

ROLE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAMME

By

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Abstract

Mother tongue education refers to any form of education that makes use of the language or languages that the learners are most familiar with. This paper therefore tends to examine the what adult education is all about, teaching and learning, needs for Adult education using mother tongue, Aims and objective of teaching in adult education centers using mother tongue, the role of mother tongue, benefits of learning in mother tongue among adult learners. This paper concludes by emphasizing on the importance of using mother tongue in teaching in our adult centers. Suggestions were made encouraging the federal government, teachers of adult learners, and adult learners themselves to use mother tongue in their teaching and learning process

Keywords: Mother Tongue, Adult Education, Teaching and Learning

Introduction

Language is a powerful means of communication which enable us to be more developed in comparison to other creatures so far found on earth. It is also a part of culture which is a system of symbolic verbal and sometimes written presentation learned within a particular culture. It is a method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use words in a structured and conventional way; it is also a means of communication used by a particular country or community. It is arbitrary, productive creative, systematic, vocalic, social, non-instinctive and conventional. Language is a sign system fulfilling the cognitive and communicative functions in the process of human activity both in children and in adult schooling. The term cognitive is the process of acquiring knowledge by the use of reasoning, intuition or perception. One of the critical concerns of education is to determine linguistic development determines the cognitive development in both children and adult. There is a debate among linguist and educational psychologist on the issue. Nonetheless, one can claim that of the former (linguist) has a beneficial role for the development of the later (educational psychology) then, language becomes a crucial topic for discussion. Brown (2000) quoted Bruner one of the psychologists who suggested that the school is a very important determiner of the use of language to facilitate cognitive development. Therefore, mother tongue which is a language has to do with the language of the immediate community of the learner.

Mother Tongue

Mother tongue is the first language, native language or mother/father/ parents tongue. It is a language a person has been exposed to from birth. In some countries, the term native language or mother tongue refers to language of one's ethnic group rather than one's first language. Mother tongue refers to a person's native language or which ought to be acquired from birth that is a

language learned from birth. While mother tongue education refers to any form of schooling that makes use of the language or languages that learners are most familiar with. This is usually the language that learners speak at home with their family. MT does not have to be the language spoken by the mother. Learners can often speak more than one or even two languages at home for example, they can speak one language with their parents which can be English language as most families do, and another with their grand-parents which can be Igbo language. Learners can receive education in different languages usually the dominant language of the country they lived in e.g. English or French etc. In Nigerian case, the language that learners hear for the first time when they enter school is English, while at home they speak another language. A learner who speaks a different language at home than the language in which they are taught at school will by definition become bilingual or multilingual as in Nigerian case. Mother tongue education can be carried out in three forms such as:

Firstly, Learners who speaks a different language at home from the language in which they are taught at school will by definition become bilingual. This depends on the goal of the school programme. Bilingual education programme aim at teaching learners a second language at the expense of their mother tongue, in this case equal importance is given to learning through both languages and learners learn how to take full advantage of their multilingualism and biliteracy.

Secondly, some schools offer education only in one language. Learners who are not fluent speakers of the school language may be offered some forms of language support or no support at all. This form is known as “SINK” or “SWIM”. In this case, learners lose or leave behind their mother tongue and use only the language of the school.

Thirdly, some schools offer bilingual education which aimed at bilingualism, but not in any of the language spoken by the learner at home. Example, a learner who speaks Igbo, or Yoruba or Hausa at home and is enrolled in a Dutch or French class. This is not far from those who enroll in adult education centers, they are used to their mother tongue which they speak at home, and in their business area and coming to school they are taught in English language, though, they speak English this does not guarantee their understanding and mastery of the language. They find it difficult to understand the lesson faster. But, when they are taught using mother tongue, they tend to understand and comprehended the subject better and faster. It also helps them understand and write in English which is the language of the school.

Using mother tongue may have two connotation-firstly, teaching mother tongue as a subject and secondly, impacting formal education using mother tongue. For the sake of this paper we are taking the second connotation which is impacting formal education using mother tongue especially in our adult education centers. Currently, people are motivated using mother tongue in formal education considering the fact that most mother tongue are going into extinction especially Igbo language. One of the organizations advocating for the use of mother tongue in formal and none-formal education is United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). In 1953, UNESCO published a report arguing in favour of mother tongue. (UNESCO) noted that the benefits of using mother tongue can be grouped in many dimensions such as:

1. Psychologically, mother tongue is the system of meaningful signs that the mind of the individual works automatically for expression and understanding.

2. Socially, it is a means of identification among members of the community in which he/she belongs.
3. Educationally, he learns more quickly through it than through an unfamiliar linguistic medium.

However, many countries with multiple languages have allowed a single language to dominate their education sector. In developing countries, the language of choice is very often the language of their historical colonizers. The problem gets worse since the language of instruction is also foreign to the teacher. In recent times, a number of countries including Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ethiopia and South Africa have taken explicit legal measure to include language of the immediate environment (LIC) or mother tongue (MT) on their formal education and informal education (Adult Education). Given the crucial role languages play in the learning process and the complicated and costly nature of mother tongue, it is imperative that we evaluate the impact of adult educational attainment as in adult outcome and different mechanisms through which the use of mother tongue can affect the adult learners' outcome.

Teaching and Learning

Teaching in education is concerned with sharing of knowledge and experience which is usually organized within a classroom. It is a process of inculcating moral values, abilities, skills by an experienced person to an inexperienced person. It can also mean a communication between two or more persons, who influence each other by ideas and learn something in the process of interaction. Teaching is a process in which a learner, teacher, curriculum, and other variables are organized in a systematic way to attain some predetermined goals. While as learning is observed by psychologist as a by-product of experience. Learning according to Nnachi (2016) is a means of bringing changes in the behavior of the organism (the learner) Nnachi summarizes learning in six (6) different ways such as:

- Learning is a behavior modification that arises as a result of prior experience or practice.
- Learning is the development of insight.
- Learning is the development of both primary and secondary drives in a learner with resulting change from past experience.
- Learning is a process of forming bonds connection or associations.
- Learning is the process of forming cognitive process
- Learning is a process that encourages participation of people in the formulation of knowledge.

Teaching and learning therefore, are the communication between two or more persons, who influence each other by ideas and learning something in the process of interaction. Communication here involves the use of language, and language in this context is the mother tongue in which the teacher and the learner interact as to bring a change in behaviour in the learner.

Adult Education

Who is an adult? Opara (2010) defined an adult in different perspective to Opara, an adult legally is a person who has attained the age of Major and is therefore regarded as a major. Politically, an adult is one who can vote or be voted for; biologically, an adult is a person who has reached sexual maturity; socially, an adult is one who is independent, self-sufficient and responsible. While Education, is the process of facilitating learning, the acquisition of knowledge; skills, values; beliefs; and habits.

According to Wikipedia, adult education is a practice in which adults engage in systematic and sustained self-educating activities in order to gain new forms of knowledge, skills, attitudes or values. According to Britannica dictionary adult education is any form of learning undertaken by or provided for mature men and women. Adult Education is processes where adults who are no longer in school, or do not attend school on a regular or full-time basis or school dropout undertake sequential and organized educational activities on various subjects. According to Linderman, (2001). Adult education begins where vocational education leaves off. It offers people who were not privileged a chance to learn, feel a need for training in a basic skills of learning so they enroll for learning, writing, learning in skill acquisition like sewing, baking, preparation of things like soap, perfume or insecticide to mention but a few. Examining this definition one can find the following essential elements that characterize adult education

- It is post-vocational education
- It is education for the deprive classes
- It is training in basic skills of learning that is literacy.

Liverrightand Haygood (2009) In the Exeter conference 2009 defines adult education as the process whereby persons who no longer attend school on a regular basis undertake sequential and organized activities within a conscious intention of bringing about changes in knowledge, information understanding, skills and identifying and solving personal or community problems. In this definition there are two elements that characterized adult education

- Past-time or full-time process
- Sequential and organized

Reddy (2012). Adult Education is concerned with the education of Adults, those who have passed school age; they are grown-ups, matured individuals. There are certain target groups which do not fit into the formal education system due to different circumstances like poverty, disability in literacy. Therefore, they become the client for adult education, this group include:

- Unemployed youth.
- Out of school youth.
- People with disability.
- Women and girls.
- Retired citizen.

Need for Adult Education

The following are the needs for adult education:

- Adult education brings new hope for illiterate masses who fail to get education during their school years.
- To widens the intellectual horizon of partially illiterate adults.
- To satisfy the recreational needs of adult.
- To supplement to the compulsory primary education.
- To provide continuing education, for education does not end with schooling, it is a life- long process.

Aims and Objectives of Teaching Adult Learners in Mother Tongue

1. To give command of language=Teaching adults in mother tongue helps them to clearly say what they want to say, that is to say that mother tongue helps adult to express themselves clearly and in a simple term.
2. To bring about mental and emotional development= One of the aims of using mother tongue in teaching adult learners is to give them a medium through which they can express themselves not only for the purpose of day- to- day life, and to give them the opportunity to express their feelings, thought, and experience bearing in mind that most of them have dropped from school for so long. This expression may be oral.
3. To give training in logical thought and expression= using mother tongue in teaching and learning among adult learners will go a long way to train them in logical thought and its expression.

All these aims and objectives of teaching adults using mother tongue can be divided into four (4) categories corresponding to the four aspects of language-

- ❖ Receptive aspect.
- ❖ Expressive aspect.
- ❖ Appreciative/critical aspect and
- ❖ Creative aspect.

The Role of Mother Tongue in Adult Learners

The following are the role mother tongue medium plays among adult learners:

- ❖ The use of mother tongue in teaching and learning increases access to quality education both at formal and informal education,
- ❖ It also facilitates the acquisition of literacy skills in addition to improving participation in the classroom.
- ❖ It may alleviate the burden of understanding content material while simultaneously learning English or second language which is the official language and other subjects.
- ❖ Mastery of one's first language or mother tongue may promote cognitive developments that are needed to a second language.
- ❖ In addition to improvement in the teaching and learning process, mother tongue can be instrumental in developing self-reliance and psychological motivation in adult learners.
- ❖ Mother tongue can lead to higher enrollment, increased educational attainment as well as improved adult learning outcomes.

Cummins (2015) outlined the role of mother tongue among adult learner such as:

- ❖ It plays an important role in his/her personal relationships and it is used for thinking and imagination. When the adult learner is taught in English the learner may not fully understand but, if it is taught using mother tongue the learner thinks faster as it begins to imagine out what that thing could be.
- ❖ It helps the learner to have a deeper understanding of how to form sentences and expression.
- ❖ It enables the learner to have a fixed mindset on how to communicate what they want or need.
- ❖ Adult learners who have a strong knowledge of their mother tongue found it easier to pick-up a second language and develop their literacy skills.
- ❖ Also skills learnt in mother tongue could be transferred into the language learning approach.

- ❖ Learners with strong foundation in their first language (mother tongue) often display a deeper understanding of themselves and their place within society, along with an increased sense of well being and confidence. Naturally, this flows down into every aspect of their lives, including their academic achievement.
- ❖ Learners with strong foundation in their mother tongue always gain complete fluency in both their first and second language. For instance, learners that have a strong foundation in Igbo or Yoruba or Hausa as their mother tongue at home will end up having a complete fluency in both Igbo or Yoruba or Hausa and English which is the language of the school.
- ❖ Strong mother tongue foundation equips learners with the skills they need to learn additional languages. It goes a long way in empowering women and men and their societies.
- ❖ In teaching adults in this group, requires a language that the adults will understand very well. There are certain terminologies and concept when pronounce in English that the adult may not understand what they really are but when pronounced in mother tongue. It becomes more clearer to the learner. They can discover that it is what they already have within their environment, but the big English makes it to look so big.

Benefits of Learning in Mother Tongue among Adult Learners

There are many benefits an adult learner gains in learning in their mother tongue such as:

- Adult learners who have a strong foundation in their mother tongue have a better understanding of the curriculum content and a more positive attitude towards school.
- By using the learners mother tongue, learners are more likely to engage in the learning process. The interactive learner-centred approach recommended by all educationists thrives in an environment where learners are sufficiently proficient in the language of instruction. It allows learners to make suggestions, ask questions, answer questions, create and communicate a new knowledge with enthusiasm.
- It gives learners confidence and helps to affirm their cultural identity. This in turn has a positive impact on the way learners see the relevance of school to their lives.
- When adults start school in a language that is still new to them, it leads to a teacher-centred approach and reinforces passiveness and silence in classroom. This in turn suppresses learner's potential and liberty to express themselves freely. It dulls the enthusiasm of their minds, inhibits their creativity, and makes the learning experience unpleasant. All of which is bound to have a negative effect on learning outcomes.
- When learners speak or understand the language used to instruct them, they develop reading and writing skills faster and in a more meaningful way.
- It lessens the burden on teachers, especially where the teacher speaks the local language well. For instance, in a learning situations where both the teacher and the learner are non-native users of the language of instruction the teacher struggles as much as the learners. But, when teaching starts in the teachers' and learners' mother tongue the experience is more natural and less stressful for all. As a result, the teacher can be more creative and innovative in designing teaching/learning materials and approaches, leading to improve learning outcomes.
- Learners who are taught using mother tongue enjoy school more and learn faster due to feeling comfortable in the environment.
- Lastly, self-esteem is high for adult's learners learning in mother tongue.

Carolyn (2018) outline some of the benefits of using mother tongue among adult learners

- It makes it easier for adult to pick up and learn other language like English which is the official language as in the case of our country Nigeria.
- It helps to develop in adult social and cultural identity.
- Using mother tongue in teaching in our adult centers will help them develop critical thinking and literacy skills.
- Skills learn in using mother tongue in teaching do not have to be re-taught when the adult transfer what they learn in a second language, that is transfer of learning.
- Adults who learn using mother tongue learn faster as they feel comfortable in their environment.
- Adult learners who learn using mother tongue always develop high self-esteem.

Conclusion

Teaching and learning in mother tongue among adult learners have a very important role to play in their learning process, as adults learn the second language in an easy way as it motivates and build self-confidence in them. Mother tongue provides opportunities for adult learners to learn faster and work as a team, as these goes a long way in improving their academic performance, as a result they take pride in their identity and heritage as an Igbo man, Yoruba man, or Hausa man.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following suggestions were made:

- a. The federal government should develop language policy where adult learners will be taught using their mother tongue.
- b. Teachers in our adult centers should encourage adult learners by using mother tongue as a medium of instruction especially when they start newly.
- c. Adult learners should be bold to express themselves in their mother tongue without fear.

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