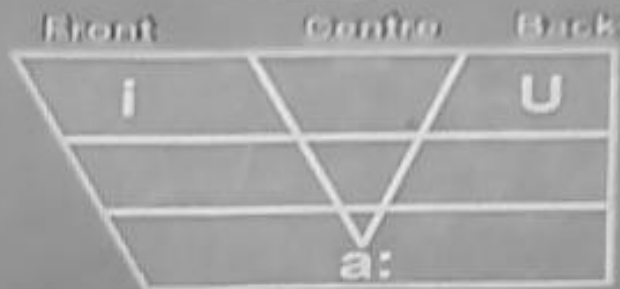


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THE ROLE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

By
Tafida, Amina Gogo

Abstract

Language is a universal phenomenon that must exist in every human society. There is no society which does not carry out its activities through language. Language, therefore, be it foreign or indigenous, is very important to its speakers, because it is the only vehicle through which a society operates. The mother tongue is the first language that a child acquires. It is therefore important in the development of a nation. This paper looks at the importance of the child's first language to the development of a nation. It takes a look at the various areas such as education, social, political, economic and religious which a person engages in as he grows and sees in a society. These are areas of development if well utilized, to not only an individual but the nation as a whole.

Introduction

Language is a system of communication, which is available to all normal humans. Language in the broadest sense is the ability to understand and use symbols particularly verbal ones in thinking as a form of communication. Awaniyi (1980) sees it as the most momentous and mysterious product of human mind. In language, there is free and unimpeded use of symbolism, the record of articulate conceptual thinking and without language there can be nothing like explicit thought. Language then is a perfect means of expression and communication among every known people.

Gochar (1994) and Boadi (1968) believe language is systematic. According to them, the language of every society is highly systematic with its rules, functions and the extent to which it can be flexible. Thus every language has a system of rules and a fixed pattern of behaviour though it can to some extent be bent to suit certain specific needs temporarily, and that every language is communicative i.e. it must be used to communicate ideas, feelings, desires, wishes etc. Also that in social context speech is the primary concern of every human language. Any language that does not have the speech form is not a normal human language even though it may be communicative and systematic.

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disregard because the development of mother tongue of a child impacts favourably on the nation itself. Therefore, even if a child speaks a foreign language as a lingua franca or official language as is the case with Nigeria, the mother tongue should not be relegated to the inferior position or considered as inferior hence brought together to the detriment of speakers who are human beings brought together to play their functions to the well being of the society. Nigeria recognises this and that is why the National Policy on Education (1997) stipulates that a child should be taught in the mother tongue or language of his/her community in the first three years of primary education. The government has even gone further by including some Nigerian languages in the curriculum of secondary and tertiary institutions. This is a welcome idea and should be extended to several other mother tongues in Nigeria. For there is no doubt that any educational system which makes the child ashamed of his own language must certainly lack what Armstrong (1974) in Ubahakwe (1979) described as "a minimum of self-respect which is necessary for the healthy functioning of a society".

Role of Mother tongue in Education

The use of children's mother tongue for instruction in primary education has received strong support in the educational and linguistic circles in Nigeria. Reading becomes more effective and meaningful to the child when primary education is given initially in the child's mother tongue (Oyetunde, 2004). Also, findings from earlier researches by Fafunwa and Bliss (1967), Bamgbose (1976) and Afolayan (1970) all stress that education initially in the mother tongue becomes more meaningful to the child if a child is taught in the language of his experience it will be easy to harness his full potentials for sustainable development. The mother tongue according to Bamgbose (1976), Chumbow (1990), and Tswana (2006), is the most useful language to a bilingual child in the formative stage of life. In fact, it has become argued that the continues poor performance in various subjects is due to the fact that the language of instruction (the English language) impedes their understanding of such subjects. Tswana (2006).

...the language of instruction in the early years of education has proven advantages especially when the child is learning to read. Also that meaningful learning from books is enhanced, therefore if a child is to learn to read through other languages spoken in his environment. A lot of researches have been carried out in this regard and the most conclusive studies carried out in Africa to date are the experimental project carried out in Africa for the period 1973-1975 (Dangre, 1976). The project's purpose was to evaluate the effects of teaching in the mother tongue and in English during the first six years of primary school. Despite initial doubts, the evaluation of the project was very positive. The students in the project scored higher than those in the regular schools both academically and in terms of primary school who were taught in Yoruba for the first three years of primary school. The last three years of primary school were taught in English throughout the last three years of primary school. According to the study, the advantage of teaching in the mother tongue goes beyond academic success to include psychological benefits.

In Mali, a similar evaluation of cognitive benefits for students in mother tongue education projects was carried out in 1985. The study covered 184 students from experimental schools and 340 students from French speaking schools starting at the same level (first grade) over 5 years. Forty-eight percent (48%) of the children in experimental schools finished their studies without repeating a single year as compared to only 7% of the students in Francophone schools. This study also proves the importance of mother tongue in academic studies (Dangre and Dagnanya, 1990).

Studies on the role of mother tongue to education were not limited to African countries alone. From 1978 to 1981, the University of Oxford in Great Britain also observed the effects of a yearly language program on five-year old native Punjabi (an Indian language) speakers. A control group using only English scored only English

scored much lower than children who were taught partly in French and partly in English. Similar results were obtained with Italian speaking children (Klein, 1994). The results of these studies have demonstrated that language and thought are inextricably interwoven and that cognitive development all children need a language (initially a mother tongue) on which to pin and develop their thoughts (Cummings, 1979).

Role of mother tongue in language teaching and learning

Oyetunde (2004) believes that to facilitate literacy in the second language, children should first be taught to read in their mother tongue. Goodman (1977) also reiterates that learning to read in a second language is easier for someone who is already literate in another, regardless of how similar or dissimilar it is. This is because Cummins (1979) explains that students who have learnt to read in an alphabetic language do not have to "relearn" the principle of the alphabet. It is assumed that since the reading process is the same for first and second languages, a child who has learned to read in his first language does not have to relearn the process (Verhoeven, 1990 in Oyetunde, 2004). He only needs to transfer the reading habits in his first language to his second. The mother tongue provides the child with the linguistic medium to express himself freely, respond to, and participate in the activities of life and growth. It provides the conceptual substance on which the child builds new thoughts.

Moreover, it is a well known fact that literacy education in Africa often suffers from serious communication problems between teachers and pupils (Klein, 1994, Chumbore, 1990). In classes with a foreign medium of instruction, teachers often face language difficulties themselves and pupils do not have the language competence to understand what the teacher says. Due to this, active learning rarely takes place. As a result, education curricula needs to integrate locally relevant literacy practices in the language to which learners are exposed in their environment and which they can use throughout. Moreover, education based on locally relevant curricula allows for local production of reading materials. It was also believed that the production of these teaching materials in mother tongues is a valuable resource for the development of contextually appropriate teaching material for foreign language teaching (Prah, 2001).

State of mother tongue in the school environment
The use of mother tongue in the school environment is a complex issue. It involves the relationship between the home and the school, the role of the teacher, and the role of the student. The mother tongue is the language of the home and the language of the heart. It is the language that the child uses to express his or her thoughts and feelings. It is the language that the child uses to communicate with his or her family and friends. It is the language that the child uses to learn and to grow. The school environment should be a place where the child's mother tongue is valued and where it is used as a medium of instruction. This will help the child to learn more effectively and to develop a positive attitude towards his or her mother tongue.

Moreover, I argued to stress the mother tongue is closely related to the identity and development of the child. It is the language that the child uses to express his or her thoughts and feelings. It is the language that the child uses to communicate with his or her family and friends. It is the language that the child uses to learn and to grow. The school environment should be a place where the child's mother tongue is valued and where it is used as a medium of instruction. This will help the child to learn more effectively and to develop a positive attitude towards his or her mother tongue.

Moreover, Iwaryn (2010), also maintains that the use of Nigerian languages in school is also a stage in Nigerian children's cultural development. According to him, if schools discard their own culture and will continue to be regarded by the children as foreign, they will regard language (e.g. English) because the latter is the only one thought worthy of being taught and studied.

The use of mother tongue also provides an environment in which the learner knows and reads his or her own text and writes about his/her own experience as well as those of others. Thus allowing people to recognize their own mother tongue as a language of identity, thought and instruction. Such an approach according to (Prah, 2001) offers an alternative to some common barriers that block cultural and linguistic continuity and that increasingly push minorities into a separate artificial existence.

The Role of Mother Tongue in the Development of Learning and

The role of mother tongue in the development of learning and...
Every human language is a contribution to the...
development of an individual and the nation in general. Every mother...
tongue has a unique system of organization that language is...
structured language as a system of systems or a set of the...
related systems, having both the phonological and grammatical...
systems. Therefore, every mother tongue is a human language...

Mother Tongue in National Development

Every human language of our country is a contribution to the...
development of an individual and the nation in general. Every mother...
tongue has a unique system of organization that language is...
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The first part of the report deals with the general situation of the country and the progress of the work during the year. It is followed by a detailed account of the various projects and the results achieved. The report concludes with a summary of the work done and the plans for the future.

The second part of the report deals with the financial situation of the organization. It gives a detailed account of the income and expenditure for the year and shows how the funds have been used. It also discusses the financial position of the organization and the measures taken to improve it.

Moreover, there should be encouragement and development of
book production, through private publishing, printing and other
institutions, to the production of both popular, teachers and general
readers, in mother tongue education.
The government should also with diverse vigor encourage the
use of mother tongue in at least the primary school level. The language
policy on the use of mother tongue should be backed up with financial
support and adequate literature in different mother tongues in all
schools.

Conclusion

This paper has taken a look at the role of language policy
especially the mother tongue in the development of an individual and
the nation in general. The paper also emphasizes the fact that every
language is a mother tongue to some people and that the extent to
which a language is accepted by the general society is dependent on the
level of acceptance and the uses people assigned to it and not language
and language is also primary factor, every language is highly
valuable.

Therefore, every language is important and the development of
a nation is directly or indirectly built on language. Sapir (1929) believes
that the real world is to a large extent unconsciously built on the
language habits of a group. The relationships between language and
development according to Doolittle (2000) are further emphasized by
the interconnection between language and reality, educational and
cultural consciousness and democratic participation. It is therefore
the prayer of the paper that the recommendations given should be
taken into consideration so that our different mother tongues would be
given the chance to flourish in view of their importance in national
development.

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