis in my school
5. Mt should not be used in my school
6. My parents do not communicate with me in the mt at home
7. My teacher does not allow us to use the mt in the class
8. I prefer my mt to the English language
9. I prefer the English language to my mt
10. I like both of them