



NATIONAL LANGUAGE IN A MULTILINGUAL SOCIETY: THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF MOTHER TONGUE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This is a theoretical paper on national language in a multilingual nation: The challenges and prospects of mother tongue education in Nigeria. Nigeria is a linguistically diverse nation, with multiple languages and dialects spoken across its 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. As part of its national policy, the government has mandated mother tongue to be used as language of education at the lower schools with a view to promoting the use of local languages in educational contexts. The paper aimed at ascertaining the need and effectiveness of using mother tongue as a national language in a multilingual nation such as Nigeria. The authors employed both sociolinguistic and evidence-based approach to examine the challenges and prospects of implementing mother tongue education in Nigeria. Based on the literature reviewed, the paper established the status of a national language and nature of multilingualism in Nigeria, examined the contention in debate for choosing any of the indigenous languages to serve as a national language, benefits, weaknesses and possible ways to promote mother tongue education in Nigeria. The paper revealed that mother tongue education has the potential to benefit Nigerian students significantly, particularly in terms of improving overall literacy rates and fostering greater cultural understanding among its citizenries but the prominence of English language and the roles it plays in Nigeria as an official language and language of instruction/wider communication has placed its promotion in a very difficult angle. However, for mother tongue education to be effective, it is important that the Nigerian government addresses the various practical and policy challenges associated with the implementation of mother tongue education, including problems relating to teacher training, curriculum design and assessment.

Keywords: National Language, Multilingual Nation, Challenges, Prospect and Mother Tongue Education



Introduction

Language is an instrument which human beings employ to elaborate, maintain, develop and transmit culture, values, knowledge, and beliefs from the older ones to the younger ones. It could also be defined as a channel through which cultural, social, political and religious values are passed from generation to generation. It goes without saying, that one's identity and language are inseparable, as languages represent the bridge between the culture and identity of the people. Language is a catalyst for human existence, it serves as the means through which thoughts and feelings are expressed. This is essentially unique to human species because it is a way that unique ideas and customs within different linguistics strata are expressed and shared.

African countries have rich cultural heritages which are ultimately used as primary sources of sustaining and transmitting the cultural values and norms to the younger ones. Basically, most African countries, Nigeria inclusive are multilingual nations. Multilingualism referred to a situation where multiple languages are spoken in a particular community/society. The nature of multilingualism in Africa has given the colonial languages such as English, French, Arabic, the impetus to retain their prominences in the linguistics landscape in Africa by the virtue of the pivotal roles they play in the heart of governance. This transcends from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial era and Nigeria is obviously one of the most linguistically diverse nations in the world. The number of languages in Nigeria are yet to be accurately ascertained as many researchers and scholars have only estimated divergent figures based on the data available to them as they relate to languages in Nigeria. It is clear that many indigenous/minority languages are not captured in language

index in Nigeria, possibly due to lack of literature in those languages yet they exist in their distinctive cultural ancestry. Ayeomoni (2012), states that there are various views and opinions about the exact number of Languages in Nigeria. This is owing to the nature of Nigerian linguistic diversity with multiple languages and dialects. This linguistic diversity in Nigeria has placed a burden on language experts and government to develop a language that would serve as a national language.

Defining the two concepts, “National language and Multilingualism” is very imperative in this paper, so as to conceptualize the bases for the discourse. The origin of Multilingualism is traceable to the account at the tower of Babel in Genesis 11: 6-7 which says “v6 and Lord said, Behold, they are one people and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do, and now nothing they have imagined they can do will be impossible for v7, Come, let us go down and confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech” (AMP Bible version). In primordial time people spoke one language. God, however, decided to punish them for their presumptuousness in erecting the tower by causing them to speak different languages. Thus, multilingualism became an obstacle to further cooperation and placed limits on human worldly achievements and confirmed the origin of Multilingualism.

Multilingualism as a socio-linguistic phenomenon has remained and continued to fascinate a sustained and extended debate in scholarly discourse over the years. Simply put, multilingualism is where two or more languages are used as means of communication in a nation or country. Onukak and Nwaedozie (2016), said multilingualism defined in relation to a



country or state is a situation where several languages are spoken or the act of using or promoting the use of multiple languages, either by individual speakers or more. Obot (2015), submits that experiment conducted at Stamford University with data collected from China, Greece, Chile, Indonesia, Russia and Aboriginal Australia has shown that people with different languages think differently while those with the same language think in a similar structure. Obot's assertion portrays the complexity associated with multilingual nations where language is seen as a medium for social unity. Multilingualism is a common linguistic characteristic of most countries all over the world most especially, the African countries. This implies that most countries of the world are multilingual in nature. Obviously, Multilingualism is a universal trend that has come to stay with humanity, because there is hardly any country, be it nation or state, in the world that does not have people who speak more than two languages. Examples are: Russia, South Africa, Nigeria, India, China, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, Canada, Belgium, Belarus to name but a few.

National language on the other hand is seen as the language spoken by the majority speakers of a country as first language which may not necessarily be their official language in some instances, depending on the ethnic distinctiveness or multifariousness of the society. Larrosa (2021) defines National language as the "language of political, cultural and social unity". It is important to state that national language and official language may not necessarily mean the same thing. National language is basically developed and used as a symbol of national unity. This means that, it functions are to identify the nation and unite its people whereas, an official language by contrast, is simply a language which is used or may be

used for government businesses. The primary function of official language is to be used for the day to day activities of government rather than symbolic representation of the nation. It is possible, of course, for one language to serve both functions. Jatau (2019) opines that "A language which qualifies as a national language must be indigenous to the country and massively spoken by the people so that there would be mass participation of the populace in all facets of their national life" (P.2). Akindele and Adegbite as cited in Olatayo (2015) gave a comprehensive picture of National Language as:

A language that has the authority of government conferred on it as the language of a number of ethnic groups in a given geo socio-political area. It is deliberately chosen as a symbol of oneness and unity and of achievement of independence in an erstwhile colonial situation and of the state of Nationhood. Such a language must, as a matter of necessity, cut across the entire strata of the society in its use and application e.g the English language in England, Canada and USA. It can also be qualified as a language that is both elite and mass oriented in integrating everybody in the political community.

The fundamental question is that, which indigenous language in Nigeria has the linguistic elements to meet this purpose considering how culturally, religiously and politically diverse we are? The division along ethnic, regional, religion and also political lines has sown seed of distrust which will be mission infertility to contemplate adopting one of the Nigerian languages to serve as national language over others.

In Nigeria, the issue of national language has always been a crucial matter that



language experts are confronted with, most especially, when formulating educational policy. English language has been given the status of both the national and official language in Nigeria. This is owing to the fact that no indigenous language has surpassed what English stands for in terms of its roles in government's administration and education. According to the 1999 Nigerian Constitution (as amended) and the national policy on education by Federal Government of Nigeria (2004), sections 1-5, English language and the three major languages Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are to be used where necessary as the language of government and education. The contention in debate still is, almost the exact status that has been accorded to the so-called three designated major languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in the two documents which states that "every child shall learn the language of his immediate environment and in the interest of national unity is required to learn one of the three Nigerian languages". Even though Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba have been given the status of national language by the virtue of their recognition by the Nigerian constitution and NPE, the status have continually been questioned and has remained a centre for debate as many indigenous language speakers consider such as a deliberate and politically motivated policy to subjugate other indigenous languages which are distinctive in their own rights and have equal right to be promoted by their native speakers to serve the purpose of national unity.

Nigeria is a linguistically diverse nation with hundreds of languages and dialects spoken across its 36 states. Unfortunately, none of this languages is used as an official or national language in the country. The quest for cultural identity and political participation among the indigenous language speakers have given room for mutual

suspicion along cultural and linguistic lines thereby impeding the common choice of an indigenous national language in the country. Adoption of English language as the national and instructional has relegated other local languages in Nigeria to the backdrop. It is against this development that the researchers embarked on this study to critically examine the challenges and prospects of mother education in Nigeria.

The aim of the study was to examine the challenges and prospects of mother tongue education in a multilingual nation such as Nigeria. The specific objectives include to; examine the quest for an indigenous national language and its effectiveness in Nigeria; determine the need and effectiveness of using mother tongue as national language in a multilingual nation such as Nigeria; and ascertain the benefits and weaknesses of mother tongue education in Nigeria.

The study is based on the sociolinguistic and evidence-based methods of examining language in relation to society. To achieve this, relevant literature was reviewed to determine the status of national language and the nature of multilingualism in Nigeria, prospects and challenges of mother education in Nigeria and the quest for an indigenous national language in Nigeria. Qualitative and quantitative literature were reviewed which served as sources to which the inferences were made. The sociolinguistic is a method used to investigate a language in relation to society while the evidence-based method gives the researchers the opportunity to use the existing linguistic materials to investigate phenomenon.

The Nature of Multilingualism in Nigeria

Multi-complexity of the Nigerian multilingualism is not unconnected to the politically motivated amalgamation of the



northern and the southern protectorates by the government of Fredrick Lord Lugard in 1914. Many historical and language scholars have expressed their dispositions as it relates to the aim and objectives behind the synthesis of the two parts that were apparently dissimilar in terms of language, religion and custom. Ihejirika (2017) points out that the 1914 amalgamation of the southern and the northern protectorates were partly responsible for the multilingual status of Nigeria because it formed a common community out of otherwise different ethnic nationalities that have different languages and cultures. Arua (2015), states that Nigeria is multi-dimensionally vast in terms of landmass, politics, culture, population, language and belief. The author further submitted that, there are about 500 languages in Nigeria, and this attests to undebatable reality of multilingualism in Nigeria (p.6).

Again, Onukak and Nwaedozie (2016), opine that the languages spoken in Nigeria are between 250-400 whereas Isa (2020), estimates that there are 505 indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria. This diversity is partly responsible for the linguistic disunity in Nigeria. Political appointments which are mostly done on the bases of tribe and religion in Nigeria is the manifest of the disunity. Apart from the three major languages, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba the other minority languages are classified into major minority and minor-minority (Onukak and Nwaedozie, 2016). Iwara (2008) gives a rough index of their number as 396. According to him, the major minority languages are given as about 12 in number – Fulfulde (or Fulani) Kanuri, Tiv, Nupe, Jukun, Igala, Edo, Ibibio, Idoma, Ijaw, Efik and Urhobo. The population of the speakers of each of them is put as ranging between 2 to 8 million people. As a matter of fact, these groups of people do not only enjoy

officialdom at their state levels, they also have a relatively standard orthography and a vast body of literature. The minor languages, on the other hand, number about 385 and have up to 2 million speakers. Eka (2000) mentions some of these minor-minority languages to include Berom, Jarawa, Angas, Mwah-gavul, Mupun, Taroh, Bajju, Mada, Ankwa, Idoma, Iggede, Igala, Nupe, Agatu, Alago, Migili, Gwandara to mention a few spoken in the North-Central, in South-South, are Eki, Oron, Annang, Ibeno, Kana, Gokana, Eleme, Okrika, Ikwerre, Itsekiri, Isoko, Bekwarra, Yala, Ejagham, Esan, and so on. In North-East we have Bacama, Bura-Pabir, Lunguda, Marghi, Cham, among others, while in North-West, there are Ninzo, Bajju, Kabawa, Dakarwa, Dukawa, Zabarwa, Gungawa to mention a few.

The linguistic situation in Nigeria has given rise to conflict of linguistic dominance even between the major-minority and minor-minority indigenous languages in Nigeria. For instance, in Benue State where Tiv language even though a minority language in Nigeria is a majority language in the State and a language such as “Etulo speakers” are unconsciously subjected to speak the Tiv language at the expense of their own language. It is the same case between Idoma and Utonkon in Benue State.

As earlier stated in the introduction, there is hardly a nation that is predominantly monolingual, as such, multilingualism is a common linguistic characteristic of most nations in the world. As much as cultural and language differences especially in Africa have given room for mutual suspicion among the different tribes, there still advantages associated with multilingualism. It enhances sociocultural cohesion and provides insight into the understanding of different cultures that exist within the society. Benard (2014) submits that



Multilingualism enhances an automatic understanding and appreciation of cultural values of the societies that are contained in the concerned language. The experiences gained from learning different languages automatically tend to change the attitude, skills beliefs of the people, society and create an expansion of world view. Benard further stresses that Many children who are fluent in more than one language are superior lateral thinkers, have a greater social adaptability, their thinking and reasoning skills are better, and their cognitive abilities are also greater.

Ability to speak more than one language gives one the opportunity to communicate with many individuals in both personal and professional contexts. For instance, when an individual who knows or can speak the national language of his/her country and effectively speaks the indigenous languages such a person is likely to synthesis knowledge and express ideas perfectly and meaningfully. It is therefore important to encourage the development of indigenous languages education so as to realise the benefits of synthesizing and clearly expressing knowledge, ideas and further appreciate our cultural diversity as a nation.

National Language Question in Nigeria

The question of national language in Nigeria has remained a controversial topic of discussion once it is mentioned, as many minority speakers of indigenous languages in Nigeria are not quite comfortable with the linguistic supremacy the constitution of Nigeria and the national policy on education have placed on the three recognized major languages which are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. The action which other minority tribes may perceive as a political maneuvering to lure them into speaking the so-called major languages which is also tantamount of taking them into extinction. More importantly to ask is, why the quest for a

national language in Nigeria? Has English language not met the linguistic needs as a nation? These are critical questions that demand answers that will design a framework for the quest for an indigenous national language. Olatayo (2015) states that, one of the national problems in Nigeria that has deferred resolution is the issue of national language. Scholars and stakeholders have argued for and against the necessity of a national language in a heterogeneous country like Nigeria where ethnic suspicion is the order of the day. Ihejirika (2017), argues that the emergence of a national language in the present scenario is a mission impossible because a choice of one language out of the numerous languages would trigger agitation and may amount to relegation of other languages. When one keeps reflecting on the subject of national language in a multilingual setting like Nigeria with every sense of objectivity, one will be left with no choice than to say that, it is better imagined and conceptualized in the imaginative realm than physical considering the heterogeneous linguistic nature of the country Nigeria.

There have been records of efforts made by successive governments including the military government in Nigeria to come up with a national language that will be used as language of unity in the country, but the efforts have all turned to be exercise in futility. Spencer and Bamgbose in Olusajo (2012) buttresses the opinion on the need for national language as follows:

Without a common language, the fragile unity which presently binds the country together would have collapsed. Imagine what would become the fate of the Head of State, both the states and the National Assemblies, the law courts, education and all other areas of national communication. Given the situation explained above, finding a common



national indigenous language will be a very difficult if not an impossible task. This is because the choice of any indigenous language as a national language will certainly generate bad feelings of jealousy, rancor and fear of ethnic domination and may even lead to the total collapse of the entire nation.

Therefore, with the constant fear of linguistic domination by other minority indigenous language speakers in Nigeria, having an indigenous national language will add more linguistic acrimony to the already existing huge divisiveness being experienced. The best bet for the country is just to allow a sleepy lion to lie in its comfort den than to clamour for a national language that will create more issues that we cannot handle. The current political, religious and regional sentiments in the land are enough challenges for us to contend with. Language is considered a cultural pride of every human being. Adopting one language/tribe over others to serve as a national language in a cultural and linguistic multifaceted country such as Nigeria will come with matching multifaceted implications in term of human and non-human resources. For instance, choosing language “A” over languages “B”, “C” and “Z” means that speakers of language “B”, “C” and “Z” would have to sacrifice their ethnic prides/uniqueness to embrace the culture of the anointed language. Apparently, one does not need an oracle to be told that this is a risk that no ethnic group in Nigeria will ever want to take most especially that the minority languages are agitating for linguistic emancipation from the majority languages.

There are some proponents like Mark (2010), Foluso (2016), Emanajo (2019), Ozoemena, Ngwoke and Nwokolo (2021) and others who have advanced debate to justify reasons for the adoption of an indigenous national language in

place of English. Their debate is mostly derived from the need for national consciousness, unity and identity. For Nigeria as a sovereign nation to justify its claim for political independence, there is need to promote the indigenous languages in order to foster national cohesion and cross-cultural understanding.

Factors Affecting the Choice of National Language and its Implementation in a Multilingual Nation

As already mentioned, in the prehistoric era, specifically in the Bible, people spoke the same language until they tried to erect the tower of Babel prompted God to punish them by making them to speak different languages which limited their achievements. This explains how language diversity has partly been a hindrance to national development and national language choice in multilingual nations, most especially in Africa. Nigeria has also been faced with this difficulty since independence. This factor is responsible for the non-articulation and implementation of the national language policy on education in Nigeria.

In Nigeria, it is a fact that the different languages do not have the same statuses. This inequality confirms that linguistic hierarchy is a serious concern in the Nigerian linguistic situation. The nonexistence of linguistic unity among the indigenous languages in Nigeria is the main factor that has hindered the choice of a national language in the country.

Another factor militating against the choice of national language is the dialectal variation even among the majority languages in Nigeria. Olusojo (2012) observes that the language situation is such that some of the dialects found within a linguistic group are not mutually intelligible even though the speakers belong to the same linguistic group.



For instance, the Hausa spoken in Sokoto State has a dialectal variation with the one spoken in Kano State or Bauchi State; the Akoko Yoruba speakers in Ondo State understand the Ilorin Yoruba speaker in Kwara State but the Akoko dialect is not understood by the Ilorin. There is also dialectal variation that exists among the Igbos speakers. These differences are also common among the major-minority and minor-minority language speakers in Nigeria. Spencer and Bamgbose in Olusojo (2012) considered the multiplicity of languages and their dialectal differences as a serious barrier to national unity and development in Nigeria, hence, the need for a common language to facilitate effective communication.

The National language question has given prominence to English language to emerge as the lingua franca and national language due to its neutrality in a multi ethno-linguistic and multicultural society as Nigeria. English language has also been adopted as a medium of instruction in schools and language of government. The language (English) plays multifarious roles apart from being the language of instruction and official language, it a language of wider communication. Anyadiegwu (2012), states that English language engenders mutual understanding, co-operation and peace in a country bedeviled with too many ethno-political problems. Its neutrality has made it to be acceptable by all as national language. This factor has certainly placed English language above any other indigenous language in Nigeria.

Need for Mother Tongue Education in Nigeria

What exactly is mother tongue? Having a better understanding of what mother tongue is will give a proper position as to whether to argue for or against its promotion in educational system in a multilingual society like Nigeria. The meaning of mother tongue

varies in many contexts. Some prefer to call it “home language” because it is the first language the child speaks at home while others are more comfortable to refer to it as “mother tongue” because it is believed that the first point of communication of a child begins with the mother while in the womb. Whichever position people hold about mother tongue; mother tongue still remains the native language of a child. The use of the term “Mother Tongue” in a multilingual context, one needs to be careful and take into consideration of some factors such as inter-marriage where husband and wife could come from two different linguistic backgrounds and their home language may not be their native languages but the language understood by the couple which could either be their second or foreign language. Mother tongue could also be defined as the language of child’s mother or both parents. This implies that mother tongue does not only mean the language spoken by the mother. A child or children can speak more than one or even two languages at home. For example, they may speak one language with their mother, another with their father and a third with their grandparents. Emenanjo (2019) states that, the de facto national policy on language education recognizes the multidimensional and multi-lingual nature of Nigeria. The policy provides mother tongue (MT) and /or language of the immediate community (LIC) as the language of initial literacy at the pre-primary and primary levels and of adult and non-formal education. This is an indication that having a strong mother tongue foundation leads to a much better understanding of the learning curriculum as well as a more positive attitude towards school, so it is vital that children maintain their first language when they begin schooling in a different language. Mother tongue education is increasingly seen, not



only as a means of restoring and maintaining an indigenous culture in the face of another associated with a powerful foreign language, but also as an instrument in the process of authentic nation building.

Mother tongue education refers to an act of giving formal learning instruction in the native language of the learner. Nishanthi (2020) opines that many children across the developing world are learning very little in school, a reality that can be linked to teaching in a language they do not fully understand. Mother tongue education helps students to develop not only the mother tongue itself but also their skills in the major education language and a second language is learned superlatively when a first language has been adequately acquired. Bilingual students perform better in school when the school teaches the mother tongue effectively and, where appropriate, develop literacy in that language (Stegen, 2015). When students develop their abilities in two or more languages throughout their education, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. They have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both the native and second language.

Ihejirika (2017), states that it is no longer tenable to posit that the use of English language as an official language in Nigeria has solved the problem of equal access to knowledge divisiveness, grounding poverty and underdevelopment. According to Muaza (2010), it can be argued that English as official language and medium of instruction in schools had become a formidable and impenetrable barrier to access to knowledge and information to a great part of Nigerian society by ostracizing the languages of the environment and disengaging them from the business of education.

Teaching in mother tongue is more effective than teaching in a foreign language as it helps the children/students to conceptualise ideas in their local language which in turn foster meaningful and deep learning (Attah, 2016). The effect of prioritizing foreign languages against the languages of the environment is seen in effectively undermining and stunting the growth and development of all the languages of the environment to a level of near incapacitation. As the incapacitation continues to thrive, modern knowledge remains an imported foreign commodity accessible to only those who are baptized with the English language. The main issue however, is the meek acceptance of the status-quo as ideal and sufficient for our educational and developmental needs.

Challenges

Mother tongue education in a multilingual society such as Nigeria is faced with myriads of challenges. These challenges are predicated on the circumstance of prestigious status of English language over the indigenous languages in Nigeria. The linguistic relevance given to English language has relegated mother tongue education to the background which in turn has drastically reduced the output of education in Nigeria. Even though the national policy on education provides that the mother tongue should be used as the language of instruction at preprimary, primary and junior secondary levels, its implementation remains an illusion as government at all levels have not created or put the needed pedagogical mechanisms in place to make the teaching and learning of mother tongue education achievable and practicable. Ozoemena et'al (2021), found out that multilingual nature of Nigeria, prestigious position of English language in Nigeria, first language of teachers,



intertribal marriage, pupils from different ethnic groups in a class, dominance of instructional materials such as textbooks written in English language and occupational mobility of parents are factors that constitute stumbling blocks for the realization of mother tongue education in Nigeria.

As important as mother tongue education is, the dominance of second language (English) which is used as the official language is a serious threat to its actualization in Nigeria and many other developing nations. What is the future of mother education in a country where children's achievement in schools are measured by their ability to speak and use English language intelligibly? What are the practical mechanisms put in place by the government of Nigeria to ensure that the teaching and learning of mother tongue is achieved? As observed by Ozoemena, et'al (2021), multilingual nature of Nigeria is a major impediment to the implementation of mother tongue education in Nigeria. With the heterogeneity of Nigerian communities, mother tongue education may not be feasible in the nearest future giving that English language has proven to play a role that will be difficult for any indigenous language to replace it. Imagine in a class where pupils who attend school in the same community but speak different native languages including the Teacher, whose mother tongue would be used as the language of instruction in the class. These challenges have put the fortune of mother tongue education in Nigeria in a dilemma and unless they are properly tackled, the dream of propagating Mother Tongue Education in Nigeria will not be achieved and policy will remain a paper document without any achievable result. Curriculum design is another serious problem associated with promotion of mother education in Nigeria. Are there

professionals that can design curriculum in all the indigenous languages? This indeed, is a critical area that needs to be looked into if the quest for promoting the Nigerian indigenous languages is to be taken serious.

Prospects of Mother Tongue Education in Nigeria

Language is an inherent identity of every human which is required to be maintained, sustained and transmitted to the younger generations. It is one of the most precious cultural inheritance humans hold in high esteem. Since language is the means of preserving and transmitting cultural values and norms from the older generation to the younger generation, it implies that any society or an ethnic group that allows its language to die or go into extinction has no future generation. Without language, communication and understanding among people in a community and the world in general is impossible hence, the need for one to promote his/her native language (mother tongue).

The position of the United Nations on Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in 1952 which held that mother tongue or first language should be used as a language of formal education in the early childhood portrayed the importance of mother tongue education to the development of children who would potentially become the future nation builders. This strong view by UNESCO laid credence to prospect of native languages in the world. Mackenzie and Walker in Ozoemena et'al (2021), state that children's potentials are often wasted when language acquisition is attempted without the use of native language which results in lack of development educational failure. It shows that mother tongue is a linguistic basis for the learning of either second or foreign



language. Emanajo (2019) corroborates this view that a child first grasps what is around him through the linguistic means he hears or sees his mother or parents speaking/using. Mother tongue development is associated with a lot of importance and it is a foundation for learning second language and foreign language. Mother tongue acquaints the child with his culture and boost his cognitive development. For effective teaching and learning to take place, development of mother tongue education becomes very important.

Recommendations

The researchers having reviewed the relevant literature on challenges and prospects of mother tongue education in Nigeria, recommended that mother tongue education should be promoted and be used as language of instruction at the lower levels of education in line with position of UNESCO (1952) and national policy on education (2004). This will help children to understand and appreciate their cultural and democratic values, and also encourage them to contribute more meaningfully to the nation's socioeconomic and political development. To achieve this, deliberate effort should be made by the policy makers to train teachers in the local languages, develop curriculum and instructional materials with the local language contents. On the quest for indigenous national language, the study recommends that with the mutual suspicion among indigenous language speakers in Nigeria and the struggle for sociocultural emancipation by minority and other endangered language speakers, the hunt for an indigenous national language be put on hold at the moment.

Conclusion

The study concludes that mother tongue education has the potential to benefit Nigerian students significantly, particularly

in terms of improving overall literacy rates and fostering greater cultural understanding among its citizenries but the prominence of English language and the roles it plays in Nigeria as an official language and language of instruction/wider communication has placed its promotion in a very difficult angle. It is believed that there are so many advantages associated with mother tongue education such as acquainting children with cultural values and boost their cognitive development in language acquisition/learning. However, for mother tongue education to be effective, it is important that the Nigerian government addresses the various practical and policy challenges associated with the implementation of mother tongue education, including problems relating to teacher training, curriculum design and assessment. With the implementation of these strategies, Nigeria can develop an education system that is responsive to its linguistic diversity and promote the use of mother tongue in teaching and learning contexts.

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