

# REPOSITIONING MOTHER TONGUE IN FORMAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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## **Abstract**

Education in the mother tongue is important because thought and language go together with the body and soul. They therefore, grow and decay together. The child thinks and drinks in the language of home before he gets to the language community at school (Ohia, 2001). This language of the home is the mother tongue. For this reason, the mother tongue becomes the first condition of school for the intellectual development of the child. This paper refutes the arguments against the use of mother tongue in formal education, and recommends the use of mother tongue in formal education because it will serve as a good preserver of societal values that are cherished by the people.

## **Introduction**

Language is a natural forming force as well as a force that plays a major role with regards to the way one thinks, behaves and reacts to situations. Language shapes the attitude of the individual. The language in a given community expresses itself, thinks and educates its young, organizes the experiences and shapes the world and social reality of that society. (Ohia, 2001). No language is intrinsically inferior to any other language. The assumption and belief of many language scholars that does not prove sufficient to satisfy the demands for improvement of that society whenever and wherever it occurs. Language can be used as additional tool to direct attention that will enable the child make the correct discrimination; language provides code for all human activities and behaviour (Egwim,2005) Hence the ability to discriminate and show relationship between different stimuli are steps in problem solving and evidence of reasoning which,, depend much on language; and those incidents and events beyond which, depend much on not possess the language to code them. (Egwim,2005).

Language is central to the teaching-learning process and language is important to the protection, preservation and promotion of cultures and the enhancement of human dignity (Iwuagwu, 2004). The vocabularies of any language can be create to cover the demands of any subject in the school. Therefore the use of language other than the mother of that community inhibits and disturb the development of the child. In other words the use of any other language other than the mother tongue damages the development of the child whose personality and ability should be integrated with the society to which he/she belongs (Ohia, 2001). Clearly education through the language of the society represents in large part the process of integration.

## **Concept of Mother Tongue Education**

Olagoke (1979) states that mother tongues the language in which one has acquired his first experience of life, the one in which he dreams and thinks in which he can easily and conveniently express his feelings and emotion.

Mother tongue education is the totality of education in mother tongue. It is the education which a child is first exposed to. It is also the people and it is this language that the people use for both their thought and communication. Mother tongue education is also a process of teaching through the child's local language or inherited and there is no inferiority. Since it grows with the child, it is already internalized, and like a shadow, it cannot disappear until death, moreover it will continue to influence one's thoughts and actions. The learning of mother tongue. Inherently grows with the child .so it becomes part and parcel of the child. Every normal baby is equipped with the organ of speech though, these organs of speech were only modified to produce speech. Nonetheless, every child with the relevant sounds. Learning the mother tongue takes a long time from the time the child exercises the .use of his vocal cords through murmuring, crying, crying from grumbling, etc. Everything the child does requires the use of language. Ohia (2001) asserted that the discrimination of which is the basis of few consonants and vowels in any language is the basis of morphological and phonological as well as the structure in that language.

Chomsky, as cited by Ohia (2001) has pointed out that by the age of six, the child is capable of

generating all possible grammatical permutation in his mother tongue. He went further, to say that as the child matures in his language from infancy, the mother tongue has serious implication for personality, conceptualization, cognitive processes, culture and communication. A child is therefore, competent to handle his mother tongue or any that the child learns first. It therefore, means that the child has a weapon or a tool to manipulate his environment (Gorman, 1970). He further, stated that the child becomes a speaker of his language as well as a listener. By this, it shows that the ear drum picks up the sound of the language, composes it, puts it into meaningful grammatical structures in the brain and sends telepathy actions to relevant parts of the body. When a child having acquired competence in the mother tongue is a continuous interference not only in the linguistic expression of the child but also in his world view. The argument that the mother tongue is irrelevant is unattainable,

### **Repositioning Mother Tongue Education in Formal Education**

Language is central to the teaching-learning process and mother tongue is important to the protection, preservation and promotion of culture and the enhancement of human dignity (Iwuagwu, 2004). The importance of mother tongue in education is emphasized by Orimoloye (1977), as cited by Iwuagwu (2004), when he states that mother tongue in a child is psychologically a system of meaningful signs that in his mind works automatically for expression and understanding. She added that sociologically, mother tongue is a means of identification among the members of the community to which he belongs; educationally, he learns more quickly through a familiar linguistic medium.

Language is the greatest motivator of learning since the more the work power of the child develops, the more active he participates in the learning encounter. He is therefore, capable of sharing ideas and experiences with others and he is more likely to be influenced and influence others. Children exposed to formal education in early childhood through a foreign language medium show relatively less willingness to perform or participate verbally, particularly when you expect them to express themselves through foreign language to other children or in the classroom because of the fear of the expression to use. Some will not be willing to accept leadership roles because it demands that you must be intelligent which is expressed through good command of the foreign language.

The use of a foreign language medium in education therefore, limits the development of conceptual thinking in children- Through the use of the mother tongue, or a local vernacular medium in education of the child, the content of education and school activity are inevitably focused around appropriate social connections and practices, therefore, making the classroom encounter more meaningful, more relevant and more rewarding. Furthermore, the use of the mother tongue in education helps the child to build up an expanding universe of experiences based on the reality that his environment and the language that articulates it represents.

Bamgbose (1976), argues that, if a child is born into a language and the child grows with that language, and if that child leaves that environment, there has to be continuity from the home to the school. Moreso, concept and ideas are best experienced by the familiar language. Culture is being promoted through language. Culture and language are inseparable. It is a dominant aspect of culture and it connects human beings to others, events, situations, and it places human beings in a community (Udoada, 2004).

The national Policy on Education (NPE), states categorically that, the mother tongue is a medium of thought in formal education thus:

The language of instruction in the pre-primary level is the mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment. At the primary level, the language of instruction is initially the mother tongue and at stages, English will be used. How many schools adhere to this policy?

It is a well known fact that, there is a great relationship between language and culture. Thus, Udoada (2004) quoting Samovar, Porter and Jain (1981), says:

Culture and communication are inseparable because culture not only dictates who talks to whom, and how the communication proceeds, it also helps to determine how people encode messages, the meanings they have for messages, and the conditions and circumstance under which various messages may or may not be sent, noticed or interpreted (p.219).

To buttress the above point, Bamgbose (1991), states that, the economic miracle achieved by countries such as Japan was not based on a widespread dissemination of English, rather, it is the result of the indigenization of such technology in Japanese and the translation of the processes into terms that the ordinary factory hand can understand". In line with the above, Ehusani (2005), observes that, Asian words as Toyota, Samsung, Sanyo and Nintendo have become household names in Nigeria and elsewhere because the Asians held on to their language, and pursued modern knowledge using the medium of their local languages.

Language is powerful in expressing fears, intention which make man different from animals. For example, we have some mental transformation through the use of mother tongue.

If mother tongue is repositioned in formal education, it will be of great advantage as enumerated by Ohia (2001), thus:

- (i) It offers equal opportunity to a large number of people, and enables them to participate actively in National construction,
- (ii) It gives a greater number of people greater access to education and personal welfare and contributes to urbanization for rural areas.
- (iii)' It makes it possible for the learner to give an unimpeded flow of thought and expressing the same, thus, giving the way for meaningful education.

### **Conclusion**

The concept of mother tongue as the first language of contact for any human being has been examined. The paper also made a passionate call for all to promote the mother tongue to play its expected roles. The submission of the paper is that mother tongue should be used as a medium of instruction in formal education because it is very effective in teaching and learning. Based on this Sharma (1957) sounds a note of warning that no education of the young without serious detriment to their social and mental development. This is because a people's world view is fashioned and could be determined and measured through their language.

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