MOTHER TONGUE: A HINDERANCE TO TEACHER DEVELOPMENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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Abstract

This paper advocates the use of English language in teaching and learning at all levels of education because it is an international language, a language of unity, a language widely spoken and understood and a classroom language as against the indigenous language which this paper adjudged as a hindrance to teacher development in the 21st century. Therefore English language having been held in high esteem internationally would only maintain its standard when every teacher improves his competence in every aspect of the language hence embracing professionalism.

Introduction

The assumption that because Africa is made up of too many ethnic or tribal languages and as such, it will be impossible to adopt one or some languages as a medium of education could be ascribed to fear of the unknown. The refusal or the fear associated with language issue in Africa is simply a local and national prejudice because time, resources and policy are what is required to achieve an indigenous Africa languages as a medium of instruction.

The essence of using indigenous African languages as a medium of instruction at some level of the schooling system lies in the fact that a child learns better and develops faster cognitively if he is taught in his mother tongue continuously over a period of time in infancy. Mother tongue is defined as “the language in which a child first learns to express his ideas about himself and about the world in which he lives” (UNESCO 1953). Also, the linguists have agreed that the first twelve years of a child’s life, is the most formative period of the child and as such, the child’s mother tongue education is his inalienable right and if denied, the fundamental human right of that child is trampled upon and more so, it is the period where language is freely and easily acquired. In Nigeria, this is actually the major concern of the advocates of the Ife project where it is believed that instead of a child talking with L2 at early stage of his education, the use of mother tongue will create in the child self-confidence, initiative, resourcefulness, creative reason, and adaptability-skills necessary further growth in the latter stages of child development (Fafunwa, 1989). Nigerian Ife project initiation did conclude that if a child is helped to lay the foundation of his future development in his own mother-tongue, the child will likely be in a position to build upon it in later years even in another language. It is quite obvious to state that mother tongue helps a lot in mauling a child’s early concept. This is because language is very close to the mind and therefore helps in conceptualization and thinking. Since mother tongue is the first language of a child, it is psychologically important to a child in the teaching and learning process.

It is commonly believed that using Mother-Tongue (the African language) in education will serve as a means by which orientation in the society’s cultural values are achieved. This is true because language cannot be separated from culture since it is an expression of culture. Given the psychological and socio-cultural importance of language to man, it follows that the mother – tongue (African Language) as the first language learned by the child to express his ideas about himself and about the world in which he lives, will tend to have a certain psychological and socio-cultural effect on the child (Emenanjo 1990:63). The contention in the above statement is opted to the agreement that indigenous African language is good to be adopted as a medium of instruction in our education System but care must be taken because the issue of language in education in Africa is a difficult and complex one when we look at the heterogenous
linguistic composition of the Africa continent. The continent is made up of about fifty independent nations with distinctive societal dispositions.

The continent in this order is made up of tribes or ethnic groups so numerous that each tribe or ethnic group has a language of its own. The situations arise where school age children of Africa deserved to be educated in their mother tongue as advocated by the language experts, the question however is whether every language found in Africa is developed to the point that its sounds are codified. Are there teachers who speak and can teach every aspect of School Subjects, knowledge and Skill in such a language? Are the languages linguistically adequate? Generally accepted? And what are those things in valued to develop such a language if chosen?

Biasness and sentiments apart, frankly speaking, the advocates of the use of indigenous African language as a medium of instruction are geometrically myopic especially when we look at current 21st century wind of change—the globalization.

Instances are there that languages like English and French are of international values and can bring world communities together easily. National unity could be achieved using a common language such as English language in the educational System. Although, English language is a language of colonialism no doubt, it is a fact that almost all the territories of Africa have been colonized and the language enforced, but the global wind of change and the rate of scientific and technological development left no room for contemplation of otherwise. The fact still remains that when the multilingual nature of African nations is considered, then the argument is not wise.

Again, most or all African languages are not adequately developed in such a way that the language will express ideas fully. Some advocate that a child’s education should start with the indigenous African language and later in the process be switched to English language but it is better to go straight to the English Language. This is because such a switch will most likely cause cognitive deficiency and hence low productivity.

It is pertinent to state that English Language should be compulsorily accepted in the teaching and learning process in the African continent because, it is an international language, a universally accepted language, a language that has taken the larger share of the development in the areas of science and technology and most especially, since the education we are talking of is tagged as Western Education.

The African Teacher and English Language
The major role of the 21st Century teacher is to inculcate knowledge, skills, attitudes etc to learners through adequate planning and preparation, through the choice of appropriate words, and use of correct gestures, signs and symbols. As a communicator therefore, he bridges the gap between the knowledge and skills to be acquired and the learners’ intellect whose intelligent quotient determines how quickly or otherwise the knowledge and/or skills is/are grasped. On the other hand, the teacher’s ability to bridge the said gap is subject to some expected qualities which enables him make the right choice when transferring knowledge and skills. As a good communicator, the teacher must be able to do the following: listen well; comprehend written and spoken languages; express ideas clearly in words; write clearly and competently; interpret non verbal ones; think clearly; respect the other party and win his/her/their confidence and have a good memory (wilianswer.com).

The teacher who is an effective communicator is able to communicate with students, parents, colleagues, administrators and community members using varieties of formats and media. He/she uses correct standard grammar and spelling to convey clear information to various recipients in a way that is appropriate to the audience. The effective communicator is a professional in written and spoken communications, and does not engage in hear-say or betray confidential information about students, their families, or other professionals. He or she is able to collaborate with other teachers, instructional aides, administrators and parents and knows how to access resources. The teacher is able to use media and communication technologies to effectively use questioning and reflective listening to engage the students in higher level and critical thinking about the content matter (wikianswer.com)
The above author concluded that an effective communicator is like a **REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONER, STUDENT ENabler, LEADER and PROFESSIONAL**. It is true because, a competent teacher candidate is an effective communicator as it is summarily stated thus:

- Demonstrating Effective verbal, nonverbal, written and media communication techniques that foster injuring, collaboration, and supportive interaction in the classroom.
- Displaying writing samples that are grammatically correct, convey information effectively and are appropriately constructed for various purposes and au
- Demonstrating communication abilities with individual students, in small groups, in class and in other school settings.
- Demonstrating the ability to communicate effectively in person, via phone, via email and in writing to parents of one’s students.
- Demonstrating the ability to communicate effectively with other teachers, administrators and other school personnel in multiple ways.

The above summarizes the personalities of a professional teacher and the fact that what he says and how it is said are the magic in the teaching and learning process. It also means that whatever is the language of communication there is the need for all teachers to be competent in it.

**Background and Challenges**

In the teaching and learning process there are various categories of teachers: (i) those who are native speakers of English and (ii) those who are second or third language speakers of English. The African Teacher falls into the later category. They have common historical background as far as language issues are concerned, they were colonized by the Britain and France and these colonial masters has influenced a lot in their lives but most importantly the colonial masters left their education and language behind as identities. Consequently, it was inherited by Africans. The Arabian language in Africa also has a historical reference as it is dated back to the period of religions propagation like the British language. However, from origin African countries are multilingual in nature. For instance, Nigeria alone has as many as about 400 languages. Consequently, each African teacher has a mother tongue (LI) which might or might not be the language of the wider communication (LWC) selected after a foreign official language in his country against the desires of his native people. Another common thing is that the African leaders, to the mother tongue activists have betrayed their countries by refusing to ‘throw away’ the languages of the colonialism and project one out of the numerous indigenous languages to compete with the one forced on them. However, the leaders had always encouraged mother tongue for the propagation of it cultures and survival of its languages. They had moreover stuck to their choice of a foreign and colonial language because it is the language of unity, western education, national development and world communication.

They have a similar nation language policy. Following the experience above, each African country has national policy on education where the role to be played by language in the Educational System is entrenched. Like Nigeria’s other policies has accommodated the use of more than two language: (i) a foreign language (English and French and Arabic language or all) (ii) One or more indigenous language(s). The exception to the above is the French colonized countries where assimilation policy was upheld.

In all, despite the efforts made to project the mother tongue, it has not become a replacement for any of the foreign languages (English language in the case of Nigeria), nor can it in the future compete with the foreign one. Some of the mother tongues have however grown as it is offered as courses of study in our tertiary schools, hence, serving for the preservation of the cultures and languages of each country.

The 3 major factors that shaped the characteristics of African teacher as they are today include: historical factor, lack of legislative professional body formed by government and economic factors. All African teachers are either bilingual or multilingual because of their historical background, and are thus batting with challenges of mother tongue.
interference and other such problems that affect the learning and use of second languages. The truth about acquiring and using more than one language has strengths and weaknesses as both or all the languages leant affect each other. For the purpose of this research we are concerned about how (L1) a mother tongue (local language) affects the L2 (English Language), a classroom language.

These days, one’s ability to speak impeccable English has become a yardstick to measure intelligibility which is a scorecard to professionalism, be you an English teacher or not, a native speaker of English language or not. This therefore affects the personality of a teacher and dents his performance as he/she transfers his/her inadequacies to the learners, who look up to him. Bilingual is a major characteristic of most African teachers as it affects us and our job as teachers reflected in communication skills.

The second and third factors mentioned above have very similar consequences on African teachers vis-a-vis the educational System as both have led to the influx of untrained teachers into our educational system and had consequently led to the popular debate and saying that “teachers are born not made” interpreted shallowly to mean that there is no difference between a professional teacher and any body whether educated or not. However, several researches and happenings have proved it wrong but the damage has already been done as they are found everywhere and in every specialization. It is so pathetic that somebody with a degree or training in one course is employed to teach a subject or course not related to his field of study.

The gross implication of the above characteristics is that first and foremost the African teachers’ English Language performance is not professional as their communication skills are impaired. This is naturally transferred to the learners if not corrected (garbage in, garbage out) and since no nation can grow higher than the quality of it teachers (FRN, 2004) it becomes obvious that the nation is doomed unless teachers are given their rightful position and they in-turn improve on their deficiencies for the sake of their personalities and their nation bearing in mind that the world is fast becoming a global village where a great deal of learning and processing of knowledge is done through the use machines and their language is computer language written in English language. Those deficiencies if not corrected will be transferred into a world problem through several new interaction processes. As advanced by Olagoke (1979:16) in Azikiwe (1998:27):

Mackey (1984:45) recommended a solution in another instance as he posited that:

... the mastery of a second or foreign language to the point it can be used professionally takes time. That is why the study of foreign languages is, where possible, being introduced into lower and lower grades of the curriculum. The better one knows how to use the language, the sooner one can use what is available in it.

In fact, as the language of science and technology, and a passport to educational advancement and prestigious employment, as the language of commerce and administration, a means of national and international communication,... it is, therefore, important and of necessity that products of our schools are proficient in English.

The Mackey’s and Azikiwe’s statements are appropriate because African teachers have to grow to reflect the changes in the 21st century and become teachers without borders. There is the need for a total reassessment and over-hauling of the educational system.

The 21st Century Teacher

The 21st century is the century that carries with it so many hopes, aspirations and fears. It is the age in which man sees himself in the global village where time and space have been compressed to its bearest minimum. Teachers of this age therefore must reflect and face the challenges posed by this 21st century. The question is what the qualities or characteristics we would expect to see in the 21st century educators/teachers? We know that teaches are student centric
and holistic but that notwithstanding, the teachers of this century must be adaptors, communicators, learners, visionaries, leaders, models, collaborators and risk bearers (http://edorigami.wikispaces.com/21st+century+teacher). In essence, the emphasis is for the teachers of present age to embrace the new strategies of the new millennium by identifying their deficiencies through going to seminars, workshops and conferences in order to rectify those deficiencies. Therefore, for the teachers of this 21st century be up-to-date, they must be able to apply different teaching and learning styles. They must be able to adopt to situations found within their localities and create new strategies. In other words, they should be dynamic in approach to issues concerning teaching and learning. They should live up to expectations by being visionary; using their imagination for the purposes of adaptability so as to be teachers of today and tomorrow, understanding and utilizing the advances of science and technology. As collaborators, 21st century teachers should put themselves at available position always and anywhere in order to be able to work together with others.

They should also see themselves as risk bearers in the process of teaching and learning by venturing into the unknown so as to discover novel strategies that will enhance their profession, teachers are not the ultimate in knowledge, they must be ready therefore to learn more from the learners and of course be ready to accept mistakes when they occur. They must learn new ideas and the changing trend of things in the 21st century. Their knowledge and understanding must be fluid-like and dynamic, ready to adapt. The teachers of this new era as communicators must see themselves as facilitators in the process of transmitting knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour and therefore must be original in approach, fluent in the medium of education, they must through communication control, moderate and manage issues and also stimulate skills acquired. As models, the 21st century teachers should show exemplary life in all attitude and behaviour and by that, teach values through tolerance, acceptance and being global. They should be resourceful educators, full of vision, incentives and action packed so that they will really be teachers without borders.

The question at this point is whether the present teachers of Africa countries and in particular Nigeria, have the above characteristics and the simple answer is ‘No’. How then can today’s teachers be helped to acquire these qualities so as to make teacher education and teaching and learning a meaningful process. These teachers should in themselves see and identify their deficiencies. The stake holders in Education should also see it as a challenge to them especially as it has been stipulated in the noble objectives of National Policy on Education on the teacher Education. In article 4 of the policy, it was stated that, “teacher should be provided with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of their country but in the wider world.” (FRN, 2004:53). This is a great commitment on the part of the policy makers because, this situation calls for a continuous process of training and retraining of the teachers. The teachers on their own, should be prepared to improve upon their knowledge through such things as conferences, seminars and workshops. They should look forward to the new millennium strategies, adapt the strategies and develop the spirit of enquiry and creativity. The present African teachers should, in their bid to develop and face the challenges of the 21st century, be ready to adapt, communicate, facilitate, leader, learn, bear risks and collaborate with other teachers and stakeholders in education so that they can be dynamic and flexible as models.

**Teacher Education and Teacher Development**

The term Teacher Education refers to the policies and procedures designed to equip prospective teachers with the knowledge, attitudes, behaviours and skills, they require to perform their tasks effectively in the classroom, schools and the wider community. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/teacher_education).

The above definition is explicit enough that it has thrown more light on the term as an idea and concept. As a policy, the plan is to create an enabling environment for the qualitative education of a nation using teachers. In essence, the term is given to the educational training or programme that is aimed at preparing teachers to acquire the methodologies necessary for the imparting of knowledge and skills. It is aimed at making teachers experts in the process of teaching and learning. The realization that Education is the cornerstone of the future of any nation, and the fact that many categories and classes of people have at one time or the other, engaged themselves in the act of teaching (Abdulwahid and Ichado 2004)
This idea that at one point or the other, one must have acted as a teacher is like the age-long belief that the first teacher of a child is his mother. The question asked by Abdulwahid and Ichado, (2004) is: “are these people who transmit knowledge and skills at various levels to various categories of people and under all sorts of conditions teachers?” The answer to this question is in the negative, this is because, teaching has a format and for one to become a teacher, there are processes to be followed.

It is pertinent at this point to look at the aims of Teacher Education in our country, Nigeria. According to the National Policy on Education, the Teacher Education is aimed to produce highly motivated, conscientious and efficient classroom teacher for all levels of our education system, to encourage further the spirit of enquiry and creativity in teachers. To help teachers to fit into the social life of the community and society at large and to enhance their commitment to national objectives, to provide teachers with the intellectual and professional background adequate for their assignment and to make them adaptable to any changing situation not only in the life of their country but in the wider world, to enhance teacher’ commitment to the teaching profession.

... The following institutions are giving the required professional training; They are: Grade II Teachers’ Colleges, Advanced Teachers’ Colleges, Colleges of Education, Institutes of Education, National Teachers’ Institutes and Teachers Centres (FRN, 2004).

The idea for the establishment of Teacher Education as was thought by the Nigerian Education Policymakers in Abeokuta in 1953 is to make and use Teacher Education as a propelling force to develop education so as to propel Nigerians to greater height among the developed nations and to achieve for the nation a society fit for the multiplicity of ideas, people and attitude in Nigeria.

The issue of Teacher Education has actually come to gain prominence in the Education Sector and as such, a lot has been done and still being done so that the best could be achieved educationally worldwide. On this note, teacher education is often divided into three segments all in effort to make education prominence because of its importance in national development. The stages are, Initial Teacher Training or Education, this is a kind of organized seamless continuum aimed at a pre-service course before entering the classroom as a fully responsible teacher. Induction is the second stage and it is the process of providing training and support during the first few years of teaching or the first year in a particular school while the third is the teacher development or Continuing Professional Development (CPD). It is an in-service training process of practicing teachers (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/teacher_education).

The training and re-training either through the initial teacher training method or the induction or through the (CPD) are aimed at developing the teacher for the tasks of teaching. And because of this, the question of what kind of knowledge, attitude, behaviour and skills teachers should process, is now the subject of much debate in many places. This is understandable as teachers are entrusted with the transmission to learners of society’s belief system, attitude and deontology, as well as of information, advice and wisdom and with facilitating learners’ acquisition of the key knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that they will need to be active in the society and the economy (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/teacher_education).

As the world the teacher is preparing through his involvement in the teaching and learning process is fast changing, and since the teaching and learning process-Education, is part of national development, teachers in this century are expected to live up to expectation. This means that teachers in this 21st century especially in this part of the world are faced with unprecedented challenges due to the changing world order. The job of teaching is a task that requires the use of a wide body of knowledge both in the dissemination and acquisition of knowledge which is specific to the teaching profession.

Teacher development as a concept and process can be seen as teachers learning to change in developing their beliefs, ideas, developing their classroom practice and attending to their feelings associated with changing. This development is based on professional, social and personal issues and none of this identified segment can proceed alone. The development can be achieved through in-service or staff development as well as through advances in teachers’ sense of
purpose, instructional skills and ability to work with colleagues. Teachers should therefore be ready to investigate their practice so as to construct their own theories in teaching in order to meet the challenges of the 21st century. The stakeholder in African Education should be ready to sponsor teachers to and the teachers should avail themselves of the opportunity to attend workshops, action research projects, study groups planned seminars and conferences.

Recommendations
This paper recommends that for education in Africa to develop like that of the developed world, English Language must be made to do the following:
⇒ That it should serve as a medium of instruction from the start of the education of the Africa Child.
⇒ That the African nations should reflect this in their curricular
⇒ That teachers of English language should be experts in the subject.
⇒ That the subject/course should be made compulsory to all students of colleges of education.
⇒ That anybody teaching or wishing to teach must be a professional
⇒ That there should be a legislation to prevent untrained teachers from teaching.
⇒ Teachers should be able to identify their problems and be ready to improve upon them.
⇒ That the African nations should spend more on education so that training and re-training will be accommodated and materials necessary for modern educational method acquired.

Conclusion
This paper has argued for the use of English Language as a medium of instruction at the start of Education in all African nations and a change of the curricula that prefers the use of the indigenous African languages at the early stages of a child’s Education. It also calls for the present African teachers to live up to expectation by focusing on the new world order, in order to function as effective communicators in English language and for the governments to spend more of their resources in Education by training and re-training the teachers.
References


