

The Role of Mother Tongue in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract

The importance of education to humanity can never be over emphasized; it is against this backdrop that emphasis is being laid on the education of a child who is the future leader.

Government at all levels and organizations all over the world have reiterated their commitment in education, especially that of children and youths ,but in doing so effectively ,attention must also be given to the medium of instruction, determining what language will be used to teach the students is one of the important factors to be considered in childhood education. Many researchers, educationists and other stakeholders have spent enormous time, energy and resources enumerating and emphasizing the importance of education to the child with little emphasis on the medium of instruction. This paper seeks to raise the level of consciousness with regards to the important role mother tongue plays in early education of a child.

Keywords: the notion of language, medium of instruction, mother tongue, the role mother tongue in childhood education.

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of mother tongue in the education of a child especially at the early stage is of great paramount. Mother tongue here represents the first language of a child which could be language of his/her parents or that of the immediate environment.

Psychologically, the proper development of a child is closely related with continued uninterrupted usage of the language of his immediate family, friends and people that the child is acquainted with.

Educationally, the child cannot learn the facts and ideas of what is been communicated unless he has an understanding of the language of instruction. (European Journal of social science 2009)

In contemporary times, the use of second language in teaching during the early education of a child has gain prominence especially when the language in question is perceived as the elite language by members of the society. This is a common practice of some primary schools especially in Africa and other developing continent, a situation that has prompted the need to reiterate that mother tongue is the culture of the child, it is the medium through which culture is expressed hence ignoring the child's mother tongue which is a familiar language and communicating with him as soon as he gets into the school environment with a different language would among other things impede the educational ,psychological growth and development of the child.

2.0 THE NOTION OF LANGUAGE

Language may be defined as a set means of communication, it denotes a set of signs and symbols which is generally accepted as referent for concepts. Language is basically used most in two forms which include the spoken form and the gesticulation form but it can also be transferred to such media writing especially if the spoken form is unavailable or for record purposes. Whether spoken, written or by gesture, language serves as a bridge among people of various tribes and races in the world.

3.0 MOTHER TONGUE (L1)

Mother tongue simply put means the first language a child comes in contact with or the language of the immediate environment. The oxford advanced learners dictionary defines mother tongue as the first language a child learns to speak. The mentalist psychologists believes that a child acquires his mother tongue at a tender age with the help of what they referred to as the Language acquisition device (LAD), a device in which the mentalist psychologist believes to be present in the child's brain with the primary function of acquiring language .it is worthy to note that at the early stage, the child naturally imbibes the structure of his mother tongue.

4.0 SECOND LANGUAGE (L2)

Second language refers to the language learnt after the acquisition of mother tongue or first language. Unlike the case of mother tongue where the child imbibes the language structures naturally, a second language learner makes a conscious effort in acquiring the structures of the target language.

5.0 MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTIONS.

Medium of instruction here refers to the language used by teachers to teach in schools, it entails the choice of verbal communication between the teachers and the students.

6.0 THE ROLE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

6.1 IT FACILITATES LEARNING

The use of mother tongue in the early education of child helps in facilitating learning, it serves as a motivation as the child moves from the known, which is the mother tongue to the unknown which is the second language or target language.

Dillip Tirkey, a member of Odisha Adivashi mauch (OAM) a state forum for tribal to promote early education in the mother tongue in India admitted that he faced a great deal of difficulty in his school days because of the medium of instruction. First language taught should be what children are familiar with. "Tribal children who are not taught in their own dialect or mother tongue in the initial years find learning difficult." He also noted that the children are unable to fully understand classroom teaching and textbooks properly as the language seems to be strange to them.

6.2 IT BREEDS CONFIDENCE AND BETTER ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Children are able to express themselves and understand concepts and subject matter taught in mother tongue. A study was carried out on fifteen Italian interpreters who were working for the European Union (EU), the interpreters were also all extremely fluent in English language. The study revealed that there were differences in brain activity when the subjects (interpreters) were shown words in their native language versus other languages they were competent in, about 170 milliseconds after a word is shown, the researcher recorded a peak in electrical activity in the left side of the brain area where words are recognized and these brain waves had a much higher amplitude when the words were in Italian, their mother tongue other than other language they were exposed to. Taiwo (1980:183) buttress this point by saying that "A language of the home in which is transmitted and the foundations to the characteristic parental and filial ties are laid makes children to be more proficient and produces high degree of skills and command."

6.3 IT PRESERVES THE LEARNERS IDENTITY AND CULTURE

Instruction in mother tongue also preserves the child's identity and culture. Thus Awonyi (1980) asked "can one identify with his culture without speaking the mother tongue". This goes on to show that mother tongue connects the child with the culture of the society that he comes from and shapes his identity. Nelson Mandela also supported this view when he said "If you talk to a man in the language he understands, it goes to his head, but if you talk to him in his mother tongue that goes to his heart". This portrays that mother tongue hold close ties to learner identity and culture, hence denying the child of his mother tongue would tantamount to denying him his culture.

6.4 MOTHER TONGUE PROVIDES THE PREMISE FOR LEARNING OTHER LANGUAGES.

Mother tongue helps the child to acquire and converse in languages other than his mother tongue. Here the child gets acquainted with the nuances of his mother tongue and on that foundation; he uses them to learn other languages especially when the mother tongue and the target language share a similar structure. It also helps the child to develop stronger literacy skills and children come to school well prepared to learn the language of their immigrant country and make progress educationally.

7.0 CONCLUSION

It is pertinent for the government, organization, teachers and other stake holders in the educational sector to renew their commitment to the use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in early childhood education. Negligence in this regard might result in the following:

- It creates difficulty in the learning process as the children hardly learn effectively until there is some degree of mastery in the language of instruction.
- It robs the child of his personal identity and social status. The imposition of a new language on a young learner not only denationalizes and disorganizes him but also debases his personality (Awonyi)
- It does not create an atmosphere of continuity between the home and the school for the child as the child is exposed to a different language immediately he gets to school.
- It neglects the basic rudiments of the child's cultural heritage which language in essence is the vehicle of transmission.

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