

EVALUATING TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF MOTHER TONGUE AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION IN LOWER PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN ILORIN METROPOLIS

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Abstract

There is abundant evidence that educating children in the mother tongue has a lot of advantages both for the children and the society. In recognition of this, the National Policy on Education stipulated that primary school children should be taught in their mother tongue (MT) in the first three years. There is need to examine how this policy has been implemented in our schools. So, the study investigated teachers' knowledge and use of MT as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools in Ilorin Metropolis. A survey design was adopted and simple random sampling technique was used to select 40 schools and 400 teachers of lower primary schools in Ilorin metropolis, Kwara State. Teachers' Knowledge of Mother Tongue Questionnaire ($r=0.76$) and Teachers' Use of Mother Tongue Questionnaire ($r=0.83$) were used to collect data for the study. Data generated were analysed using descriptive statistics and t-test at $p<0.05$ significant level. Results revealed that teachers' knowledge of MT is low and they do not use MT as a medium of instruction. It was recommended that government should take a drastic step to revisit and enforce her policy on MT as a language of instruction in our schools.

Keywords: Teachers' knowledge of mother tongue, Teachers' utilization of mother tongue, Medium of instruction

Introduction

Determining what language will be used to teach children is one of the most important decisions of educational policy of a nation. The language (s) used in the classroom affects children opportunity and ability to learn. Mother Tongue (MT) which is also known to be the native language or indigenous language or first language of a child is an

indispensable instrument for development of intellectual, physical and moral aspect of education. Providing children with an opportunity to learn in their mother tongue starting on the first day of school confers significant advantages for the education system, teachers, parents, and students.

Obiero (2010) noted that instruction in MT can be useful in shaping of habits, conducts, values, virtues, customs, and beliefs of children in the society. According to the findings of research, weakness in mother tongue can cause paralyses of all thought and power of expression and can often make children suffer from problems of identity loss or alienation from their culture (Batibo, 2005). When a child is not taught in his/her mother tongue in the early years, we deny the child his rights and a host of other benefits allied to education in the mother tongue in early years. The use of mother tongue has long been ignored and considered impossible due to lack of understanding of the significant roles that language plays in facilitating access to schooling and academic achievement. Suffice it to say that Nigerian children are better educated first in the mother tongue so that we do not continue to flounder in the abyss of failure and loss of identity (OlaOlorun, 2013).

Linguists in realization of the all the important roles of MT and dangers of its non-utilization recommended in 1951 at the UNESCO meeting that children should begin their schooling through the medium of the mother tongue. Following this, UNESCO has since 1953 encouraged mother tongue instruction in primary education. Adegbite (2004) also advocated the use of African languages for the development of African nations. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – UNCRC (1989) also lent credence to this and declared that children should be taught in their mother tongue. To UNCRC children who are taught in a language with which they are not familiar with are maimed emotionally and intellectually.

The Federal Government of Nigeria in support of this stipulated in her National Policy on Education (1998 and 2004) that primary school children should be taught in their mother tongue or the language of the immediate environment in the first three years and in English in the last three years (National Policy on Education NPE 1998, 2004). Some educators have also recognised and acclaimed use of MT as the determining factor for achieving the goals of Education for All (EFA). They argued that only those countries where the student's first language is the language of instruction are likely to achieve the goals of EFA. For this reason, as reported by Bender & Dutcher (2005), EFA Global Monitoring Report has strongly advocated that all children should be taught in their mother tongue for at least the first few years of primary school regardless of whether the

language is a minority or a majority language. Similarly, Lawal (2005) opined that Nigerian languages should be the language of education from birth to the elementary level to stop the languages from going into extinction and promote education for all.

Truthfully, years of research have confirmed these presumptions. A number of projects have been carried out in Nigeria which has given empirical data supporting the advantages of mother-tongue based education. The famous Ife Six-Year Primary Project (SYPP) was an experimental project that taught primary school children using their mother tongue (Yoruba) as the medium of instruction throughout the six years of primary school. The project lasted eight years (1970-1978). Evaluation showed that children taught in their mother tongue for the six years did not suffer any deficiency in learning in English in later years at secondary school. In addition, the project children made definite affective gains in terms of adjustment and attitude to schooling. The poor performance of students taught in English in both internal and external examinations further established the effectiveness of MT in teaching and learning (Afolayan, 1979, Ojerinde, 1986). OlaOlorun (2013) also reported that despite the fact that many children speak English language, yet, they perform poorly in English language examinations as noted in West African Examination Council's (WAEC) Chief Examiner's Report.

Several other researchers have confirmed the benefits of educating children in their MT and thus concluded that it is best for a child to learn in the mother-tongue in the formative years as it would help his educational development in the future. For example, Krashen, (2004) confirmed that many skills acquired in the first language can be transferred to the second language. If a child has developed good reading skills in the MT she is likely to be able to apply these skills when reading English. Lawal (2014) also noted that children who begin their education in their mother tongue make a better start, and continue to perform better, than those for whom school starts with a new language. Kosonen, (2005) pointed out that when children are given opportunity to learn in their mother tongue; they are more likely to enroll and succeed in schools. Benson (2002) added that parents of such children are more likely to communicate with teachers and participate in their children's learning.

Thomas and Collier (2002) in their study also confirmed that mother tongue serves as a foundation for and bilingual and multilingual education. When a child is fluent and learned in the mother tongue, a cognitive and linguistic foundation for learning additional languages is laid. Also, six to eight years of education in a language are necessary to develop the level of literacy and verbal proficiency required for academic achievement in

secondary school. Cummins (2000) noted that children's ability to learn second or additional languages (for instance, a lingua franca and an international language) does not suffer when their mother tongue is the primary language of instruction throughout primary school. Hovens (2002) also identified that mother tongue based education benefits children especially the disadvantaged one including children from rural communities who tend to have exposure to an official language. Aside all these, Adegbite (2004) remarked that communities around the world are realizing the need to ensure the transmission of their linguistic heritage to the youngest members of their communities so Nigeria should not be left out in the game. All these benefits identified are enough rationale for basing early education in children's mother tongue before introducing a second language as a medium of instruction as opined by Ouane and Glanz (2010) and Ball (2010).

Regardless of all, Lawal (2014) observed that language policy is still discarded and the foreign languages with their uncontroversial disadvantages continue to thrive. Ball (2010) pointed out that all the advantages of mother tongue based education in the early years have been overlooked. This is noticeable in the careless attitude of many Nigerians to their indigenous languages. The indigenous languages have long been threatened by the recognition of English language as superior to our native language. According to Lawal (2005) English language is spoken by an overwhelming majority of Nigerian children and therefore has come to assume a very important position in Nigeria. The parents' attitude to the use of mother tongue therefore is undesirable. OlaOlorun et al (2013) observed that parents preferred English language as their children's L1 and so children are motivated from birth to speak English-language. The authors also reported that English language is used as the medium of instruction in many schools right from the first year of primary school and it is taught as a subject throughout the school in spite of what the NPE says.

In an attempt to bring to realization the language policy of making MT the language of instruction at lower primary school level, it becomes necessary to start the preparation for transition to Mother Tongue (MT) based education from the teachers who are the major catalyst that will carry out the teaching and learning in the MT. Previous researches have looked into teachers' perception of the continued use of the English language as the language of instruction in Nigerian schools. No attempt has been made to measure teachers' understanding of the roles mother tongue plays in educating a child. None of the available studies also look at how far teachers' have really implemented the language policy. Hence, the study investigated teachers' knowledge of the importance of and use

of MT as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools in Ilorin Metropolis.

Statement of the Problem

The National Policy on Education (1998, 2004) has prescribed that the Mother tongue (MT) be used as medium of instruction in the first three years of primary school while there is a transition to English medium at the fourth year of primary school. Many scholars confirmed that this language policy has long remained a fantasy because no serious attempt has been made on its implementation. No wonder, the quality of education continues to deteriorate because language policy has failed and the foreign languages with their uncontroversial disadvantages continue to thrive. Nonetheless, the use of our mother tongue to teach our children is indispensable if we must experience growth in our search for technological advancement. In the nations' attempt to re-strategize on making language policy a reality in our lower primary schools, a first step is to investigate teachers' understanding of this policy and reasons why children in lower primary schools should be taught in their MT as well as how far they have employed the language policy. Teachers are the actual classroom users of language so there is need to ascertain their knowledge of MT as a medium of instruction and also substantiate their use of MT as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools which this paper actually carried out.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of teachers' knowledge of the importance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary school?
2. What is the level of teachers' use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools?

Hypotheses

1. There will be no significant difference in the teachers' type of school and their knowledge of the importance of using Mother Tongue as the medium of instruction in lower primary school.
2. There will be no significant difference in the teachers' type of school and their use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools.

Methodology

This study used descriptive survey research design. The population of this research work comprised of all teachers of lower

primary in both public and private primary schools in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State. A simple random technique was used to select 40 public and private primary schools from three Local Government Areas in Ilorin Metropolis. All teachers of lower primary classes in each sampled schools participated in the research. The two instruments used for data collection in this study were self-developed instruments by the researchers. Teachers' Knowledge of Mother Tongue Questionnaire (TKMTQ) was in essay format and consisted of seven questions on knowledge of importance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction and marks obtainable was 100 percent. Teachers' Use of Mother Tongue Questionnaire (TUMTQ) was 10 items questionnaire soliciting information on how often teachers use mother tongue as a medium of instruction structured in Likert scale of four points: Almost Always - AA (4) Always - A (3) Sometimes-S (2) and Never - N (1). The reliability of the instruments was also established. Using split half method TKMTQ gave reliability co-efficient of 0.76 and TUMTQ yielded reliability coefficient of 0.83. Data that collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistic of t-test. All hypotheses tested at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the level of teacher's knowledge of the importance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary class?

Table 1: Level of Teachers' Knowledge of the Importance of Mother Tongue

Score	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Std. D.
0-19	12	3.0		
20-39	336	84.0		
40-59	17	4.3		
60-79	15	3.7	37.71	2.62
80 and above	20	5.0		

Table 1 shows the level of knowledge of the teachers on the importance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary class. The table shows that the knowledge score of 3% of the teachers was between 0 and 19, 84% of them scored between 20 and 39, 4.3% of them scored between 40 and 59, 3.7% scored between 60 and 79 while

the remaining 5.0% scored 80 and above. Out of 100 percent, the overall mean score of the teachers' knowledge is 37.71 with standard deviation value of 2.62. Based on the result from this table, it can be inferred that the level of teacher's knowledge of the importance of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary class is low.

Research Question 2: Do the teachers utilize mother tongue as the medium of instruction in lower primary class

Table 2: Level of Teachers' Use of Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction in Lower Primary School

S/N	Items	Mean	Std. D.
1	Use Mother tongue to interpret when I see pupils cannot understand what am teaching them	2.83	1.10
2	Encourage my pupils to interact in mother tongue	2.38	.87
3	Tell children stories in mother tongue	2.59	.81
4	Use mother tongue to teach my pupils some topics in English and other subjects	2.34	1.14
5	Give pupils instruction using mother tongue	2.29	.85
6	Prefer using other languages to Mother Tongue	2.26	.78
7	Punish children who use Mother Tongue to express themselves	2.25	.92
8	Discourage other teachers from using MT as medium of instruction	2.23	.83
9	Make effort to use Mother Tongue despite all difficulties in its use	2.63	.90
10	Reinforce a child who speaks Mother Tongue well so he/she will continue using it.	2.41	1.10
Weighted Average		2.42	

Table 2 shows the teachers' use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower primary class. The table shows that it is almost always that the teachers do the following: use mother tongue to interpret when pupils cannot understand what is being taught ($\bar{x} = 2.83$), encourage pupils to interact in mother tongue ($\bar{x} = 2.38$), tell children stories in mother tongue ($\bar{x} = 2.59$), use mother tongue to teach pupils some topics in English Language and other subjects ($\bar{x} = 2.34$) and give pupils instruction using mother tongue ($\bar{x} = 2.29$). The table shows further that the teachers sometimes do the following: prefer using other languages to mother tongue ($\bar{x} = 2.26$), punish children who use mother tongue to

express themselves ($\bar{x} = 2.25$), discourage other teachers from using mother tongue as a medium of instruction ($\bar{x} = 2.23$), make efforts to use mother tongue despite all difficulties in its use ($\bar{x} = 2.63$) and reinforce a child who speaks mother tongue well ($\bar{x} = 2.41$). Meanwhile, based on the value of the weighted average (2.42) which is lower than 2.50 that is accepted in this study as a value for positive response, it can be inferred that teachers do not use mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary class. Teachers' level of utilization of MT as a medium of instruction is very low.

Test of the Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There will be no significant influence of school type on the teachers' knowledge of the importance of using Mother Tongue as the medium of instruction in Lower Primary class.

Table 3: Summary of T-test showing Influence of School Type on Teachers' Knowledge of Importance Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction.

Variable	N	Mean	Std. D	df	T	Sig (p)	Remark
TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE OF IMPORTANCE OF MT							
Private	131	78.24	95.95	398	-2.11	.035	Significant
Public	269	95.51	65.36		3		

Table 3 shows that the overall mean score of the private and public teachers' knowledge of the importance of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction at lower primary class. The teachers from private school had a lower mean score of 78.24 while those from public schools had higher mean score of 95.51. The mean values reveal an appreciable difference which indicates that the level of knowledge of the teachers in public school is higher than that of the teachers in private school. This implies that the

teachers in public schools are more knowledgeable about the importance of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary class. Thus, there is significant influence of school type on the teachers' knowledge of the importance of using Mother Tongue as the medium of instruction in lower primary class ($df = 398$; $t = -2.113$; $p < 0.05$). Based on this result, hypothesis 1 is not accepted.

Hypothesis Two: There will be no significant influence of school type on the teachers' use of mother tongue as the medium of instruction in Lower Primary class.

Table 4 Summary of T-test showing Influence of School Type on Teachers' Use of Mother Tongue as Medium of Instruction

Variable	N	Mean	Std. D	df	T	Sig (p)	Remark
TEACHERS' USE OF MT							
Private	131	35.37	98.45	398	-2.119	.035	Significant
Public	269	48.89	25.03				

Table 4 shows that the overall mean score of the use of mother tongue by private and public school teachers. The teachers from private school had a lower mean score of 35.37 while those from public schools had higher mean score of 48.89. The values show difference in the mean scores which indicates that the teachers in public schools use mother tongue more than the teachers in private schools. Thus, there is significant influence of school type on the teachers' use of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary class ($df = 398$; $t = -2.119$; $p < 0.05$). Based on this result, hypothesis 2 is not accepted.

Discussion of Findings

The study revealed that teachers' have low level of knowledge of the importance of using mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary school. This is in agreement with the assertion of Araromi (2005) that most people, teachers inclusive are ignorant of the benefits the society can derive from teaching their children using MT.

It was also found that teachers do not utilize mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary class. This is in agreement with assertion of Baker (1998) that the use of English Language (official language) is dominant and has become the order of the day in our education system. The result was also in conformity with Lawal (2005) where he observed that the policy has been very difficult to implement because of the attitude of the educated class who will rather have their children taught English Language right from the cradle. The result also confirmed the finding of Egwuogu (2014) who found that not all the teachers can speak and write their mother tongues very well and so they cannot teach in mother tongues. This places a serious challenge to the utilization of MT as schools where children spend most of their hours taught in English and so children speak more of English while indigenous languages are gradually going into extinction.

The result of the study also revealed that teachers do not use Mother Tongue as medium of instruction in lower primary classes. This result corroborates Lawal (2005) report that what obtains in schools is very different from what NPE stipulates as regards language of instruction. The author's investigation confirmed that many schools use English as a medium of instruction all through. The result also showed a significant difference in the public and private school teachers' knowledge of the importance and utilization of mother tongue as medium of instruction in lower primary classes. Teachers in private school scored lower than the public on utilization of MT. This finding is supported by Egwuogu (2014) who reported nonchalant attitude of private schools to the language policy that recommends MT as the language of instruction in lower primary schools. Ede, Iyamu and Sam, Aduwa Ogiegbae (2007) observed that the negative attitude of most of these private schools is aggravated by majority of parents who see foreign languages especially English language as all in all and are always proud to hear their children speak English. OlaOlorun et al (2013) observed that parents preferred English language as their children's L1 and so children are motivated from birth to speak English language. The erroneous attitude of private schools to the use of MT is apparent when you enter their schools. Their building walls are inscribed with this warning all around, "Vernacular speaking is prohibited" and any child that breaks the law will be punished. This is a pathetic situation; we can imagine how we have made ourselves slaves in our fathers' land when foreigners are at present coming down to Nigeria to learn our indigenous languages. An instance of this is Yoruba Flagship Centre at the University of Ibadan where foreign students come annually for fellowship to enable them learn our native language better.

Conclusion

From this study, conclusion can be made that both public and private school teachers do not have knowledge of the importance of mother tongue as a medium of instruction in lower primary schools. The type of school (private or public) determines the teachers' knowledge of the importance of using Mother Tongue as medium of as well as their use of mother tongue as medium of instruction in lower primary class. The public schools' teachers' use of mother tongue is better than that of private schools' teachers.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

- Nigeria as a nation should revisit and enforce her policy on using MT as language of instruction in lower primary schools.
- Government should play critical role in promoting clear and continued commitments to effective mother tongue based and bi/multilingual education programmes in policy agendas and administrative contexts at national and local levels.
- Government and other stakeholders should organize quality pre-service and continuous in-service training to educate teachers on the importance and utilization of the MT in lower primary schools.
- Effort should be made to increase innovation and research on approaches to developing teachers' competency of using the indigenous languages to teach young children in their mother tongue.
- Adequate follow-up, supervision, monitoring and evaluation should be provided by the government to ensure that schools especially private schools utilize MT as language of instruction in lower primary schools.

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