

THE PLACE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN ADULT/NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Language plays an important role in teaching and learning situations, not only as a subject taught in school but also as a medium of sharing information between the learner and the teacher. It is therefore important to use appropriate language that can effectively capture and convey the exact information of the teacher to the learner and most importantly in a way the learner will understand. The trend all over the world, especially amongst the developed countries of the world is that mother-tongue is equally used as the medium of instruction in school system including adult/non-formal education programmes. This factor has helped such countries as China, Japan, India, to mention but a few in no small way in achieving enviable development because learners are able to transfer concepts learned in the mother-tongue easily. It is, however, sad to note that Nigeria, a multilingual country, with over 400 spoken languages, seems to be reluctant to tap into the benefits of using the mother tongue in her system of education. This paper delves into the place of mother tongue in Adult /non-formal education in Nigeria.

Keywords: Mother tongue, language of education, adult/non-formal education.

Introduction

Language is of great significance in man's life. Its importance can be better understood by a look at its varied uses. Language is used as a vehicle for communication, social interaction, learning, storage of information and learning artefacts, maintenance and transfer of culture. It can also be used as a tool with which man builds varied skills, value and competences necessary for survival as well as helping man discover hidden or stored up knowledge and contributions in various fields of endeavour over the generations. Language is learned. No one is born with the capacity to speak a particular language. Anukam (2000) stresses that nature equips man with the basic potentiality to learn and speak the language of his immediate community (mother tongue). The type, degree and quality of language learnt depends on his immediate environment.

The concept of mother tongue (MT)/ Language of the immediate community (LIC)

According to the Cambridge advanced learners' dictionary (2017) "mother tongue is the first language that you learn when you are a baby rather than a language learned at school or as an adult" Webster's new World College Dictionary (2010) sees mother tongue as one's native language. Sometimes the term "mother tongue" or "language of the immediate community" is used for the language that a person learned as a child at home.

The mother tongue does not have to be the language spoken by the mother rather, the language that children speak at home with their family. This is drawn from the belief that the mother is the first

teacher available to the baby at birth. Therefore, whatever language the mother speaks is eventually passed on to the child.

Relevance of mother tongue (MT) in Education

- Pupils tend to show increased self- esteem.
- Children learn better and faster in a language they can understand (preventing delays in learning.
- It makes the acquisition of a second language easier.
- It helps in the preservation of culture and heritage.\
- On the average, pupils perform better, reporting less repetition.
- Parents' participation is increased. Parents can help with home work and can participate in school activities.
- They enjoy school more because they see it as an extension of the home.
- It encourages child-centered learning. Students interact and collaborate with their peers in problem solving, reflective thinking, inquiry learning, discovering learning etc.

Provision of the National Policy on Education (NPE)

It is a common knowledge that Nigerians do not have a well-articulated and explicit National Language Policy that can be found in one document. It is also a common knowledge that Nigerians do have a National Policy on language in Education

NPE (2013) provides that:

- Mother Tongue (MT)/Language of the immediate community (LIC) are languages of initial literacy at the pre-primary and primary levels, and of adult.non formal Education.
- Three major National Languages: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are languages of the National culture and integration.
- English as the official languages becomes the languages of the formal literacy the bureaucracy, senior primary school, secondary school and higher education.\

The policy also advocates:

- Multilingualism as the National goal.
- Treats Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as potential National Language which are to be developed and used as LI and L2 through the Educational System.
- All Nigerian Languages are meaningful medium of instruction in initial literacy and lifelong in Adult/non-formal Education.

The effectiveness of using the language a learner is comfortable with, a language in which he can express his thought and translate his internal idea into articulate sentences, has been established by many scholars – Taiwo 1976, Emenanjo 1996, Osborn 2007, Oluwole 2008. Emenanjo 1996 states, “the training of the mind in the understanding of the world around is best done and realised in the languages in which the students are most familiar.” To me, the language that a learner is most familiar with can be any of the following: the learner’s mother-tongue (MT), first language (L1) or language of the immediate community (LIC). Consequently, it is important to use the mother

tongue or language of the immediate environment as the language of instruction in adult/non-formal education centres. This is because Eyibe (2000) stressed that:

If adult education is to support the process of rural transformations, the educational activities must be seen as integral elements of an overall social, economic and cultural development process, with content, methods, participants and instructors related directly to develop goals.

Anukam (2000) stressed that adult learners will be able to learn the things around them better and easier and be more effective in understanding them if they are taught in their mother tongue. Language experts like Swanson (1980) and Yoloye (1965) gave support to this idea that for a child to master a second language, he must first be rooted in his mother tongue.

Concept of Adult/Non-formal Education:

Adult/Non-formal education is a process of sharing knowledge with people and in the process, human resources can be developed for the benefit of a given society. Eyibe (2000) stressed that it is the organisation of learning experiences for men and women who wish to improve themselves and their communities with programmes designed to help adult learners understand and respond to the socio-economic development of their countries at a given epoch.

UNESCO in her International Conference in Nairobi, Kenya as reported in Nzeneri (2010:10) defined adult/non-formal education as:

The entire body of organised educational process, whatever the content, level and method, formal or otherwise, whether they prolong or replace initial education in schools, colleges and universities, as well as in apprenticeship whereby persons regarded as adults by the society to which they belong develop their abilities, enrich their knowledge, improve their technical or professional qualifications or turn them in a new direction and bring about changes in their attitudes or behaviour in the two-fold perspectives of full personal development and participation in balanced and independent social, economic and cultural development.

Some adult/non-formal education programmes are designed to meet divergent needs of the communities. The implication is that the activities in the programmes should be relevant to cultural norms, aspirations, values of the community or the totality of the people's way of life, which includes the language of the people. It incorporates informal learning by adult from their day-to-day experiences through interaction with family, neighbours, colleagues at work where they have group discussions concerning their trainings in the language of their immediate community (mother tongue) in order to understand things better and clearer (Indabawa & Mpofu, 2006:5).

Forms of Adult/Non-formal Education:

Adult and non-formal education could take divergent forms. According to Eyibe (2000), it includes:

- a literacy programme where illiterate people in the communities are taught how to read and write and do arithmetic in adult education centres.
- a remediation programme because regular school dropouts are registered in adult education centres or continuing education centres where they are given new opportunity to remedy their education.

- a skill training programme because unskilled workers can be registered in adult education programmes for the acquisition of new survival skills.
- a retraining programme because workers who had acquired obsolete skills in the past can now learn new skills in adult education centres to face the technological changes of our modernising societies and communities.

The implication is that the adult education programme must be properly planned and implemented by qualified and enterprising adult educators who understands the adult learners' needs, their different characteristics, peculiar circumstances which include language of communication as well as the nature of the society involved in order to accomplish the desired objectives.

Goals and Objectives of Adult/Non-formal Education:

The goals and objectives of adult/non-formal education according to NPE (2013) shall be to:

- Provide functional basic education for adults and youths who have never had the advantage of formal education or who left school too early. They include the migrant folks, almajiri pupils, illiterate and semi-literate adults, youths/adolescents who left the formal school early and are not willing to come back, and other categories of disadvantaged groups who are unable to have access to the conventional educational system and therefore require other forms of educational programmes to cater for their particular/peculiar needs and circumstances.
- Provide remedial and life-long education for youths and adults who did not complete secondary education, and
- Provide in-service vocational and professional training for different categories of workers and professionals in order to improve their skills.

This clearly shows that the categories of learners being talked about here are those who know little or virtually nothing about the content of the programmes to embark on, and the implication is that the teacher or the adult instructor will have to begin with the basic elements in the programmes using the language the adult learners will understand, the language they are comfortable with or the language they can express their thoughts and translate their ideas into articulate sentences – the mother tongue.

Principle, Methods and Evaluation of Teaching/Learning in Adult/Non-formal Programme Centres:

The principle of adult learning is learner-centeredness. It may be based on perceived learning needs or unstated or hidden curriculum. At times, adult learners go for classes for the pleasure they can get from developing their intellect. Eyibe (2000). In addition, the principle of relating classroom activity to the adult learners' life experiences and concretising what is taught them makes learning more meaningful, purposeful and the learning outcome maximised. Mbakwem (2005). This principle is better achieved when the mother tongue or language of the immediate community is used. Anukam (2000).

Inquiry learning, discovery learning, problem-solving, group discussions, dramatization and play way methods etc. are some of the methods used in adult learning. They explore and learn for themselves without waiting to be taught by the adult instructor. This is what Eyibe (2000) refers to as “andragogy”. In this learning strategy, they explore for experiences by interacting with families,

neighbours, colleagues, concerning their trainings and experiences in their native languages. By so doing, they acquire more skills, understanding and knowledge. Thus learning becomes meaningful to them. They also coach others in the process.

The evaluation technique is observation. It is measured in behavioural terms. Evaluation, according to Duru (2011) is defined as the process of determining the extent to which a specific set of activities reach pre-stated objectives. In adult/non-formal education, formal and non-formal methods of evaluation are used to assess the adult learner. The formal education methods will involve the administration of pre- and post-test questionnaires, observations and other kinds of data at specific intervals, which evaluates the cognitive, affective and psychomotor domains. This procedure should be supplemented by informal set of observations, which is an indication that part of the evaluation processes are rooted in culture, the totality of peoples' way of life, which language is one of them. Informal observation was the method of evaluation during the pre-literate era.

Conclusion:

Every language has the capacity to perform whatever role it has been assigned to. No language (foreign or indigenous) is inferior to the other. However, the only impediment to the successful use of indigenous languages in both adult/formal and non-formal education is that some have not been fully developed to cope with the demands of formal education. If the required attention and steps are given to the development or standardisation of the numerous indigenous languages in the country, Nigerian languages and indeed, all the numerous indigenous languages in Africa can be used in education either as the language of education or a school subject in formal education. All that is needed for the successful implementation of the indigenous language education policy is a "will-to-do" and the developed and implementation of the language policies by the government of Nigeria.

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