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The Gambia Journal of Educational Research (GAMJER) is a multi-disciplinary Journal published by the School of Education, University of The Gambia, Gambia. It is a Journal for cutting - edge multi-disciplinary research that publishes original and quality plagiarism-free manuscripts. It aims at improving the quality of educational practice internationally and specifically in The Gambia. This is to improve global educational practice and policy development as well as disseminating ideas arising from global educational research findings.

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## CONTENTS

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | <i>Pages</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| <b>Abdoulie F.R Jadama, Ousainou S. Loum, Babou B. Dibba, Alpha M. K. Lowe, Modou N. Njie</b> - Effect of School Feeding Programs on Students' Attendance and Retention in Schools of The Gambia.                                         | 1            |
| <b>Apata Funke Susan</b> - Senior School Students' Knowledge of Building Physics into Community for National Development -                                                                                                                | 11           |
| <b>Adeleke Florence Oluwaseye (Ph.D) &amp; Margaret Funke Faremi (Ph.D)</b> - An Appraisal of the Prospects and Challenges of Entrepreneurship Education in Universities in Osun State.                                                   | 23           |
| <b>Joseph Moyinoluwa Talabi, Ph.D. Olubunmi Oluyemi Akitoye &amp; Samuel Oludare Okusanya</b> - Examining the use of Western Terminologies as Implement to the Study and Practice of African Traditional Religion in Ogun State, Nigeria. | 35           |
| <b>Agbajeola, R. O. &amp; Hassan O. A.</b> - Professional Development and Instructional Supervision as Contributory Factor to Teachers Job Performance in Ogun State Secondary Schools.                                                   | 44           |
| <b>Ololade Gbeminiyi Ogundipe &amp; Oluwaseun Oyewole</b> - Peer Influence and Locus of Control as Determinants of Social Studies Pre-Service Teachers' Learning Outcomes in Entrepreneurship Education in Southwestern Nigeria.          | 56           |
| <b>Adegboyega Adebayo, Victor Edet Esang and Gabriel Taiwo Ogunwole</b> – Entrepreneurship Training and Business Education Students Occupational Competencies in South West, Nigeria.                                                     | 68           |
| <b>M. B. Amoda Ph.D</b> - Vocational Factors as Predictors of Business Education Undergraduates' Entrepreneurial Aspiration in Universities in Southwest Nigeria.                                                                         | 82           |
| <b>Kehinde Pedro Amore, Ph.D.</b> - Self Efficacy and Learning Style as Predictors of Secondary School Students' Achievement in and Attitude to English Grammar in Ogun State, Nigeria.                                                   | 99           |
| <b>Samson Olusola Olatunji, Ph.D. &amp; Abimbola Roseline Olawale-Jimoh, Ph.D.</b> Language-of-Instruction for Sustainable Development in Selected Vocational Education Centres; Facilitators' and Participants' Perspectives.            | 114          |
| <b>Anthonia Ayobami Oyelade, Ph. D &amp; Muhammed Lanre Akinloye, Ph.D</b> - Impact Analysis of Fee-Free Policy on Class Population and Enrolment Patterns in Basic Schools in South-West, Nigeria.                                       | 128          |
| <b>Omobolaji Olufunmilola Akanbi, Ph.D.</b> - Teacher Curriculum-Awareness: A Sine Qua Non for Effective Implementation of English Language Curriculum in Ibadan, Nigeria.                                                                | 139          |
| <b>Tajuddeen Sa'ad, Ph.D, Ahmed, Omuya Philip &amp; Ajibola, Febishola Olushola</b> – Developing the Youth and Community through Physical Activity.                                                                                       | 149          |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| <b>Salomi, Modupe O. (PhD), Adenaike, Fausat A. (PhD), Agbajeola, Racheal O. (PhD) &amp; Muraina, Kehinde O. - Linear Programming Technique: A Model of Decision-Making in Management.</b>                                                                                                        | 161 |
| <b>Beatrice Ifeoma Ajufo, Ph.D, Salomi, Modupe Olufemi (PhD), Ogunyinka, Victoria Oluwabukunmi &amp; Afisanwo, Adetayo Joseph - Teacher Classroom Management and Effectiveness as Correlates of Students' Academic Achievement in Junior Secondary School Mathematics in Ogun State, Nigeria.</b> | 174 |
| <b>Y. A. Akinbi, Ph.D, J. O. Akinbi, Ph.D &amp; O. M. Olorunmota - A Comparative Analysis of Pre-colonial and Post Colonial Body Fashion in Yoruba Land (Nigeria) and its Implications on Education.</b>                                                                                          | 184 |
| <b>Babalola Atinuke, Ph.D &amp; Amaechi Precious Chinaza - The Influence of Parenting Style on Self-Esteem among in -School Adolescents in Kubwa Community of Bwari Area Council, Abuja.</b>                                                                                                      | 197 |
| <b>Ogunbiyi, Joseph Olukayode, Ph.D, Anum, Obinna Augustine, Ph.D., Shaibu Joshua Shaka, Ph.D, Obaje Friday Alex, Ph.D &amp; Ojebiyi, Olufemi Adesola, Ph.D - Assessment of Teachers' Skills for Implementing Entrepreneurship Education in Secondary Schools in North Central, Nigeria.</b>      | 208 |
| <b>John Adelani Fayemi, (PhD), Adeola Oladele Ogunsanya, (PhD) &amp; Yinka Oluranti Adediran, (PhD) - Impacts of Water Pollution on the Inhabitants of Makoko Riverine Community in Lagos State, Nigeria.</b>                                                                                     | 221 |
| <b>Adedayo Oyewole Sofadekan, Ph.D &amp; Samuel Folorunso Ogundare, Ph.D – Teaching Cultural Diplomacy to Rupture the Vestiges of Colonially Induced Ethnic Nationalism in Nigeria.</b>                                                                                                           | 230 |

**LANGUAGE-OF-INSTRUCTION FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN  
SELECTED VOCATIONAL EDUCATION CENTRES; FACILITATORS'  
AND PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES**

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**Abstract**

*The appropriateness of the language of instruction to the particularities of the participants in a vocational education programme is crucial to its success as a means of achieving sustainable development at the individual and community levels. This descriptive survey was thus carried out to investigate facilitators' and participants' assessments of the appropriateness of the language of instruction practices in two vocational education centres, one in each of Ibadan and Ile-Ife of the southwestern part of Nigeria. The whole population of the facilitators and learners was used for the study, making a total of 174 learners and 5 facilitators from the two centres. Two researcher-designed questionnaires were used for data collection, one for the facilitators and the other for the participants. A researcher-constructed structured three-item interview guide was also used for qualitative data collection. The two instruments were administered by the researchers to the facilitators and participants respectively. The oral interview sessions were conducted with all that signified readiness to have their oral contributions recorded. The analyses of the collected data were done with frequency counts and percentages. The findings show a general preponderance of the use of English-Yoruba codemixing and codeswitching by the facilitators, occasional communication breakdown resulting from linguistic factors, and a variety of language-of-instruction preferences by the learners, among others. It is then recommended that vocational education providers in Nigeria should not consider any cost too high to ensure that all learners have access to vocational skill acquisition in their most preferred languages.*

**Keywords:** Career construction, community development, language proficiency, linguistic preference and personal development

**Introduction**

Community development is central to national development. National development is vital to the attainment of sustainable development at the global level. Adequate development of the individual is fundamental to development at the aforementioned echelons. Sustainable development thus necessarily has to progress from individual through community and national to global heights.

There are therefore many community development projects tailored towards the development of individuals. Among such endeavours are various skill acquisition schemes provided for adults by governmental and non-governmental organisations (Ihimekpen, Okwoma & Ajueyitse, 2019).

Paramount among the schemes are entrepreneurial skill acquisition centres where people are equipped with necessities for livelihood.

To optimally harness the potentials of such community development projects, the focus needs to transcend mere acquisition of job-specific technical know-how. Learning at the vocational centres has to cater for the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. This is an important requirement for making the development arising from the programmes sustainable.

To inject sustainability into the learning activities of the vocational skill acquisition programmes of the community development organisations, one of the most crucial factors to consider is the language employed as medium of instruction. If the learning activities are carried on in a language in which the beneficiaries are adequately proficient, they would not need to add grappling with linguistic challenges to the learning tasks. So, their burdens will be lighter than if they are forced to learn in a borrowed language. In the same vein, learning is interesting when executed in a language that the learners find exciting and prestigious.

The study was thus carried out to investigate the language majorly used as medium of instruction in selected vocational skill acquisition centres in two southwestern Nigerian cities. The emotional and pedagogic implications of the language practice were also interrogated. This was with a view to determining what language-for-training policy is best for such programmes.

Skill acquisition rather than academic certificates drive a nation's economy (Awa, Saidu & Ogbuji, 2018; Hussaini, & Jumba, 2018; Adewuyi, 2020). Entrepreneurship is among the necessary drivers of the transformation of 21st Century communities into highly productive ones that would enjoy sustainable development (Nwambam, Nnennaya & Nwankpu, 2018; Joseph, & Ijeoma, 2019; Ogunleye, 2019). However, the Nigerian government has not been able to provide an education system that can seamlessly integrate vocational skills. Many Nigerian graduates without appropriate skills to match market demands have thus remained underemployed or unemployed and thereby rendered unproductive to the society (Adewuyi, 2020).

Career Construction Theory, described as "a grand theory of career development" (Rudolph, Zacher & Hirschi, 2019) was developed at the end of the 20th Century in the field of social psychology (Dix, 2020). Among the people that popularised it as from 2005 is Savickas. It has a constructivist underpinning that emphasises a clear understanding of the underlying factors of an individual's preference for a particular career and how such affect their ability to adapt to the peculiarities of the career (Del Corso & Reh fuss, 2011). The theory is relevant to a study of the importance of the linguistic medium of vocational education since it engages subjective factors that either engender or hinder people's skill acquisition zeal. And attitude to the language of instruction is one of such factors.

People's decisions to venture into particular vocations are significantly influenced by their prior understanding about the vocations, and the understanding comes through observations and interaction via the media of particular languages. More understanding about the vocations is expected to be obtained while undergoing the training. It will be helpful if the language of initial understanding is also the one through which further understanding is to be gained. Any linguistic

disconnect between the two stages results in significant barrier to the desired level of smooth mental transition. Language is the medium of the meaning imposed on the vocation from the interaction of past, present and future experiences. Social integration is emphasised by career construction theory as imperative for an occupation to contribute to sustainable development (Del

Corso & Reh fuss, 2011). It, however, cannot be achieved when the language through which the occupation is learnt is alien to the practitioner and the immediate society.

The dynamism of language as a living phenomenon also makes the application of the career construction theory relevant to a study on the role of language in vocational education programmes. Career construction theory pays special attention to the progressively erratic and fast-evolving social and economic circumstances of careers (Leung, 2022). It is noteworthy that language is an integral component as well as a major vehicle of social and economic variables. The place of motivation in how people construct their careers is also acknowledged by career construction theory (Hogan & Holland, 2003). A vocational education programme will succeed to the extent to which it is executed in the language in which the target beneficiaries have a keen interest. In Nigeria of today, there are people who are excited at every opportunity to use the English language and there are those whose motivation is their indigenous language. The question of what language to employ in a vocational skill acquisition programme constituted by people of these different linguistic inclinations is therefore deserving of critical consideration.

Language is arguably the most useful facility for intra and interpersonal communication. Without the facility of language, bipedalism might have been the only difference between human beings and most animals. Socialisation, a product of teaching and learning in various forms, would have been a near impossibility. Vocational skill acquisition as an aspect of socialisation would thus suffer terrible setbacks.

Specifically, seamlessly integrating language and literacy into vocational training is a complex task that places a great deal of pressures on vocational education facilitators (Bak & O'Maley, 2015). It is worthy of note that whatever variable strains a tutor in the course of teaching-learning activities would reduce the tutees' learning potentials. The language used in a vocational training programme should thus be one in which both the teacher and the taught are highly proficient and thereby motivated.

Of unquantifiable significance to the success of vocational training is the need to focus on discipline-specific language comprising technical words. The specific context-based vocabulary must be taught, albeit sometimes seemingly unconsciously in practical contexts, for effective learning to take place (McLaughlin & Parkinson, 2018). The fact that a vocational training session is not primarily a language learning enterprise presents attendant advantage and disadvantage to the mastery of the register of the concerned vocation. The advantage is that the context-specific and practice-based circumstances provide interesting learning settings similar to the play-way technique that have been found facilitating to children learning. The disadvantage, however, is that since language learning is not the primary target, the mastery of the special vocabulary may be choked up by a multitude of skill acquisition activities.

However, in a pretest-posttest quasi-experimental study carried out by Ababneh and Al-Momani (2011) at Al-Huson University College in Jordan, a four-week English-medium vocational training intervention was found effective in enhancing the participants' mastery of certain technical terms. This must have been caused by the fact that some bodies of knowledge in the vocational education are easily explicated through practical procedures (Bruijn & Bakker, 2017). As participants are actively involved in the procedures being taught, the process of mastering the words and expressions used becomes easier as mental pictures of the actions and objects corresponding to the words and expressions facilitate retention of the linguistic content (Corpas Orellano, 2017). What should be noted, however, is that being taught in a language in which the participants are already proficient would provide a much easier and more effective platform for learning both the procedures and the diction.

The recognition of the cruciality of language to the success or failure of any educational enterprise has given rise to a myriad of research endeavours from which language-in-education and language-for-education policies deemed appropriate for the peculiarities of nations have evolved. For instance, the Nigerian National Policy for Education stipulates that a child's mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment of a school be used for instruction for the first four years of the nine-year basic education. English is to take over progressively as medium of instruction afterwards as the child develops competence to comprehend school instruction in the language.

Studies carried out, especially in Nigeria, have shown disparities between policy statements and actual implementation as far as language-for-education is concerned (Olatunji, 2016;). This anomaly is not without attendant negative consequences. Also, to worsen the case, gross discrepancies are obvious between the Nigerian policy on vocational and technical education and its actual implementation (Adewale, Aderonmu, Fulani, Babalola & Awoyera, 2018; Awa, Saidu & Ogbuji, 2018; Isah, 2020). Therefore, vocational education in Nigeria is threatened with double jeopardy.

Kapsargina and Olentsova (2020) recognise the possibility of a direct involvement of second or foreign language learning and vocational education in the formal secondary school setting. Where the vocation being learnt is not indigenous to the learning environment, elements of foreign language learning may be inevitable in informal contexts, too. For instance, a computer-mediated vocation will definitely have to do with the English language in a Nigerian environment because computer is a borrowed technology in the country. Except equivalent Nigerian language terms are available or indigenous terms are coined for objects and activities, the English terms will have to be used.

The importance of participants' educational and life experience to the success of a vocational training programme cannot be overemphasised (Khajieva, Khujaniyazova, Kenjaeva & Jumaniyozov, 2020). Similar to the observed case of Eenhana Vocational Training Centre in Namibia (Nepolo & Eze, 2020), where the medium of instruction and interaction in a vocational skill acquisition scheme is a second language, an overwhelming failure rate occasioned by linguistic barriers may be the natural consequence. The appropriateness or otherwise of the language of

instruction in a vocational education setting, just like in any other form of education, will either help or hinder the attainment of set goals.

Vocational education was generally misconceived in Nigeria as a substandard endeavour exclusively for people who were not adequately endowed with the cerebral qualities required for tertiary academic success. This misconception persists in some quarters in Nigeria (Adewale, Aderonmu, Fulani, Babalola & Awoyera, 2018). Even Nigerian education policy makers are not immune from the fallacy (Olaleye, 2021). This was why the emphasis for vocational training was placed on unsuccessful completers of junior secondary education while their brilliant counterparts were to proceed to senior secondary schools in the defunct 6-3-3-4 system of education in Nigeria.

This was partly responsible for the failure of the scheme as it made the vocational option denigrating and unattractive. A similar scenario is playing out in Namibia where the vocational option is being provided for only completers of Grade 10 that “do not meet the entry requirements for Grade 11 to 12” and “those who have completed Grade 12 but do not meet the admission requirements for universities and other institutions” (Nepolo & Eze, 2020, p. 312).

If the entrants into a vocational training scheme are actually less intellectually endowed, a second language should not be used as medium of instruction despite being the official language and medium of instruction in conventional institutions. As observed by Nepolo and Eze (2020), the use of English rather than a relevant indigenous language as medium of instruction is responsible for the poor performance of the vocational training participants in Namibia. Sincere seriousness of policy makers and implementers of vocational education programmes is thus expected to manifest in seriousness about the language to be used for interaction.

There is, however, a paradigm shift occasioned by widespread unemployment and under-employment of highly literate Nigerians, some even to postgraduate levels (Eric, Adamu & Ogochukwu, 2019). People of that academic level are now enrolling in vocational skill acquisition. A similar surge in attention to occupational education has been observed in the Dutch education system, albeit in the formal setting (Bruijn & Bakker, 2017). According to Bello and Muhammad (2021), the upsurge in the recognition of technical and vocational education as a panacea to graduate unemployment is worldwide. Many unemployed Nigerian university graduates and those who are not gainfully employed have resorted to vocational skill acquisition for survival. A substantial percentage of people in this category have English as their home language, most times despite low proficiency in the language (Opoola, & Opoola, 2019; Deji-Afuye, & Obadare, 2021). Their passion for the English language is so deep-seated that many of them even Anglicise their personal names (Eze, Aboh & Eze, 2020; Mensah, 2022). Determining what language is best for a vocational education scheme populated by participants with such varying linguistic competence levels and preferences as in Nigeria presents the spectacle of critical dilemma.

### **Methodology**

Two vocational training centres operated by non-governmental entities, one from each of Osun and Oyo states of southwestern Nigeria were incidentally sampled for the study. The whole population of participants in all of the various vocations during the training session were used for the study

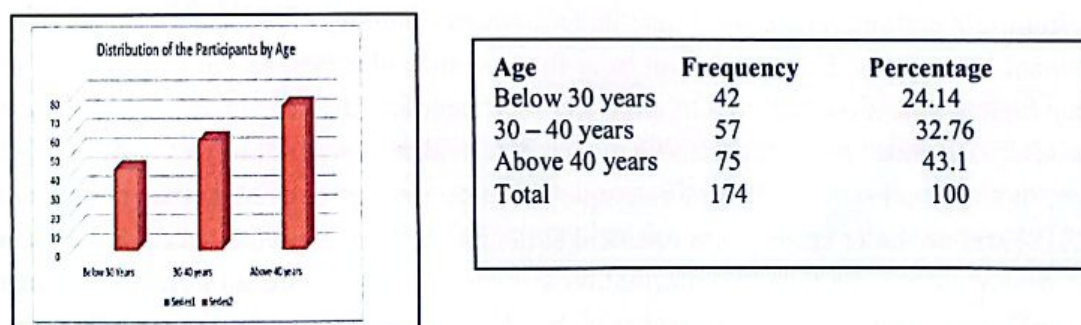
subject to their willingness to participate in the study. A total of 174 learners and 5 facilitators were drawn from the two centres.

Two questionnaires were used to elicit data from the study participants. The first was titled "Facilitators' Perspectives on Linguistic Angle to Community Development in Nigeria Questionnaire" (FPLADNQ). The researcher-designed thirteen-item instrument requested information about each centre, its language-for-training policy and practice, the communication consequences and the respondent's thoughts on appropriate language policy and practice for effective training at the centre. The second questionnaire was titled "Learners' Perspectives on Linguistic Angle to Community Development in Nigeria Questionnaire" (LPLADNQ). The researcher-designed eight-item questionnaire sought demographic information about each respondent with regard to gender, educational qualification, home language and perspectives on the appropriateness and effectiveness of the language practice in the training centres.

Thirty copies of the questionnaire were administered on learners in a vocational centre other than the ones that constituted the study sample. The responses were collated and processed through split-halves and subjected to the Pearson moment product correlation treatment that yielded 87.3 reliability.

A researcher-designed three-item interview guide was also used for data collection from both facilitators and participants that agreed to respond in speech and did not mind their vocal responses being recorded. Copies of the two questionnaires were administered by the researchers to the facilitators and participants respectively. The oral interview sessions were conducted with all that signified readiness to have their oral contributions recorded. The analyses of the collected data were done with frequency counts and percentages.

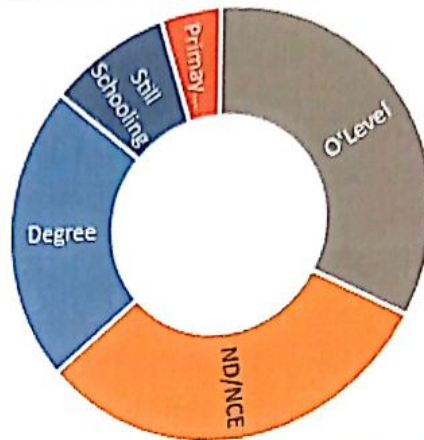
**Figure 1: Distribution of the participants by age**



It is noteworthy that people above 40 years of age were more in number than any other age group, followed by those from 30 to 40 years. Interaction with a majority of the people in these categories showed that they already had some types of occupations in the formal or the informal sector. Their sense of underemployment heightened the obvious fact of inability to cope well with the harsh economic realities of the country prompted them to opt for additional skills to survive.

Figure 2:

## Distribution of the Participants by Highest Academic Qualifications



Key:

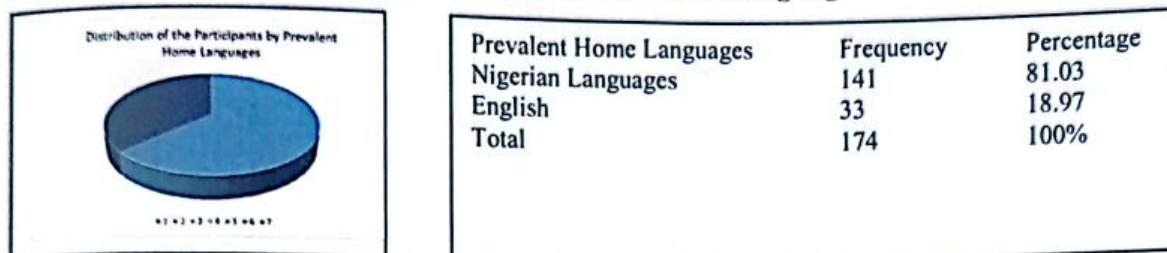
| Formal Education Status            | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Still Schooling                    | 16        | 9.2        |
| Primary School Leaving Certificate | 8         | 4.6        |
| O' Level                           | 57        | 32.76      |
| ND/NCE                             | 54        | 31.03      |
| Degree                             | 39        | 22.41      |
| Total                              | 174       | 100        |

It is not surprising that up to 22.41% of the participant in the vocational training programmes were graduates from universities. There were also undergraduates among 9.2% that were still schooling in conventional institutions. This is a fallout from the variously observed as the gross inadequacy of the Nigerian higher education curricula to empower their beneficiaries for entrepreneurship (Ezeani, 2018; Hussaini, & Jumba, 2018; Okolie, Nwajiuba, Eneje, Binuomote, Ehiobuche, & Hack-Polay, 2021). Also, the informal sector offers more employment opportunities to Nigerians than the formal (Aminu, 2019) and the latter emphasises practical skills rather than theoretical knowledge. It is also generally believed in Nigeria that the informal sector also provides more opportunity for practical vocational skill acquisition than the formal (Okolie, Nwajiuba, Eneje, Binuomote, Ehiobuche, & Hack-Polay, 2021), hence the presence of university graduates and current students of regular higher education in the skill acquisition centres.

Okolie, Nwajiuba, Binuomote, Ehiobuche, Igu, and Ogungboyega (2020) recommend the establishment of career training with mentoring (CTM) centres in all higher education institutions in Nigeria. It is perhaps the non-existence of such centres in the country that propels Nigerians who are currently enrolled in one higher education institution or the other to seize the opportunities provided by non-governmental organisations. Examples of such private initiatives are the ones in

which this study was carried out. Among the skills being taught are tailoring, weaving, hairdressing, soap making, and so on.

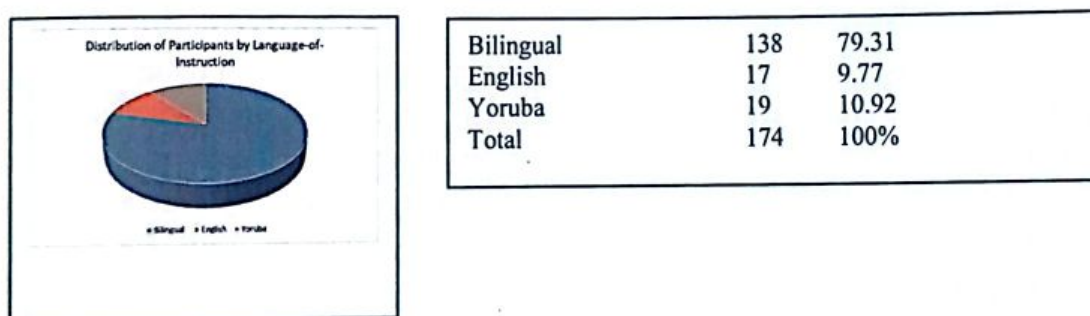
**Figure 3: Distribution of participants by prevalent home language**



Contrary to what has been observed as most Nigerians' inordinate desire to anglicise themselves by adopting English as their home language (Olatunji, 2016; Deji-Afuye & Obadare, 2021), majority of the participants have their indigenous languages as home languages. The implication of this is that most people that have English as home language have not seen any reason to enrol in vocational education schemes, probably because of their real or perceived privileged status. The readiness to enrol in such schemes may, therefore, have status dimensions.

**Research Question 1:** What is the prevalent language-of-instruction in the selected vocational training centres in the Yoruba-speaking southwestern states of Nigeria?

**Figure 4: Distribution of participants by language of instruction**

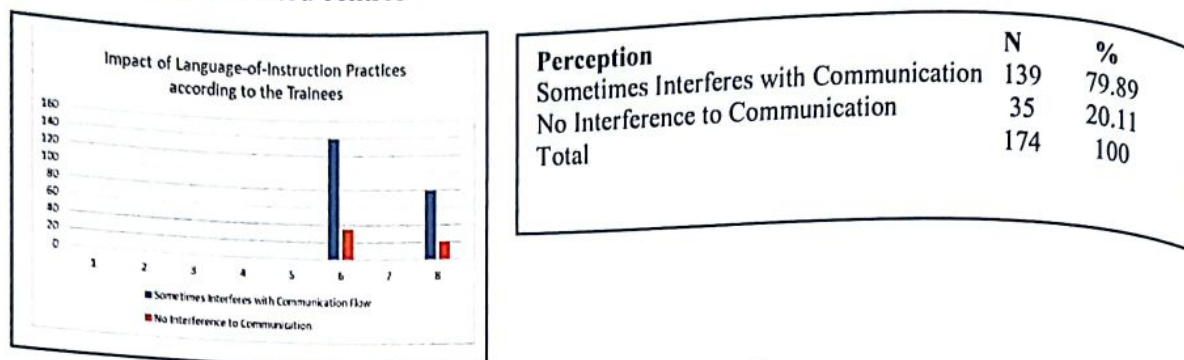


The vocational education centres predominantly practise bilingual instruction. The two centres are located in the monolithic southwestern part of Nigeria. There are, however, people from some other parts of the country residing among the Yoruba speaking people of the southwest. This language contact situation is one of the factors that promote community English-Yoruba bilingualism in Yorubaland. The varieties of the English range from the Standard Nigerian English to the illiterate varieties of pidgin and idiolects.

Data collected through the designed interview schedule show that the instructors basically codemix and code-switch as a normal practice. Some instructors speak more of English while others used Yoruba more. This is not surprising because English is seen as a status symbol in Nigerian communities in general and Yoruba states in particular (Akinyode, 2019; Akujobi, 2019).

**Research Question 2:** What is the vocational education facilitators' perception about the prevalent language-of-instruction in the selected centres?

**Figure 5:** The vocational education facilitators' perceptions about the prevalent language-of-instruction in the selected centres



A huge percentage of the participants experience linguistically induced communication blockade in the course of skill acquisition. This cannot be without some negative consequences as regards the future practice of their skills. It is then pertinent to ask if they would prefer see a change in the language of instruction. This is done in the following paragraph.

**Table 1: The Participants' Disposition to Change of Language of Instruction**

| Participants' Disposition                          | N   | %     |
|----------------------------------------------------|-----|-------|
| Change of Language-of-Instruction Policy Necessary | 143 | 82.18 |
| Not necessary                                      | 31  | 17.82 |
| Total                                              | 174 | 100   |

Since 82.18% of the participant saw the need for a language-of-instruction reform, it is logical to conclude that they take the issue seriously. This underscores the significance of unhindered flow of communication to a successful vocational education programme. Learners' preferences, as reasonably as possible, outweigh their teachers' preferences if a learning experience is to yield maximum benefits (Røe, Rowe, Ødegaard, Sylliaas & Dahl-Michelsen, 2019; Du Plessis, 2020). However, a probe into the facilitators' preference in this case cannot be waved aside presumptuously because it can be rightly assumed that they have a considerable degree of expertise to bring to bear as regards their preferred language of instruction.

**Research Question 3:** What is the vocational education facilitators' perception about the prevalent language-of-instruction in the selected centres?

To the question "Have you ever at any time realised you were misinterpreted as a result of language barrier?", 4 (80%) of the facilitators answered in the affirmative while 1(20%) denied having experienced such. When asked how often such misinterpretation happens, 40% indicated "Very Often". 20% stated "Often" while 20% claimed it has never happened. All these indicate that the learners are not alone in their observation of the linguistically induced communication hitches resulting from the operational language at the centres. The implication is that the language problem, no matter how insignificant this may seem, is a reality that needs to be addressed to maximise the pedagogic aims of the centres.

**Research Question 5:** What languages do the participants in the vocational education in the selected centres prefer for instruction?

**Table 2: Language Preferences of the Participants for Instruction**

| Languages Preferred by Participants | Frequency Count | Percentage |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|------------|
| English                             | 96              | 55.17      |
| Yoruba                              | 51              | 29.31      |
| Bilingual                           | 18              | 29.31      |
| Igbo                                | 6               | 3.45       |
| Urhobo                              | 3               | 1.72       |
| Total                               | 174             | 100        |

That an overwhelming 55.17% of the participants prefer an English-medium training programme while the nearest in preference (Yoruba) has a much smaller 29.31% authenticates the submission that many Nigerians crave the high social status conferred by the English language (Olatunji, 2016; Deji-Afuye & Obadare, 2021). Interactions with the 18 participants that prefer a bilingual programme shows that each of them prefers their indigenous language and English. This implies that the Igbos among them prefer English-Igbo bilingualism, and ditto for the Yorubas that suggest English-Yoruba.

It is easy to term such a bilingual vocational training policy unnecessarily expensive, especially considering the fact that those preferring some Nigerian languages may be an infinitesimal percentage of the participants. However, one should note that Papua New Guinea did not consider it wasteful providing multilingual elementary education for its about 5 million population that had over 800 languages (Olatunji, 2016; Schreyer & Wagner, 2022). This thus proves that where there is political will, no amount required to implement a policy should be a disincentive. The widely acknowledged benefits this affords the Papua New Guinean education also point to a potential of huge pedagogic success.

The language preference for instruction in a vocational training programme, especially the learners', is very important to the success of the programme because as found out by Iyortsuun, Goyit and Dakung (2020) as well as Haddoud, Onjewu, Nowinski and Alammari (2022), whatever affects learners' emotion and passion will significantly determine their success at the vocational skills acquisition and language evokes a great deal of sentiment (Umera-Okeke, 2019; Kanca, Ginaya & Astuti, 2020).

It is noteworthy that no matter how irrational the participants' language preference, may appear, irrational beliefs, too, go a long way in determining the success or failure of any entrepreneurship education (Ifeanyieze, Ede, Ejiofor, Ekenta, Onah, Okechukwu, Isiwu, Ogbonna, Azunku, Nwankwo, Ezebuio, Onah, Mezieobi, Ede, Onyenusi, Asogwa, Omeje, Abubakar and Samuel (2021). Therefore, the education programme providers should either provide facilities to match the preference or provide measures to correct the preference. Unfortunately, the National Policy on Education is silent on what language is recommended for vocational enterprise institutions established outside the framework of formal education system.

Where students of vocational training programmes prefer to be taught in English, a language in which their proficiency is limited, their linguistic deficiency will have to be catered for concurrently with the target vocational skills. The principle of integration of academic and vocational education being practised in Germany can be of help towards the goal of improving the beneficiaries' capacity for the use of the chosen language to master the learning content (Mordhosrt & Jenert, 2022).

### Conclusion

Individuals and non-governmental organisations in Nigeria are contributing to the sustainable development goals of the United Nations in the area of vocational education. There, however, seems to be no policy-driven language-in-education principle being uniformly implemented in the vocational education centres. The predominant language practice in the centres sampled is haphazard English-Yoruba bilingualism with a preponderance of Yoruba language. Yoruba is the indigenous language of the monolithic southwestern part of Nigeria. Uncoordinated bilingualism is a product of lack of clear-cut language policy for vocational education. This results in occasional communication breakdown among the facilitators and participants. The desire for language-in-education practices is thus shared by facilitators and participants alike. The most widely preferred language of instruction is English though a great percentage of the participants does not possess the level of formal education expected to accord adequate proficiency in the language. Bilingual policy tailor-made to cater for the needs and preferences of the diverse participants in instruction is also advocated to cater for those that may be unable to grasp learning content in English.

### Recommendations

1. At the governmental as well as individual vocational centre levels, adequate provision should ensure that no learner is left behind as a result of linguistic barrier. Facilitators that are highly proficient in both the predominant language of each centre's environment and English should be engaged. When necessary, two or three facilitators may be employed to teach the same content in different languages. This should not be seen as a waste of resource.
2. Periodic upgrade and update of the facilitators' lesson delivery strategies and linguistic competence should be organised. With highly skilled lesson presentation by facilitators, participants, linguistic deficiencies can be significantly mitigated. As the facilitators hone their linguistic competence, information dissemination becomes much easy and effective.

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